Bournemouth University

Exploring the construction and maintenance of social relationships within an elite female football club using photo interviews and visual concept relationship mapping methods

A Thesis submitted by

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in partial completion of the requirements of

Bournemouth University for the degree of

Masters of Research

October, 2019

Copyright Statement

Abstract

Social relationships and friendships form a central part of individuals' lives and can both enhance and hinder their experiences in a variety of settings. In team sports, this is especially true as relationships between teammates are integral to team performance, success and wellbeing. Importantly, highly competitive environments have been shown to be detrimental to the quality of social relationships and friendships. Little is still known about the female team environment and the complexity of relationships that are intertwined and woven into the fabric of a women's football club. Using qualitative methods in the form of visual concept relationship mapping and photo interviews, the aim of this study was to explore relationships within an adult female football environment. Findings identified 5 types of relationship that were important to the elite female footballer: teammates, friends, family, coach and support staff and romantic partners. When exploring these relationships, the complex and layered relationship dynamics within the team were evidenced through social closeness and social distancing between teammates, coaches and support staff. Interactions between these individuals were influenced by the competitive elite team environment. This study highlights the importance of extending existing understanding of team-mate relationships through highlighting the difference between the 'team-colleague' and 'team-friend' relationships; previously unexplored within academic literature. Where previous research has focused primarily on male youth sports, the contribution of this study lies in extending this research base into the terrain of female adult sports.

Future research should further explore relationships in the elite female sport environment and examine these relationships in relation to athlete wellbeing. Furthermore, it is recommended that the visual concept relationship mapping exercise be validated as a viable psychological tool for relationship interventions across sporting spaces.

Acknowledgements

Table of Contents

Tables and Figures:

Chapter One: Introduction and Research Rationale

Introduction

This study explores relationships within elite female football. It does so through critically examining the construction, importance and intensity of the relationships held by female footballers and exploring the methods they adopt to maintain such relationships. Social relationships within sport are recognised to have a number of benefits including athlete wellbeing(Jowett 2005; Felton and Jowett 2013), enjoyment and motivation (e.g. Smith 2003; Ullrich-French and Smith 2006; Jowett and Cramer 2009). Athletes who maintain social relationships are less likely to drop out of sport and are more likely pursue higher levels of their sport based on their assessment of their relationship with the team and coach as well as the support they receive from other significant people (Domínguez-Escribano et al. 2017). To date, limited focus has been placed on understanding relationships within women's sport more broadly and more specifically within the sport of football.

Women's football is the most popular female team sport in England (UEFA 2017) largely due to increased investment in the sport including funding, more playing opportunities, greater media coverage and recognition in recent years (Williams 2003). To date research has focussed on the growth of participation (e.g. Williams 2003), gender inequality and the impact of society related to female sport participation (e.g. Clark and Paechter 2007; Caudwell 2011; Drury 2011; Jeanes 2011; Pielichaty 2015). More recently interest has steered towards the motivations of female participation (Escaribano et al. 2015) and promoting women's football participation through role modelling (Dunn 2016). Despite the knowledge that personal, social and environmental factors can have an impact upon commitment to sport (Côté 1999) and that social status, social relationships and personal fulfilment are amongst the secondary factors for sport participation (Valdés 1998), interpersonal relationships have gained little attention specifically in women's football. Recent research by Themen and van Hooff (2017) focussed on exploring the diversity of social relationships for women in the amateur football setting, however this primarily related to negotiating against traditional gendered cultural practices, instead of understanding the importance and intensity of the types of relationships constructed as is the aim of this study.

Where prior research has focussed on singular relationship concepts (e.g. coaches, parents, peers or friends) this study aims to explore the varying relationships within South- Coast United Women's Football Club (a pseudonym), in order to understand how these relationships are constructed, their importance, intensity and how they are maintained.

Aims and Objectives

Aim: *To explore the relationships constructed and maintained within an elite adult female football environment.*

Objectives:

1: To develop the combined use of visual concept relationship mapping and participatory photography interviews as a method for exploring relationships in sport;

2: To explore the types, importance and intensity of relationships within an elite football setting, and to examine how these relationships are constructed and maintained;

3: To investigate the differences in relationships at two interconnected levels of play (from 1st team to development team);

4: To provide recommendations for coaches and practitioners toward relationship maintenance and development strategies.

This thesis will present the findings to the above aims and objectives by firstly exploring previous research in sport relationships and interpersonal theories (Chapter 2). Following that, the methodology design will be presented and explained (Chapter 3) with research findings explored in the results and discussion (Chapter 4). Finally, the thesis will close with concluding thoughts on the findings and overall study with limitations and future recommendations offered.

The following chapter will present prior research in this field by exploring the broader concept of relationships, understanding the types, significance, conflict and maintenance. Following this, theoretical frameworks of interpersonal relationships will be identified and critiqued as well as justifying the use of attachment theory as the underpinning construct for this study.

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Chapter Two:

Researching Relationships: The Literature

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Introduction

In this chapter I will provide an overview of the theory relevant to this study by introducing relationships more broadly by defining relationships and understanding humans as relational beings through theoretical concepts that underpin relationships. I will then explore current literature in the area of relationships within sport by first contextualising women's football in the elite setting and then focus upon three critical interpersonal relationships within the sport: the coach athlete relationship, parent athlete relationship and peer and friendships. In this chapter I will consider what research believes to be the significance of these relationships and explore conflict and relationship maintenance. Lastly, I will highlight gaps in the literature in which this study aims to address.

Understanding Relationships

Human are instinctively social beings, with relationships playing a fundamental role in our satisfaction at work, play and in our family life, dependent on the quality of our friendships and loved ones (Jackson-Dwyer 2013). Every life event involves some degree of interpersonal interaction that greatly influences people's lives (Duck 2007). Throughout life we experience a large number of relationships, the first with our parents or guardians, but as we grow and explore our social world other relationships develop (i.e. friends, peers, work colleagues, romantic liaisons, sport teammates) and become more important (Dwyer 2000). It is understandable then, that interpersonal love and belonging and relatedness to others are considered vital in our innate psychological needs (Maslow 1943, Ryan and Deci 2000). Social relationships serve as a key ingredient to providing humans with a sense of meaning in life (Stavrova and Luhmann 2016) with many people believing that being loved and wanted provides us with a sense of purpose (Klinger 1977). However, it is the quality and satisfaction of these relationships that is considered more important for health than the number of friends or connections one has (Vandervoort 1999).

Relationships are regarded as "a series of interactions occurring between two individuals over time with each interaction limited in duration but affected by past interactions in which the two individuals are interdependent and enduring" (Laursen et al. 1996 pg. 78). In other words, the quantity (ie the amount of time spent together) and quality (ie whether interactions are perceived as 'positive' or 'negative') of social interactions are key in

sustaining a healthy relationship (Laursen et al. 1996). In its earliest stages, human interaction is reliant on a common ground of attraction where needs and interests are shared (Laursen et al. 1996). For humans, this shared need is a result of our innate need to belong and to have company of others (Baumeister and Leary 1995) known as *affiliation*. Primarily humans live and work in groups rather than in isolation thus affiliation can be found in a number of circumstances such as to have fun, gain approval, alleviate fear and share sexual intimacies (Dwyer 2000). Affiliative needs originate from basic human survival where mechanisms guide behaviour of attachment, group coalition, hierarchal power, mating and reciprocity (Laursen and Hartup 2002). Buunk's (1996) motives for affiliation has been highly regarded as integral to the contribution of interpersonal relationship research. The study suggests that our motives for affiliation are based on: social comparison (where people want to compare their own feelings with others in the same situation), anxiety reduction (that people prefer to be with those who have already experienced the same situation thus can offer emotional support and reassurance) and information seeking (seeking reassurance from those more knowledgeable particularly in fearful circumstances). As such affiliation can be found in wider theoretical frameworks and is key to our understanding of the construction of interpersonal relationships.

Theoretical Frameworks: Understanding Construction and Importance of Interpersonal Relationships

Understanding interpersonal relationships and the characteristics associated with building and sustaining a high-quality relationship are significant to the study of human development (Arbeit et al. 2016). Many theories have been put forth in order to develop our understanding of relationships including social exchange theory, attachment theory, social connectedness and the need to belong. This section will explore the key theories underpinning the construction and importance of relationships that have evolved over time and justify attachment theory as the selected theory that will underpin this study.

Social Exchange Theory

Early conceptualisations of interpersonal relationships focus on why we exchange interactions with others. Homan's (1974) social exchange theory is defined as the exchange of tangible or intangible activity that is more or less rewarding or costly between at least two persons. Relationships are fundamentally social exchanges that accrue rewards and costs from interactions that, when balanced, results in continual interaction and efforts to preserve

the relationship (Laursen et al. 1996). Thus, close relationships have equal rewards and costs divided between the individuals within the relationship (Walster et al. 1973). When participants perceive an inequality in exchanges or that greater equity can be attained through an alternative interaction, the relationship is discontinued (Laursen et al. 1996). Social interaction was based on the social behaviour produced by social interaction between the actors involved. Exchange theory suggests that when outcomes are balanced and favourable for each individual, mutual regulation, interdependence and closeness within relationships are achieved (see full review Cook et al. 2013).

Whilst attachment theory similarly explores how interactions can shape future relationships, social exchange theory highlights the importance of the nature of interactions made and the degree of equality between persons in the relationship in order to have positive future relationships and achieve closeness. This differs from attachment theory where focus is directed to the importance of early experiences of relationships and how they might influence relationships with others.

Attachment Theory

Rather than focussing on the connections or exchange in relationships, attachment theory explores the importance of early experiences of social relations as the foundations of our ability to develop successful relationships later in life; those who experience positive relationships at a young age are more likely to develop strong and sustainable relationships with future attachments (Giordano 2003). Attachment theory suggests that early security and stability allows children to comfortably explore future relationships (Bowlby 1973). According to attachment theory, we have an innate need to make secure attachments with key caregivers as a means of survival (Bowlby 1973, 1980, 1999). Ainsworth's (1985) addition proposes that we have four main purposes for attachment:

1. Maintain proximity to caregivers;
2. Caregivers are a safe haven;
3. Caregivers are a safe base to explore from and;
4. Experience of separation anxiety when removed from caregiver

This creates cognitive views of our perceptions of relationships from a young age; the generalised attitudes and beliefs play a significant role on an individual's ongoing relationship experiences and choices (Giordano 2003). Naturally, our parents/ guardians and family provide us with our initial attachment from birth and are vital in providing a shared identity and safe base (Dwyer 2000). These form our primary attachments, with secondary attachments formed in the absence of primary caregivers (in the form of siblings, teachers

and peers). Repeated interactions with primary and secondary attachment figures develop an internal working model of attachments that consist of two primary components: 1) trust that others will provide support when in need and; 2) recognise if the self is worthy of the support from others. This internal model shapes future attachment behaviour and style.

Despite attachment theory being widely accepted, sociologists have suggested limitations primarily due to its emphasis on the individual and their early experiences as a model of future relations, with broader social influences such as race, social class and school not considered significant in shaping later relationships (Giordano 2003). Although the need to belong theory similarly suggests that building relationships are innate, Baumeister and Leary's (1995) work extends this understanding by suggesting that satisfying our need to belong and obtaining intimate relationships can still be achieved even in absence of primary caregivers as long as relationships are free from negativity and conflict.

The Need to Belong Theory

For an individual, being an accepted part of a larger social group such as a sports team is a salient source of both self-worth and efficacy, more so than being accepted by parents, partners or friends (Stavrova and Luhmann 2016). Baumeister and Leary (1995) suggest that the need to belong is a fundamental motivation for interpersonal interaction. They suggest that humans have an innate drive to form and maintain a minimum quantity of positive, lasting significant relationships. In order to satisfy these drives, there is a need for frequent, pleasant interactions and that these interactions must be reciprocal. The need to belong theory recognises Bowlby's (1969) earlier work on attachment theory where there is a *need* to form and maintain relationships. Baumeister and Leary (1995) suggest that this need to belong can be direct to any human, however in more recent work this has also been found to extend to wider paradigms such as sport team identification (Theodorakis et al. 2012). This is developed through continued interactions with significant people with whom they share this identification with. One inherent critique of the need to belong theory is that individual differences are not taken into account (Baumeister and Leary 1995). People hold different types of relationships with each relationship differing between each dyad, thus individual differences must be considered.

The need to belong theory recognises the effects belongingness has on emotional patterns and processes, findings similar to social connectedness. Social connectedness theory encompasses belongingness, attachment, togetherness and relatedness (Santini et al. 2015) thus extends the above theories by conceptualising the degree to which a person experiences these factors.

Social Connectedness

Understanding our 'interpersonal connections' has become increasingly significant relationship work. Connection describes positive bonds with people and institutions that include mutually beneficial exchanges between an individual and their peers, family, school and community (Lerner et al. 2005). It is our emotional experience of being in a relationship and feeling close to someone that can determine our level of connection (Lerner 2004) recognising the implications of social norms as shaping human life (Gilligan 1995). Thus, interpersonal connections concern the interpersonal relationships within this context that involve closeness or positive bond between people (Arbeit et al 2016). Strong perceptions of social connectedness are invariably a source of positive meaning in life (Stavrova and Luhmann 2016). Hawkley and colleagues (2005) highlight three different types of connections: *intimate* in the presence of spouse or romantic partner; *relational* in the presence of more remote connections such as friends and family members and *collective* through a sense of belonging to a larger community or social group. Although each bears importance, Baumeister and Vohs (2002) emphasise the key component of collective connectedness in its role to meaning of life by satisfying two of the four basic needs (purpose, values, sense of efficacy and need for self- worth).

Similar to attachment theory, connectedness recognises that a young person's experience of connection with their parent is salient to feelings of belonging (Bornstein 2015). Whilst parents continue to be a significant part of our lives, it is the experience of other close interpersonal connections (peers, colleagues, mentors) that contribute to self-worth, mental health and life satisfaction (Shernoff 2013). These other interpersonal relationships are integral to our overall perceptions of quality of life, influencing varying social contexts and domains. Within the sport domain, the variety and complexities of different relationships can interchangeably affect the athlete and others involved (Jowett and Cramer 2009).

After reviewing the relevant theories surrounding interpersonal relationships, attachment theory will be used to underpin the findings in this research. Attachment theory recognises the internal working models of individuals that are as a consequence of the quality of attachment in early life and supports the notion that relationships with the primary caregiver can influence relationships later on. Additionally, attachment theory highlights the integral need for relationships that other theories (such as the need to belong theory) have widely

accepted and integrated into their conceptual models. Furthermore, attachment theory underpins attachments to not only humans but to inanimate objects (Hodge 2018) thus will aid exploration into the different types of relationships that are developed both with humans and others. Thus, attachment theory is pertinent to understanding how and why relationships are constructed in this study.

Within the sport domain, relationships differ in response to their setting with specific relationships key to team function and environment. Women's football offers a unique landscape to explore relationships, as the competitive elite environment can impact connections between coach and athlete, peers, friends and parents.

Relationships in Sport: Women's Football and its Professionalisation in England

In its 125 years of documented institutionalisation, women's football in England has had a turbulent history. In 2019, women's football has its own full-time professional top tier league, the 'Barclays FA Women's Super League' in addition to a part-time paid second tier. In the biggest ever investment in UK women's sport, Barclays have partnered with The English Football Association (The FA) to form a multi-million partnership with the aim to drive the growth of the women's game (The FA 2019). Yet, this movement towards professionalisation has only recently been established and the journey there has not been without its challenges. From the 50 year ban of women's football between 1921 and 1971 by The FA to their reassertion of control in 1993 (Williams 2006), to the increased participation that prompted the launch of the semi-professional Women's Super League (WSL) in 2011 (Woodhouse et al. 2019) to the most recent development of steering the sport into full-time professionalisation in 2018 (BBC Sport 2018), women's football has fought to be recognised as equal to their male counterparts in the sport. Previous research into women's football has largely addressed the inequality and sexism within the sport (Williams 2006; Caudwell 2011)which remains present in today's society as evidenced by the gender pay gap (Archer and Prange 2019). As women's football progresses into the professional era, future research into the sport cannot be without recognition of the gender differences and discourse subjected to women in sport as it is integral to the history and future of women's football.

The FA's launch of the WSL was largely due to the need to develop a professional women's league to address the lack of quality and competition within the women's game (Woodhouse et al. 2019). Thus, the newly established league generated a competitive elite status for

women's football within England where professionalisation of women can be judged by the number of women work within the field as athletes, managers, coaches or other paid occupations (Williams 2011). This professional era of women's football demonstrates a shift into a greater competitive environment that is "ruthless, fast paced and results focussed… where everyone must continually justify how their input impacts performance" (Eubank et al. 2014, pg. 31). The environment in football specifically has a high turnover in staff with teams rarely containing the same players season to season (Eubank et al. 2014). These high-performance environments can be rife with social implications with evidence of tension between athletes and competitiveness between teammates (Hanton et al. 2005) alongside playing insecurity that can hinder relationship connections (Adams and Carr 2017).

As sport evolves into a professional and elite setting, relationships can become more complex. Therefore, better understanding the types of relationships within sport is key to understanding how relationships may change in relation to the setting in which they are expressed. There are a number of critical relationships that have been the focus of previous relational work in sport, these will be introduced within the following sections.

The Coach- Athlete Relationship

The coach-athlete relationship (CA-R) is often regarded as the most important and influential relationship within the sport environment as a result this relationship has gained the greatest focus within sporting relational research. It is widely accepted that psychological wellbeing and performance enhancement lies at the heart of the coach-athlete relationship (Rhind and Jowett 2010). The coach-athlete relationship is defined as the "emotions, thoughts and behaviours of the coach and athlete [that] are mutually and causally interconnected" (Jowett and Lavallee 2007, pg. 4). This definition indicates a dynamic interaction between coach and athlete demonstrating the ability for the relationship to change as their thoughts, feelings and behaviours shape the quality of interaction (Jowett and Lavallee 2007).

Jowett and colleagues have led the field in examining the coach-athlete relationship. Their work today has examined for example, the effect of the coach athlete relationship on group cohesion (Jowett and Chaundy 2004), motivational climate (Olympiou et al. 2008), collective efficacy (Jowett et al. 2012), attachment and wellbeing (Felton and Jowett 2013) and attachment and relationship quality (Davis and Jowett 2014). In her earlier work, Jowett (2005) infers that the coach-athlete relationship is a particularly crucial relationship compared to others in the sport domain (i.e. parent, peers, teammates) as it is the foundation of coaching. The coach and athlete purposefully develop a relationship that is characterised by a growing appreciation and respect for each other. When acknowledging the motives for

initiating and developing a coach-athlete relationship, Jowett (2005) argues that the relationship attempts to achieve a) athlete excellence for the athlete and professional excellence for the coach and; b) personal growth for both athlete and coach. Thus, these motives impact the relationship and its outcomes, with quality of relationship determined by its effectiveness or success (Jowett 2005). Jowett (2005) suggests that the coach-athlete relationship has two interrelated dimensions: 1) prizewinning relationships (determination of which is deemed as successful or unsuccessful) and; 2) a helpful, coach-athlete relationship (seen as effective or ineffective).

An ideal coach athlete relationship will satisfy both performance and personal growth, whilst an emphasis on achieving positive outcomes through psychological health and wellbeing is deemed effective but unsuccessful due to the inability to extend outcomes to performance (Jowett 2005). It is important to note the influence an effective interaction can have on the satisfaction and wellbeing of those within the relationship, as favourable psychological outcomes can often outweigh the rewards (Jowett 2005). In their review of conflict among athletes and coaches, Wachsmuth et al (2017) highlight communication, team processes and leadership and power as key areas that impede the development of high quality and successful relationships amongst athletes and coaches. Such factors have been explored and conceptualised to produce several coach-athlete relationship models across a 10year span.

The Coach-Athlete Relationship Conceptual Models

The development of the coach-athlete relationship has led to several models being developed to conceptualise the coach-athlete construct. This section will address the evolution of the following coach-athlete relationship models: Poczwardowski's (1998) Conceptual Model; Wylleman's Conceptual Model (2000); LaVoi's (2004) Conceptual Model and Jowett et al's (2005) 3C + 1 model. Whilst Jowett and colleagues (2005) 3Cs+1 model is the most widely recognised to indicate the quality of coach-athlete relationships, its creation was founded upon Wylleman's Conceptual Model (2000) thus highlighting how the coach-athlete relationship has evolved.

Early Conceptualisation of Coach-Athlete Relationship Models

Poczwardowski's (1998) Conceptual Model presents the earliest model of the coach-athlete relationship by exploring the interpersonal dynamics of the coach-athlete dyads by highlighting the recurring pattern of mutual care in coach-athlete relationship between the athlete and coach. In his research, Poczwardowski's (1998) suggest that the coach-athlete relationship involves both technical and affective conversations regarding each other's needs thus both sport and non- sport issues should inform interactions and are the subject of

ongoing exchanges. Within a group dynamic the informal and formal roles played by both the coach and athlete influence the dynamics on the coach-athlete relationship. In addition, three phases of the coach-athlete relationship emerged: 1) the pre-relationship or recruiting phase, 2) relationship phases which consisted of initial, transition, productive, concluding and after eligibility stage and 3) the post-relationship phase of which two kinds were postulated as sentimental or extinct.

Pocwardowski's (1998) conceptual model hypothesises mutual care as a key component of the coach-athlete relationship similarly found in Wylleman's (2000) later conceptual model where reciprocity of behaviours define the coach-athlete relationship. Wylleman's model (2000) discusses the behaviours of the coach and athlete on the sports field by categorising them based on three dimensions:

1. Acceptance- Rejection: based on positive or negative attitudes towards the relationship;
2. Dominance- Submission: ones strong/ weak position in the relationship and,
3. Social- Emotional: ones social or personal role in the relationship

The three tenants allow for complementarity between individuals in a dyadic relationship, an important aspect in the relationship which could attribute to the reasoning behind its inclusion within the 3Cs + 1 model.

Where most academics focus on the effects that the coach-athlete relationship has on the athlete, LaVoi (2004) highlights the importance to study both the athlete and coach within the dyad. This model supports Poczwardowski's (1998) earlier conceptualisation, where the study provided the notion that coaches are influenced in the relationship as well as the athletes, thus the importance to study both elements of the dyad is recognised. LaVoi's (2004) model is based upon the human need to belong and feel close in relationships that result in personal gains that can allow individuals to acquire fundamental skills, qualities and benefits. Deprivation of these interpersonal relationships, conversely, can lead to emotional problems and other maladjustments. It is based on the relational- cultural theory, providing sport with an alternative paradigm to the traditional theoretical viewpoints associated with interpersonal relationships. According to the relational cultural theory, psychological development is facilitated by interdependence, connection and participation in growth-fostering relationships. However, when applied to the sports setting in the form of the coach-athlete relationship, the approach focusses on the athlete's growth when they are close or independent with their coach or teammates. In the sports context, both closeness and interdependence can be studied in terms of four qualities. *Authenticity* allows for individuals to be open to self-expression and in turn is respectful of their partners. *Engagement* is studied through demonstration of commitment and responsiveness to the relationship.

Empowerment suggests a sense of inspiration and encouragement to be an active partner in the relationship, and consequently having the *ability to deal with differences and conflict* by embracing diversity and building to enhance the relationship.

Whilst these earlier conceptual models have bridged the gap in coach-athlete literature between the limitations of coach leadership to the interpersonal dynamics of the coach-athlete relationship, they still place emphasis on interpersonal behaviours and neglect other important non-behavioural components such as thoughts and feelings (Jowett 2005). Such neglection has generated the conceptual 3C and Co-orientation (+1) model.

Jowett et al's (2005) 3Cs +1 Model

As noted, Jowett and colleagues' (Jowett and Ntoumanis 2004; Jowett 2005) 3Cs + 1 model has become the most widely recognised model to indicate the quality of coach-athlete relationships. The model highlights what they deem to be the four most critical dimensions in the coach-athlete relationship:

1. Closeness: feeling emotionally close and prescribing affective meaning to their relationship through mutual trust, appreciation, respect and fondness
2. Commitment: the intention to maintain a long-term athletic relationship to maximise outcomes for both coach and athlete
3. Complementarity: degree to which both parties demonstrate corresponding behaviours
4. Co-orientation: degree to which they have established common ground in their relationship based upon their own interpersonal perceptions

Each component provides an indication to the quality of the coach-athlete relationship which has been found to increase athlete satisfaction (Jowett and Ntoumanis 2004), enhance athlete performance (Rhind and Jowett 2010) and influence athlete's motivation disposition (Adie and Jowett 2010), if positively perceived. The later addition of the co-orientation model (+1 element) adds another layer to the coach-athlete relationship by uncovering the coach and athletes perceptions of each other in relation to the 3Cs (Jowett 2005). In the direct perspective, the athlete perceives the coach in relation to the 3Cs. In the meta-perspective athletes attempt to infer the coach's 3Cs. This allows for three dimensions of Co-orientation: *actual similarity* (both parties have mutual feelings), *assumed similarity* (the athlete is sure of their feelings but assumes the coaches') and *empathetic understanding* (the athlete assumes the coaches' feelings and the coach is certain of their feelings).

The coach-athlete conceptual models have provided an insight into the frameworks pertaining to the coach-athlete relationship that have driven research into the field to explore the impact the of the coach-athlete relationship on the coach, the athlete and the sport environment.

The Impact of The Coach Athlete Relationship

Whilst academics have discussed the impact the coach-athlete relationship has on coach behaviour (e.g. Rocchi et al. 2013), athlete burnout and athlete development and success (Jowett and Cockerill 2002) in relation to relationship quality, the most notable is the CA-R influence on athlete and coach motivation. Mageau and Vallerand (2003) argue that the coach athlete relationship is the most influential in determining athletes' motivation and subsequent performance success. In sport, motivation is defined as the reasons associated to participating in sporting activities (Vallerand and Losier 1999). Motivation is a key component to initiate a coach athlete relationship, thus it was significant that a motivational model was devised for the coach athlete relationship. Ultimately it was proposed that the behaviour of the coach plays a significant role in athlete motivation by impacting basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence and relatedness (Mageau and Vallerand 2003). By satisfying these needs, an athletes' self-determination, extrinsic and intrinsic motivation can be determined. Riley and Smith (2011) provide evidence to support this concept, indicating that the quality of coach athlete relationship is closely linked to self-determination, partially mediated by the athletes' satisfaction of basic needs. Despite this, Smith and Smoll (1996) stated that the effects of these coaching behaviours ultimately rely on the athletes' perceptions of these behaviours. Thus, the extent to which an athlete feels the coach has contributed to their feelings of competence, connectedness to others and autonomy in their own behaviours leads to a heightened experience of intrinsic motivation through coaches' ability to fully satisfy the athletes' basic needs.

Coaches can also impact the team environment more broadly which contributes to their significance to the team setting. For example, Hampson and Jowett (2014) found that the quality of coach athlete relationships was a predictor of collective efficacy beyond what was predicted by coaches' behaviours and leadership alone. Consistently, athletes are more likely to commit to working within a team and develop confidence of team capabilities if they perceive their relationships with the coach is going to last (Jowett 2008). In regard to team cohesion, sports teams where the coach athlete relationship reflects positive relationship properties are more likely to experience high levels of team cohesion in comparison to those teams where there is a negative relationship between athlete and coach (Jowett and Chaundy

2004). Whilst such research highlights the influence the coach-athlete relationship has in team settings, further research is needed to determine the effects and complexity of multiple relationships with the coach and how this may impact the team environment.

Knowledge from basic interpersonal relationships infer that relationships are subjected to the personality and other circumstances surrounding the relationship (Dwyer 2000), therefore it should be recognised that each player within the team will have a different relationship with the coach based on these factors. Furthermore, each athlete has their own motivations, ambitions and behaviours that not only shape the team's climate and functioning but the support and guidance they may seek from the coach. Thus if perceived positively the relationship will thrive, however if perceived negatively conflict may arise.

Conflict and Maintenance in The Coach-Athlete Relationship

Although there has been an abundance of research concerning interpersonal conflict in the organisational and social psychology, the concept of conflict is unclear and complicated. In their review, Wachsmuth et al. (2017) address this by defining interpersonal conflict as

> "a situation in which relationship partners perceive a disagreement about, for example, values, needs, opinions or objectives that is manifested through negative cognitive, affect and behavioural reactions" (pg. 8).

Importantly it is how this disagreement is perceived that influences the cognitive processes (Deutsch 1969). Wachsmuth et al. (2017) suggest that interpersonal conflict is influenced by intrapersonal factors (e.g. personality, self-esteem, competence, motivation) and interpersonal factors (e.g. poor communication and relationship quality, incompatibility, ineffective motivational climate).

In the coach-athlete relationship, Jowett et al's (2005) 3C+1 model has postulated that low levels of closeness, complementarity, commitment and co-orientation can negatively impact the coach-athlete relationship thus leading to regression and interpersonal conflict that may cause relationship termination (Jowett and Cockerill 2002). Communication has been noted as a key interpersonal process that can generate conflict if ineffective. Failing to communicate effectively has been a main characteristic of poor coaching (Gearity and Murray 2011 *in* Wachsmuth et al. 2017). Mellalieu et al (2013) found this to be true in elite athletes where breakdown of interaction and communication was a determinant for conflict in competitions. Furthermore, poor quality relationships and conflict can increase stress levels in coaches and athletes (Fletcher et al. 2012).

Numerous interpersonal skills including open communication, caring about the athlete, having clear expectations and accountability and having a winning record are amongst key factors for maintaining relationships (Gould et al. 2007).

In the broader context, there is a need to nurture relationship to ensure ongoing interactions, thus implementing skills to build relationships at differing levels are important (Van Orden et al. 2005). For the coach-athlete relationship Rhind and Jowett (2010; 2011) developed the COMPASS Model which aims to maintain and enhance the coach-athlete relationship. The model lists reactive and proactive strategies when faced with conflict including openness, motivation, support, social network and prevention. Additional strategies in the literature suggest preventative measures such as employing an open-door policy, establishing rapport and showing an interest in the athletes' personal life (Wachsmuth et al. 2017) can aid in the maintenance of quality coach-athlete relationships. When faced with conflict, often athletes report seeking help or withdraw from conflict (Mellalieu et al 2013). In abusive situations or when faced with low quality coaching athletes either ignored or accepted the conflicts with coaches (Stirling and Kerr 2008, Gearity and Murray 2011).

The most important requirement for conflict management and resolution strategies is to identify and address conflict early to avoid escalation due to the summation of emotions and negative behaviours (Holt et al. 2012). Often conflict is suggested as negative entity (Noakes and Rinaldi 2006), however conflict may facilitate personal growth and skill development as individuals become more capable of overcoming adversary and as a result improve their social interactions (Wachsmuth et al. 2017).

With acknowledgement of the positive and negative affects the coach-athlete relationship can have on both parties, it is apparent that this form of interpersonal relationship has significance within the sport environment. Arguably the parent-athlete relationship has as much influence as the coach-athlete relationship in the sport domain. Much attention has been placed on the parent-athlete dynamic in recent years due to the recognition that parents and coaches are equally key in the competitive and organisational aspects of youth sport with parents spending large amount of time in the sport environment similar to the athlete and coach (Harwood and Knight 2009). Because of this, parents also influence the coach-athlete relationship.

The Parent-Athlete Relationship

Families are vital in providing us with a shared identity and safe base in our lives (Dwyer 2000). Whilst family connections have been associated with positive outcomes for

individual mental health and interpersonal relationships later in life (Bell and Bell 2009), parents in particular have a unique influence on the lives of children and their enduring participation in sport (Harwood et al. 2015). In line with interpersonal relationship definitions, the parent-child relationship describes social interactions between caregiver and child, where social interchanges continue regardless of outcome (Maccoby 1999). Thus, the parent-athlete relationship relates to these dynamic interactions with significant others within the social-cultural context, in this case the sport domain (Harwood et al. 2015). From birth, the relationship one has with their parent is determined by their initial attachment to their caregiver which can inherently impact an individuals' behaviour across their lifespan (Bowlby 1979). The importance of secure attachments has been demonstrated across research in social and psychological fields, reporting that greater security of attachments to parents and significant others can increase wellbeing (La Guardia et al. 2000; Leak and Cooney 2001) thus linking secure attachment to optimal functioning (Felton and Jowett 2013). Therefore, parental attachments in early life can determine the formation and quality of relationships later on and are significant in the developmental outcome for athletes in sport.

Significance of The Parent-Athlete Relationship

Parents are responsible for introducing their children to sporting activities thus are significant in the socialisation process in the sport domain. Literature on parent-athlete relationship has primarily centred on parental involvement in sport (Hellstedt 1987; 1995; Lindstrom Bremer 2012), parental support (Power and Woolger 1994, Lindstrom Bremer 2012) parental modelling (Colley et al. 1992) and parental attitudes and behaviours ((Babkes and Weiss 1999; Holt et al. 2008; Dorsch et al. 2016; Knight et al. 2016). Underpinning each of these themes is the impact they have on sport motivation and future commitment to the sport. Youth athlete's perceptions of their parents attitudes and behaviour are associated with motivational orientation and attraction toward sport (Omli and Wiese-Bjornstal 2011).

Much research surrounding the parent-athlete relationship theorises parental involvement in sport and their impact on developmental outcomes of athletes and future commitment to sport. Hellstedt's (1987) early work, conceptualised parental involvement by suggesting that parents' level of engagement was based on a continuum from under involved, to moderate, to over involved. At the moderate level, parents promote the best interest of their children, despite sacrificing personal interests. More recently, Côté and colleagues devised the developmental model of sport participation to highlight the role significant others (parents, peers, coaches and siblings) have in ensuring a healthy and prolonged sport involvement

(Côté 1999; Côté et al. 2007). Related to parents specifically, they indicate how parent involvement develops over three stages of a child's sport involvement: sampling stage (6-12 years), specialisation stage (13-15 years) and investment stage (years 16+). During each stage, the parent becomes less involved, from initial introduction to the sport and providing them with the necessary resources and equipment, to becoming less involved whilst providing financial and emotional support, to eventually removing themselves from a leadership position to a supportive role while maintaining regular contact and engagement. This notion of a supportive role was reinforced by Omli and Wiese-Bjornstal (2011) as youth athletes expressed the role of a supportive parent as the ideal behaviour children wanted to see from their parents. Conversely, 'demanding coach' and 'crazed fan' were behaviours children did not want to see from their parents. Such negative parental behaviours can result in sport attrition (Omli and Wiese-Bjornstal 2011).

Parental impact on athlete motivation (e.g. Ullrich-French and Smith 2006) and parental pressures (Amado et al. 2015) has been examined. Brustad and Partridge (2002) evidence that parents are key contributors to motivational outcomes in youth sport by finding that athlete's perceptions of parental behaviour and attitudes reflected their self-perceptions of ability, motivational orientation and attitudes towards attraction to sport. Correspondingly, Babkes and Weiss (1999) research into parental attitudes and behaviours on motivational outcomes in youth football, found that children who perceived their parents to be positive role models, positively believed in their child's competency and provided frequent, positive feedback had greater enjoyment and intrinsic motivation. In addition, Amado et al's (2015) research on parental support and pressure found that parental pressure negatively satisfied basic psychological needs. Furthermore, they found that pressure was a positive predictor of intrinsic motivation and negative predictor of amotivation. This is consistent with research across parents in youth sport within the sport psychology field, where youth's perceptions of their parents were strongly linked to key motivational outcomes.

On the contrary, research from the parent's perspective indicate stressors associated with their child's participation in sport. Harwood and Knight's (2009) research found that parents experience seven stressors related to their child's tennis participation: competition, coaches, finance, time, siblings, organization-related, and developmental. Furthermore, in their later work Harwood and colleagues (Harwood et al. 2010) suggest that in youth soccer academies, parental stressors fall under four dimensions: academy processes and quality of communication; match-related factors; sport-family role conflict; and school support and education issues. There are many factors that influence parental involvement in sport including: the youth sport context; other parents and coaches; concerns with own behaviour; knowledge and experience of sport; previous experience as a sport parent; and goals,

expectations and beliefs for child's sport (Knight et al. 2016). Consequently, highlighting the impact sport has not only on the athlete but the parent as well. Although these studies do not incite impact on relationship quality, they provide a key understanding of the indicators that may influence parental behaviours which in turn can impact perceptions of relationship exchange. Parents as well as athletes experience stress in relation to competitive sport thus need to be equipped with the necessary skills to cope with the demands of the competitive environment (Harwood and Knight 2009). Studying both the athlete and parent is important to understanding the parent-child interactions as the child's interpretations of parental involvement dictates their effects on self (Knight et al 2016).

Although most research has focussed on parental involvement in sport, athletes also associate playing sport with a strong family connection, where sport helps families to develop deeper relationships (McCalpin et al. 2017). In football, fathers and older siblings were especially noted as transmitting an interest in the sport and provided an opportunity for families to share a common interest (McCalpin et al 2017). Furthermore, siblings can have both a positive experience of sport (by enhancing relationships and developing understanding) and negative experiences (sibling competition and emotional response) (Nelson and Strachan 2017).

Despite most research surrounding this social construct has centred on youth and adolescence parent- child relationship, there is evidence to suggest this construct is still relevant to parents of adult athletes, thus its relevance to current study. According to Dwyer (2000) the majority of adults still have some contact with their mothers at least once a week with over 10 per cent seeing them daily, suggesting that we still share a strong bond with our parents even as we grow older. Whilst some academics suggest that we become more independent and rely less on our parents as we grow older (see full review Farley and Kim-Spoon 2014), Dorsch et al (2016) have recently suggested that parents for emerging adults in particular (aged 18-25) remain key socialising agents at this time as they are still dependent on parents for support during the process of self-sufficiency. Despite parents having a heavy involvement in their child's life, such engagement can have both positive and negative effect on the athlete (Dorsch et al. 2016) as maintaining connections with parents presents challenges for renegotiating parental involvement (Arnett 2000) (Arnett 2000; 2004). In their study, Dorsch and colleagues (2016) found that parents of intercollegiate student-athletes positively impacted academic self-efficacy, athletic satisfaction and reduced levels of depressive symptoms, however negatively influenced emotional interdependence and functional interdependence. Thus, it is apparent that whilst parents are still highly involved

in their child's life as they progress into adulthood, their support can simultaneously have a positive influence on their wellbeing but a negative impact on them achieving autonomy. It is also important to note that, in these instances the coach-athlete relationship advances into interdependence with coaches having a greater influence and input with parents moving to the background (Wylleman and Lavellee 2004). As such, conflict is inevitable.

Conflict and Maintenance in The Parent-Athlete Relationships

Conflict between parent and child is often as a result of discrepancies of expectations with appropriate behaviour and timings related to authority, autonomy and responsibilities (Montemayor 1983; Smetana 1989, 1995; Deković et al. 1997). Often this is regarded as a normal part of family relations and functions (Branje et al. 2009). In the more severe cases, conflict between parent and child can result in low psychological wellbeing and school adjustment and higher levels of substance abuse (Shek 1997). Little research has explored conflict between parents in sport, with majority of conflict examining conflict between parent and coaches (Jowett and Rhind 2009) and the impact negative parent behaviours have on parent athlete relationship (Omli and Wiese-Bjornstal 2011). Despite the knowledge that parents will ever be present in our lives, maintaining these relationships are still important.

Maintenance strategies between parent and child has scarcely been research, with many studies focussing on overall family conflict. On family conflict, Vuchinich (1990) details five distinct form of conflict resolution: 1) submission, 2) compromise and negotiation, 3) distraction concludes standoff, 4) withdrawal and 5) third party intervention. Friends and romantic partners are less likely to resolve conflict through coercion and submission, and resolution is often reserved for parents, siblings and classmates. In more recent literature, problem-solving has been suggested as a key method to resolve conflict by integrating goals from both parties in the form of compromise (Recchia et al. 2010). Children often observe conflict resolution strategies implemented by their parents and attempt to utilise effective methods later in life (Reese-Weber and Kahn 2005).

Whilst relationships with the family have shown to form a pivotal role in future attachments, relationships outside of the family become increasingly important through childhood and adolescence (Giordano 2003). Research has reflected this progression in understanding, as other relationship types such as peer relationships, have started to receive an increase in attention (Giordano 2003). Although parents continue to be critical to provide us with support, control and socialisation, when autonomy is negotiated, peers take on a heighted importance (Giordano 2003). These two types of relationships are distinctively different

with independent social worlds containing interpersonal systems that reflect different systems and demands (Hartup 1979). Thus peer relationships have notably received more attention of late with the understanding of differences in relationship behaviours and demands to be discussed next.

Peer Relationships and Friendships

Understanding the role that peers play in our lives has become more salient as it is recognised that time and activities devoted to peers can overshadow that spent with parents (Bigelow et al. 1996). Previous literature defining friendships and peer relationships has often been blurred, with terms used interchangeably for describing constructs that are entirely different. Newcomb and Bagwell (1995) provide clarity on the subject, defining friendships as a deep and intimate connection between individuals, with peer relationships associated with lesser affective ties as a result of more superficial interactions. This increased investment in peer relationships is a result of the impact these connections have individuals. For relationships to develop, individuals voluntarily choose with whom they want to develop a closer bond. Within the workplace literature distinction between peers (or co-workers) and friends are a result of this voluntary selection of friendships as opposed to interacting with peers with who they have involuntarily been placed with.

Significance of Peer Relationships and Friendships

Much of the research concerning peer relationships and friendships has been conducted within the context of the school environment (Weiss and Smith 2002). The limited research that had been carried out in the sporting domain has primarily focussed on youth and adolescent friendships (Zarbatany et al. 1992; Newcomb and Bagwell 1995; Weiss et al. 1996; Weiss and Smith 2002; Carr and Fitzpatrick 2011; Adams and Carr 2017), where the focus has been upon the significance of these relationships in reference to quality of youth friendships and close friendships. This research will be discussed in the following sections.

Friendship Quality
Attachment in early life can impact relationship quality later on (Bowlby 1988)). According to Hartup (1995) friendship quality refers to specific dimensions associated with the relationship such as companionship, help, guidance and loyalty. These dimensions have shown to harness both positive (intimacy and emotional support) and negative (conflict and

betrayal) features of sport friendships that can determine the perceived friendship bonds (Weiss and Smith 2002) and are vital in the maintenance of relationships.

The sport environment in particular has demonstrated a contribution to developing positive relationships and maintaining them has often linked to sport enjoyment, prolonged participation in sport, sport motivation, improved physical competence, popularity and overall athlete wellbeing (Smith 2003; Ullrich-French and Smith 2006, 2009). Investigations into friendships have found friendship quality to be a determining factor to athlete wellbeing. Harter (1999) argues that approval from one's peer group such as teammates, can influence self-worth, positive and negative emotions and motivational processes. Furthermore, friendship satisfaction and frequency of interactions with friends consistently showed positive associations with happiness (Camfield et al. 2009). Ullrich-French and Smith (2006) add that perceptions of positive dimensions of friendships quality in youth football, was positively associated with enjoyment and motivation which in turn contributed to a high likelihood of continual involvement in sport. Conversely, Adams et al(2011) found that an absence of close relationships, particularly best friendships, was related to a decrease in global self-worth as individuals' negative experiences increased. Additionally, Adams and Carr (2017) found the competitive nature of the environment hindered friendship-building and capabilities of players to develop close friendships with their teammates found that adolescent male athletes in football academies. This was due to the competitive nature of the environment such as selection and the uncertainty of their career at the club. Further to this, negative friendships and peer relationships have also been found to impede sport performance, where aggressive competitiveness, verbal insults and physical aggression were identified as components of peer conflict (Jowett and Lavellee 2006). In women's football, girls who were perceived to play aggressively were often ostracised from the team (Clark and Paechter 2007), despite girl's relationships with peers deemed as 'closer' than boys (Collins and Laursen 1999). Most girls fear not fitting in or being excluded thus for girls to be accepted in girls only football they had to play 'like girls' (Jeanes 2011). Friendship quality varied dependent on the degree of positive or negative interaction between peers. Positive interactions produced a heightened level of connections that developed into closer friendships.

Friendships

Friendships are often categorised as a 'close relationship' built from frequent and intimate interactions, where relationships with classmates, teachers and others are typically considered as 'non close relationships' (Laursen et al 1996). Features such as cooperation,

support, companionship, affection and power can differentiate between these relationships (Furman and Buhrmester 1985) and can be determining factors for rendering a close relationship.

Recent literature has explored the concept of close relationships by examining the emotions and behaviours associated with them (Arbeit et al. 2016) and their impact on wellbeing (Adams et al. 2011) and life satisfaction (Shernoff 2013). In their research on exploring interpersonal connections for young men, Arbeit et al (2016) found that feeling close and cared for was an important aspect of their relationships as well as sharing feelings and providing mutual support. A high percentage of adolescents experience significant comfort through perceived support and understanding within their friendships (Call and Mortimer 2001). However, such closeness and intimacy are often associated with adolescent girls' relationships due to the dyadic nature of their relationships (differing from male relationships where larger more hierarchal coalitions are formed) (Rose and Rudolph 2006, David-Barrett et al. 2015).

Sex differences in friendships are thought to emerge early, becoming apparent in small children and increasing with age (David-Barret et al. 2015). David-Barret et al (2015) suggest that females invest more heavily in a few high-quality relationships, whereas their male counterparts prefer larger groups with less investment per member but a high group cohesion. Although girls do not necessarily engage more frequently than boys in dyadic relationships, they do have more extended interactions than boys, thus allowing them to develop a greater emotional and closer relationship than boys (Rose and Rudolph 2006). This focus on relationships may therefore contribute to feelings of anxiousness of social approval, abandonment and friendship status (Benenson and Benarroch 1998). Regardless of gender differences, research has consistently found that friendships or close and prolonged affiliations are characterised by 'homophily' whereby people typically choose friends of the same gender and age (see Rose and Rudolph 2006 for a full review). Reviews on this topic have urged for a greater depth in adult relationships, findings that will be explored further in the context of this study for female emerging adults and female adult environment. Where close friendships are developed through frequent, intimate and positive interactions, peer conflict occurs when these interactions are negative.

Conflict and Maintenance in Peer Relationships And Friendships

Peer conflict is defined as "mutual opposition between two or more people" (Noakes and Rinaldi 2006, pg. 881). Conflict amongst peers is the greatest potential threat to relationship

stability (Selman 1980). If not addressed, conflict may lead to relationship deterioration, relationship termination, formation of cliques, low team cohesion, deselection, favouritism, quitting or dropping out of the sport (see Wachsmuth et al 2017 for full review). Further to this, negative friendships and peer relationships have also been found to impede sport performance, where aggressive competitiveness, verbal insults and physical aggression were identified as components of peer conflict (Jowett and Lavellee 2006). Females are considered to have more relational issues thus use more conflict-mitigating strategies (Noakes and Rinaldi 2006). In an elite team environment, high task cohesion may lead to conflict or a breakdown of relationships due to a performance orientated competitive team climate (Carron et al. 2005). This can also lead to low quality of relationships or the inability to form stable relationships (Adams and Carr 2017). Furthermore, conflict between peers can lead to athlete isolation (Paradis et al. 2014) and increased competitive anxiety (Partridge and Knapp 2016). With peer conflict having a substantial impact on athlete motivation and wellbeing, the implementation of maintenance strategies is vital to sustaining close bonds.

Strategies for maintenance in peer relationships are similar to those employed by the coach-athlete relationship. However, most pertinent with peer conflict is the use of negotiation and compromise as resolution strategies (Laursen et al. 2001). The level of negotiation differs between relationships, with siblings rarely negotiating, romantic partners negotiating the most and friends negotiating more than acquaintances (Laursen et al. 2001). The most effective conflict strategies have been found to be targeting the conflict issue (eg. lack of communication) collaboratively between the two conflicting partners (Wachsmuth et al. 2017). The more effective these conflict strategies have been executed, the more likely they will be accepted into their peer group (Johnson and Johnson 1996). Conversely, difficulties with this can result in low self-esteem (Opotow 1991). In sport, a team environment where team members can discuss problems openly and cooperatively help to resolve problems (Holt et al. 2012). Furthermore, empathy, cooperation, communication and social responsibility have been identified as key facets to maintaining strong bonds between peers (Ommundsen et al. 2005), however these findings are linked to youth relationships and have not been broadened to include adult friendships.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the theoretical relationship frameworks and the significance, conflict and maintenance of athlete relationships with coaches, parents and peers within the

sport literature. Parents and peers are key wellbeing and life satisfaction as well as ensuring an enjoyable sustained participation in sport. The coach-athlete relationship is integral to performance success and is considered the most important relationship within the sport setting. Despite abundance of research exploring broad scopes of these relationships, this study aims to add to the sport relationship field by offering an insight into the ways in which elite female footballers navigate their relationships within the competitive team environment extending upon the current literature scope.

The Current Study: A Statement of Purpose

People hold a high number of interpersonal relationships throughout their lifetime and changes to these relationships are inevitable. Individuals' journey through the social domain can provide them with satisfying relationships which they hold dear and provide them with meaning in their life. Positive relationships more broadly can enhance wellbeing, foster a sense of belonging and increase self-esteem. In the athletic field the construction and maintenance of positive relationships are considered to increase performance and motivation. However, relationships can also bring about challenges that can have a negative impact upon these factors. If establishing relationships is complex, preserving them undeniably adds to the complexity. Thus, this current study seeks to identify the different relationships within the elite female football environment and explore the reasons athletes construct relationships while acknowledging the transitional element of young and new players into the setting. Furthermore, emphasis is placed on understanding the significance of these relationships in the lives of women athletes.

This study will focus on exploring parental, coach and peer relationships in the elite environment addressing key gaps in the current literature. In the sport friendship literature, studies predominantly focus on children and adolescents in sport, with limited and mixed evidence for gender differences in adult friendships (David-Barret et al 2015). This poses difficulty in generalising findings to the adult sporting environment where there are inherent differences between youth and adult sports. Lack of research in adult sporting friendships is surprising as research into reasons for adult participation in sport has suggested that making friends and social interaction is a key motivator (Jones et al. 2011). Although developmental research suggests that intimacy is a characteristic that is progressively important with age (Weiss et al. 1996), there is little inclination that this trend is consistent in adult relationships. This gap resonates with studies in the parent-athlete relationship where youth sport has taken centre stage in research with little focus placed on the parent-child

relationship in adult sport. Our limited knowledge of parent connections with adult children suggest that links with parents are maintained through mutual enjoyment and the want to keep in touch despite age and distance (Dwyer 2000). Previous research has been strongly invested in the developmental theory of relationships in youth (i.e. Côté 1999; Côté et al. 2007), yet little research has explored parent-athlete relationships beyond this and into adulthood. This research aims to extend the current literature by bridging the gap between youth and adult relationships and social interactions by providing an understanding of the environment and the relationship ties of adult women in the sport of football.

The following chapter will present the methodological design used to achieve the research purpose.

Chapter Three: Research Design

Introduction:

The primary aim of this study was to explore the construction and maintenance of social relationships within an adult elite female football programme through use of multiple qualitative methods. Visual concept relationship mapping and photo interviews were used as a means of developing an understanding of the relationships female footballers maintain, through their individual experiences of social interactions in and around the football. This chapter will present and justify the research approach adopted in this study by first identifying the philosophical underpinnings of the work as well as highlighting the individual methods. The following chapter presents a qualitative approach to data collection surrounding relationships and interaction in a women's football context.

Research Philosophy:

Understanding the nature of any research requires critical exploration of the philosophical foundations that underpin research (Merriam and Tisdell 2015). As Gratton and Jones (2003) describe, the research approach is often determined by individual research stance that is guided by their epistemology and ontological positions. The ontological approach refers to the nature of reality (Goertz and Mahony 2012). For qualitative research this concerns the meanings of concepts, with quantitative research on the contrary focussing on the operationalisation and measurement of concepts (Goertz and Mahony 2012). Epistemology then, is understanding the nature of knowledge, as Denzin and Lincoln (2005) describes, the relationship between the inquirer and the known. Quantitative researchers adopt an objective approach where the researcher and researched object are separate entities that cannot be influenced. In contrast, qualitative researchers propose a subjective approach where the inquirer and known is dependent on the other (Sparkes and Smith 2014).

Such methodological positions often predispose researchers to adhere to specific data collection techniques associated with the research practices (Brewer 2000). True to qualitative research, the philosophy underpinning this research is determined by my own philosophical influences in relation to my belief about the nature of reality. This study adopts the ontological belief that reality is socially constructed; that there is no single observable reality, rather multiple realities or interpretations of a single event (Merriam and Tisdell 2015). Thus reality is 'humanly constructed' (Sparkes and Smith 2014) where research findings are the creation of interactions between the inquirer and the inquired (Hollinshead 2006). In short, the social world and associated meanings are produced and

maintained through social interaction and meaning construction; known as social constructivism.

Social constructivism informs the interpretivist epistemological stance for this research, wherein understanding of knowledge is associated with studying real life interactions in natural situations that are not experimentally controlled (Brewer 2000). Patton (2015) explains that our experiences are determined by the way in which the experience is interpreted, thus it is through this interpretivist lens that we gain a deeper understanding of the world as experienced by those in that setting. Interpretivist research takes into account the intangible aspects of social science where feelings, emotions and behaviours can be measured by collecting data from the perspective of those involved in the social setting (Gratton and Jones 2003); in this case the feelings, emotions and behaviours associated with relationships developed and maintained within the South-Coast United Women's Football Club.

When embarking on a qualitative project, the researcher is concerned with understanding the meaning of a phenomenon; to understand how people make sense of their lives and their experiences (Fetters et al 2013). The core aspect of this research lies in the understanding of the lived experiences of the Ladies First and Development team, through understanding the types of relationships they construct and maintain. In recognising the philosophical stance that underpins this research, it is apparent that these characteristics are fundamental to implementing a qualitative study. The epistemological beliefs are interconnected with methodology (Krane and Baird 2003), where further justifications of this approach follows.

Adopting a Qualitative Approach

Where quantitative research aims to identify cause and effect of a phenomenon, qualitative research in contrast seeks to gain an understanding of the phenomenon of those involved (Fetters et al. 2013). As described by Braun and Clarke (2013), qualitative research in its basic form uses words as data and is collected and analysed in a variety of different ways. For the purpose of this study, the qualitative approach enabled me to capture significant qualities such as feelings, thoughts and experiences that are salient in exploring relationships within the cultural environment of women's football. Prior research in the relationship field has predominantly consisted of utilising quantitative methods in the form of multi-section questionnaires (Olympiou et al. 2008; Felton and Jowett 2013; Davis and Jowett 2014; Leo et al. 2015), self- report questionnaires (Nangle et al. 2003, Jowett and Chaundy 2004, Carr 2009, Carr and Fitzpatrick 2011, Vella et al. 2013, Dorsch et al. 2016) and surveys (Babke

and Weiss 1999; Ullrich-French and Smith 2006; Vella et al. 2013;) with very few using qualitative methods such as interviews (Côté 1999; Stewart and Kerr 2013; Arbeit et al. 2016, Harwood et al. 2016; Adams and Carr 2017). This is surprising, considering the core nature of relationships involve interactions and social exchange between two or more persons thus the use of more personable and interactive methods such as interviews would be more appropriate and comes away from simply reducing participant contributions to numbers and instead seeks to provide them with a voice (Gratton and Jones 2014).

Because of this, a multiple method approach utilising simultaneous and supporting methods was deemed appropriate to collect in depth data on different types, quality and intensity of relationships constructed and maintained. Within such a complex environment as that of the female football environment, employing multiple qualitative methods allows for comprehensive and holistic understanding of the social environment, where the perspectives of the members associated with the social group can be detailed (Krane and Baird 2005). Consequently, visual concept relationship mapping and participatory photo interviews were chosen.

Mapping the Relationship Networks: Using Visual Concept Relationship Mapping

Concept mapping is rooted in the foundation of the constructivist paradigm where concept maps are the subjective representation of one's concept in response to a question or phenomenon and encourages the construction of knowledge by facilitating the interaction between the individual, their current cognitive structures and new information (Wilson et al. 2016). Thus, this innovative approach adds a valuable insight into how female footballers interpret their relationships and how their experiences impact the team environment (Pink 2009) in a creative manner that can help stimulate conversations and assist in additional qualitative tools. The use of mapping as a sociological method has only recently started to branch out in the sport domain with few studies using mapping for sport research (Ries et al. 2008; Huang et al. 2017; Donaldson, Callaghan, et al. 2019, Donaldson, Reimers, et al. 2019). Of those, none have used mapping to explore interpersonal relationships. Where previous studies in sport have used visual concept mapping with broader concepts such as sport participation (Visek et al. 2015) this study will use visual concept relationship maps on the micro scale focussing on the details within one construct: interpersonal relationships.

The use of visual concept mapping has been broadly used across many research fields including health care (Passmore 2013) and child learning environments (Clark 2011), all of which have adopted a variety of techniques under the broader banner of the concept mapping method. Thus, defining visual concept relationship mapping is problematic. In its basic form, concept mapping is defined as tools to assist individuals in visualising the journeying nature of a concepts' development (Butler-Kisber and Poldma 2010). Visual concept relationship maps are essentially visual tools for organising and representing knowledge, constructed from concepts, grouped together according to similarity and linked to self, based on their relationship ties (Kinchin et al. 2010). The end product is a visual image that facilitates an interactive relationship with its audience, providing a rich understanding of the subjective meanings related to a phenomenon (Wilson et al. 2016). Whilst the representation of the concept map in this study differs from more traditional forms where a definitive hierarchy and linking words are not used, it does identify individual concepts and suggests a relationship between them (Wheeldon and Faubert 2009). Lines identifying links between the relationships and the direction of the thought processes as indicated through arrows are a key component to the concept mapping method (Latif et al. 2016). Thus, concept mapping is the most appropriate definition of the method used for this study, particularly as ties between relationships, the unidirectional arrows from each line and ratings associated to each concept illustrate a different type of hierarchy and relational element of the map.

Creating Visual Concept Relationship Mapping

The concept of the maps adopted for this study primarily stem from Grenville-Cleave et al's (2017) sport psychology relationship mapping activity, derived from practical sport psychology interventions, yet has never been used in the research field. Their activity has been designed to "broaden awareness of one's relational context" (Grenville-Cleave et al. 2017 pg. 142). It draws upon emerging developments of positive psychology where research suggested that positive psychology activities and interventions can aid the quality and satisfaction of relationships (O'Connell et al. 2015). Therefore, the identification and awareness of these relationships in terms of importance, frequency and quality are valuable in maintaining the quality and effectiveness of them (Grenville-Cleave et al. 2017). However, there is no research to date to support the use of relationship mapping nor the use of visual concept relationship mapping to explore relationships. Thus, when searching for an appropriate method to use for this research, whilst none offered a thorough fitting method, this was deemed most appropriate as a foundation.

To build upon this foundation, Cruwys et al's (2016) social identity mapping (SIM) method provided a visual presentation of social groups to assess their network of group membership. Group specification and importance, group ratings, group similarities and group compatibility were concepts adapted from SIM to explore relationships. Despite SIM focussing on group membership, Cruwys et al (2016) suggest this method is adaptable to address a range of research questions. Thus this, combined with the ratings of relationships as proposed by Grenville-Cleave et al (2017) have aided in the creation of the visual concept relationship maps used here.

Phase One: Visual Concept Relationship Mapping

The procedure of the visual concept relationship mapping exercise followed the basic technique of performance profiling research, originated by Butler and Hardy (1992) and similarly used by Hays et al (2010) in confidence profiling as well as Visek et al (2015) concept mapping procedure. Both procedures followed three stages, within which the process of eliciting information are detailed.

Stage 1: Introducing the idea. The idea of relationships within sport and the role they play in sporting experiences was introduced to the athletes to shed light on their feelings towards their relationships. Visual concept relationship mapping exercise was introduced to the athletes, detailing the importance of understanding relationships and their role within the sporting context through visual representation. Athletes were provided with examples of completed visual concept relationship maps, created by the researcher from a work place environment. They were reassured that there was no right or wrong answer in creating their map, instead it was based on their own interpretations of their relationships. The workshop aim was not only a basis to collect data, but also to improve athlete's own awareness of their relationship. It was highlighted that the information provided would not be accessible by the club, and that it was the athlete's choice the degree to which they discussed their relationships once the workshop was completed. It was understood that the workshop may illuminate the current state of the athletes relationship thus athletes were signposted to psychology support services should they need it.

Stage 2: Eliciting constructs

Understanding Relationships. Athletes were first asked to identify the constructs associated with fundamental qualities associated with relationships. As a group, they gathered constructs through discussions and brainstorming answers to the following:

a) What are relationships?

b) Why do we have relationships?

c) What do we look at when researching relationships?

d) What are the different types of relationships we possess?

Discussions lasted around 10minutes which provided ample time for a broad range of answers to be shared with the whole team (Butler and Hardy 1992). Whilst the researcher initiated discussions, it was then facilitated by the rest of the team where interactive presentation tools were used to display information discussed and give opportunities for all athletes to contribute ideas. From here, athletes used these ideas to stimulate their own internal discussions regarding their relationships and select those qualities and constructs most important to them and their representation of their relationship network.

Working individually, on an A4 sheet of paper, athletes were asked to list all of their relationships related to their involvement within the team. These relationships could be internally such as teammates or coaches, or externally in the form of family or peers outside of the team. It was explicitly explained that the relationships identified should have some significant influence on the individual's experience of playing football and specifically with South-Coast United. Once identified, these relationships were then grouped together according to the types of relationships they were (i.e. teammates, friends, coach, support staff etc), sorting into piles that make sense to them (Visek et al 2015). It was at this point that research assistants were used to help participants with their creation.

Relational grouping. On an A3 piece of paper, athletes added the names from their previous list surrounding their name in the middle to begin to create the concept map. Placing of the names was according to: closeness to self (closest relationships were closest to their name in the centre of the paper with less close relationships towards the outer area of the sheet), type of relationship (using the same colour pen to illustrate e.g. purple colour for teammates) and similarity between those relationships (friendship groups, support staff placed closer together within each type).

Stage 3: Assessment.

Assessment of the relationships were made using the following:

Rating of relationships. For each relationship, athletes rated on of scale of 1-5 (1 very low, 5 very high) the following: importance (I) of the relationship, frequency (F) - how often they saw them in and out of football, and quality (Q) of the relationship.

Relational ties. Ties between the participant and their relationships were illustrated through arrowed lines. Zig zag lines represented weak ties between the relationships with straight

lines indicating strong ties. Dotted or broken lines were introduced by athletes who felt that the relationship was purely professional. Reciprocal relationships indicated multidirectional arrows from self to relationship, whereas unidirectional relationships were indicated with one arrow in the direction of the strength of the relationship.

Describing the relationships. Finally, next to each relationship players were requested to add a few words or images to describe their relationship (e.g. best friend, mentor, vice-captain, close, professional, awkward, turbulent).

At the conclusion of the workshop, concept maps were collected by the researcher and unless requested otherwise, were kept and later disposed once data analysis had been conducted. If athletes wanted copies of their map, they were able to take photographs before maps were collected or told to email the researcher where the map could be arranged to be returned to them. Because of the environment they were in, discretion was used when collecting the maps at the end of the session to ensure that sensitive information regarding teammates was not seen. In line with ethics, athletes who wanted to volunteer to take part in phase two of the research project, were asked to provide their email on the back of their work so they could be contacted to take part in the second phase: participatory photo interviews.

Through the Lens of a Female Footballer: Participatory Photo Interviews

Participatory photo interviews (Kolb 2008) or photo-elicitation interviewing (Harper 2002; Loeffler 2004) asks participants to take photographs and use them as a part of the research interview. Where photo elicitation interviews suggest the use of photos as a prompt and are primarily taken by the researcher or professionals and reviewed by the participant (e.g.Collier and Collier 1986; Harper 1987; Epstein et al. 2006), participatory photo interviews "invites participants to answer a research question by taking photos and explaining them to the researcher" (Kolb 2008, pg. 4).

Participatory photo interviews encourage participants to take photographs of a chosen aspect of their lives (in this case their experience of their football environment) which are later used during informal interviews to explore the subjective meanings of these images (Jorgenson and Sullivan 2010). Images rather than words alone, evoke deeper elements of human consciousness that not only elicits more information from participants but also evokes a different type of information (Harper 2002). Photographs generated by informants offer the opportunity to capture specific moments that might be easily forgotten (Jorgenson and Sullivan 2010). For example in Loeffler's (2004) research which used photo interviews to explore the meanings of outdoor adventure experiences, photographs primarily consisted of

the environment in which they travelled (images of mountains, lakes, sunsets and waterfalls), the activity in which they were pursuing and the people with whom they were pursuing the activity with.

Through providing tangible detail and sense of being there(Frost 2013) (Prosser and Schwartz 1998), photographs provide a prompt from which questions can be asked to elicit a greater depth of information from the participants and allow for clarity from photographs to be gained (Krane and Baird 2005). Informal meetings following a semi-structured interview format with these key informants allow the participants to voice their personal perspectives, feelings and perceptions in a one to one setting without the presence of their peers (Holloway 1997) thus allowing me to elicit a greater insight into the meanings attached to specific relationships (Krane and Baird 2005). Where the visual concept relationship mapping exercise brought about athlete self-awareness of their relationship networks within the team, photo interviews gave athletes the opportunity to reflect on their footballing experience.

The core aim of the study was to explore the construction and maintenance of relationships, therefore it was important to select methods that would replicate this interaction and social exchange in the research process. Stories and narratives are central to the ways people live their lives (Frost 2013). How individuals construct stories of their relationships provide sense of meaning to their relationships and their experiences as they are told (Frost 2013). Interviews alone create a sense of relational interaction and communication between interviewee and interviewer as similar to that in the social environment, however the inclusion of photographs in this process allows for the construction of story- telling from key events or experiences as created by the participant to reveal the nature of their relationships. These stories were brought to life in the participatory photo interview phase.

Phase Two: Participatory Photo Interviews

As part of the second phase of the research project athletes were tasked with producing photos that illustrate their "experiences of being in the women's football team". Two weeks after the concept mapping workshop eight participants took part in the participatory photo task. It was anticipated that relationships may alter slightly after a relationship mapping exercise, as athletes' awareness of their relationships are roused. Taking time to reflect on the relationships and understand where to focus time and attention are important for growth (Grenville-Cleave et al. 2017), therefore a short period between each task was necessary to allow reflection before deciding to proceed with the next task. Furthermore, it presented an opportunity for me to make initial analysis of the maps through number of relationships,

types of relationships, weak/ strong ties and quality of these relationships and generate questions was then used to generate questions and prompts to inform the interview guide for phase two.

The participatory photo procedure followed Kolb's (2008) photo interview phases. Once information on the next phase of the study was detailed to the athletes and consequent discussions surrounding their involvement had been address, athletes committed to taking an active role in the study in the *opening* phase. During the *active* phase, athletes we required to take photos using their own camera (predominantly from mobile phones as all players had easy access and were familiar to them) and asked to bring them to the interview later on. Little criteria around the task was given to the athletes, as it was important to give them creative freedom and opportunities to capture their story as they see it, without control or influence from the researchers (Kolb 2008). In the *decoding* phase, athletes described not only their photos but also their visual concept relationship map. Semi- structured interviews followed the visual concept relationship mapping exercise. The interview guide was developed from the visual concept relationship maps and the photographs produced by the athletes and was designed to target the components of their relationships (i.e. type of relationships, the construction of these relationships, relationship ties etc) by using a general reflection of their experiences within the team. The visual concept relationship maps and photos were laid out on the table and athletes were asked to select a photograph to discuss first. To open discussions the open question "tell me about this photograph" was asked of each photograph. This process was repeated with each photograph. Once discussions of the photographs were completed, the interview was directed to the visual concept relationship maps. Initial discussions were centred on the method itself, generating thoughts from athletes regarding the mapping process and its implementation. Questions related to the content of the maps were asked such a "tell me about your map", "talk to me about the placement of your relationships", "how have you grouped your relationships", "what type of relationship is the most important", "who is the most important" and "what factors makes someone highly/ lowly rated". To conclude the interviews, athletes we asked to discuss their experience of being in the team to gain a further insight into their football participation.

Why Combine the Use of Visual Concept Relationship Maps and Photo Interview?

Through use of two innovative qualitative methods, I was able to delve into the team setting and elicit insightful information from multiple approaches. Photography interviews and

visual concept relationship mapping were methods chosen due to their ability to bring together multiple perspectives using different modes of expression which allows the participants to be the main contributors and co-constructors of the research topic (Morrow 2005; Clark 2011). The participatory nature of these methods facilitates the process of knowledge production thus working in line with the social constructivist approach to the research project (Clark 2011) and as such have been recommended by previous authors as further use in this field (Clark 2011; McCalpin et al. 2017). Based on these recommendations, using photography interviews and visual concept relationship mapping were deemed appropriate methods for the current sample to generate the necessary data in line with a social constructivist approach whilst further developing these combined methods for their application in further sociological research.

Key to this research is the educational element visual concept relationship maps can provide through illuminating and bringing to light the different relationships players have within the team environment. Concept mapping has proven to be important in organising ideas and facilitating learning (Conceição et al. 2017) and serve as a useful means for recalling experiences that traditional data collection may not (Wheeldon and Faubert 2009). By graphically detailing their relationships, athletes are able to bring to consciousness their relationship ties which in turn may facilitate more detailed and in-depth reflections of their experiences during the interview phase (Wheeldon 2011). Thus, these concept maps are used in the initial stage of the research to help generate an understanding of the principles and key concepts to be explored further in the research and to give participants some background knowledge of their relationships prior to their interview.

Sampling and Team Demographics

In accordance with qualitative research, the current study implemented purposeful sampling to achieve research aims. Purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that the researcher wants to discover, understand and gain insight into a phenomenon thus selecting a sample from which the most can be learned is necessary (Merriam and Tisdell 2015). Although using this form of sampling does not allow for generalisability, a feature common in quantitative research, it does generate information-rich data derived from the in-depth understanding of specific cases where we can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the inquiry (Patton 2015).

Due to my relationship with South-Coast United Women's team, as a coach for the youth teams and current Vice Captain of the Women's First Team, I used my connections as an

opportunity to gain unique access to the South-Coast United Women's football programme. This sample was also selected based on it presenting a 'typical' sample where the members of both the women's team are "not in any way atypical, extreme, deviant or intensely unusual" (Patton 2015 p. 284) to the phenomenon of interest. The women's programme, particularly in the UK area, represent elite teams that operate a development and first team level teams, with younger players from academies or youth set up transitioning in ladies' football. Thus, despite the team cultural differences of players within each team, the overall phenomenon of women's football programme is typical to those found across the country.

The current study explores the relationships of 10 participants aged 18-26 (see appendix 1 for individual demographics) in accordance to Dorsch et al's (2016) developmental ages categorisation of emerging adults (aged 16-25) and adults (aged 25+). As noted, McCalpin et al (2017) explored similar multiple methods with youth soccer players aged 8-11, implementing a successful methodology for youth in sport context, thus exploring this with older sample age is key. In light of this, the latter stage of Côté et al's (2007) developmental model is specifically relevant to the current study where parent involvement remains integral for the majority of those athletes in the South-Coast United Women's team who fall under the "emerging adult" category.

The squad of 30 players across both first and development teams have a wide diversity in the following: age, race, sexuality, background, birthplace, career and team status, length of time at the club, and overall experiences. The two teams at senior level exhibited two different approaches to the expectations of player: the first team was drilled and expected to perform and win games thus team selection and training attitudes reflected this. Both teams trained on pitch twice a week, with a total of 29 competitive games played per team. Whilst winning games was an important goal for the development team, its primary purpose was to develop players to first team quality and produce players worthy of playing at the highest level at the club. Whilst there is a core group of players that have been part of the club for many years, there is an element of competition amongst teammates as an increase in the pool of talent from newcomers joining the club requires a fight for selection. This culture and change makes for an interesting development in relationships, how the existing relationships are maintained and how new players impact the dynamic of the team.

Procedure

Data was collected at the mid-point of the season to allow for relationships to develop and settle in the team, particularly for new members who had recently joined. The study

followed two phases of data collection: phase one visual concept relationship mapping exercise and phase two participatory photo interviews (see figure 1 on research procedure). The visual concept relationship mapping workshop introduced the idea of relationships, a warm-up exercise to help participants organise ideas and stimulate recall which in turn would later inform interview questions for phase two (Wheeldon 2011). Following approval from the Bournemouth University ethics committee, all athletes in both South-Coast United's first and development team were invited to participate in the research. Out of the 30 athletes registered, 10 athletes volunteered to take part. Of those, one was a development player, eight were first team players and one floated in between first and development. Participant age and experience varied from recently joined, to senior members who had been at the club for four years, players who have been injured for most of the season and players who have come through the local university link (see appendix 1 for full participant demographics). Participants were provided with an overview of the project in their entirety but could chose not to volunteer for phase two if requested, thus participants were asked to consent to participate at each phase. All 10 volunteered participants attended the visual concept relationship mapping workshop. Workshops were held in person and lasted one hour directly before training; considered the most convenient time for participants. Due to the number of participants partaking in each workshop and to ensure consistency, validity and reliability across all maps, seven sport psychology undergraduates were recruited as research assistants. Successful students went through a rigorous recruitment where submissions were reviewed, applicants interviewed before seven were selected. They were trained to administer and facilitate concept mapping in consistent ways. Their role was to help participants through the process, working with them on a one to one basis whilst the lead researcher facilitated the workshop. Two workshops took place with seven participants participating in the first and three in the second. For the second phase of the research project, all participants were invited to take part in the photo- interviews. Eight participants responded and were interviewed. These interviews were held at a time and location convenient for the participant and lasted between 45-85 min in length (453 min total) and 112 transcribed pages.

Following the data collection, content analysis from phase one and thematic analysis from phase two were conducted to generate key findings.
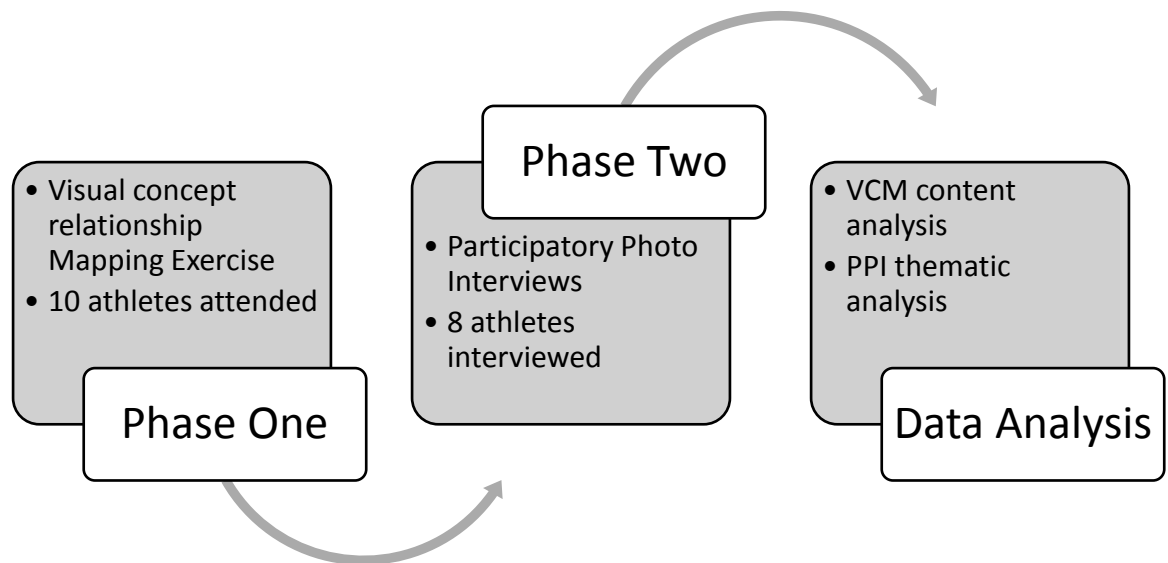
Figure 1 Research Procedure

Data Analysis

The aim of data analysis is to essentially 'make sense' of the data collected using processes to answer the research question and provide meanings or insights that constitute the findings of the study (Merriam and Tisdell 2015). In qualitative research, Flick (2013) describes the process of data analysis as:

> "the classification and interpretation of linguistic (or visual) material to make statements about implicit and explicit dimensions and structures of meaning-making in the material and what is represented in it" (pg. 5).

The key process of data analysis in qualitative research requires organising messy, raw data into conceptual categories (Gratton and Jones 2003).

Data analysis for the research study was twofold and was linked to the phases of the study. Content analysis was used in the initial phase of data analysis and is a method used to identify patterns focussing at a micro level to provide frequency counts (Wilkinson 2000). It allows quantitative analysis of qualitative data (Ryan and Bernard 2000). The data generated was not used in isolation, instead it helped to produce initial coding (such as types of relationships, relationship isolates, relationship ties, key informants and contributors) that were explored later in the interview phase.

Thematic analysis followed the content analysis to help identify and organise patterns of meaning also known as 'themes' (Braun and Clarke 2013). The interview transcripts produced from phase two were then analysed following Braun and Clarke's (2006) proposed a six-phase approach to thematic analysis as shown in Table 2. Commonalities are identified through focussing on data to ascertain meaning in answer to the research question (Braun and Clarke 2013) through sustained process of interpretation (Smith and Osborn 2003). In line with the qualitative nature of this research, the researcher immersed themselves into the data to inductively generate themes from interview transcripts using a 'bottom-up' approach where the themes are derived from the data as opposed to moulding data to fit pre-existing themes (Hastie and Glotova 2012). Research into adult female football relationships have rarely been researched thus the coding process was driven by the athlete's personal experiences and descriptions than pre-existing theory.

Following Miles and Huberman's (1994) suggestion of the data reduction procedure, the data was organised and coded, with irrelevant information discarded. As required for the demands of the shear of volume of data collected from qualitative research, this process was on ongoing process throughout the data collection, allowing explanations to be continually developed and refined (Gratton and Jones 2015).

Table 1 Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis

Phase	Description
1. Familiarising with the data	Immersing in the data by reading and rereading the textual (in the form of visual concept relationship maps and interview transcripts) and visual data, taking notes from initial ideas
2. Generating initial codes	Production of codes from interesting features presented in a systematic fashion across the whole data set
3. Searching for themes	Sorting codes into potential themes, collate and combine codes under overarching theme
4. Reviewing themes	Two levels: level 1 checking the themes work in relation to coded extracts, level 2 across the entire data set, generate a thematic map of the consequent analysis
5. Defining and naming themes	Define and refine themes to present for

	analysis, identifying the essence of each theme
6. Producing the report	Write-up of the analysis to tell a compelling story of the data, convincing the reader of the validity of analysis in concise, coherent account using evidence from data to demonstrate themes beyond mere description of the data.
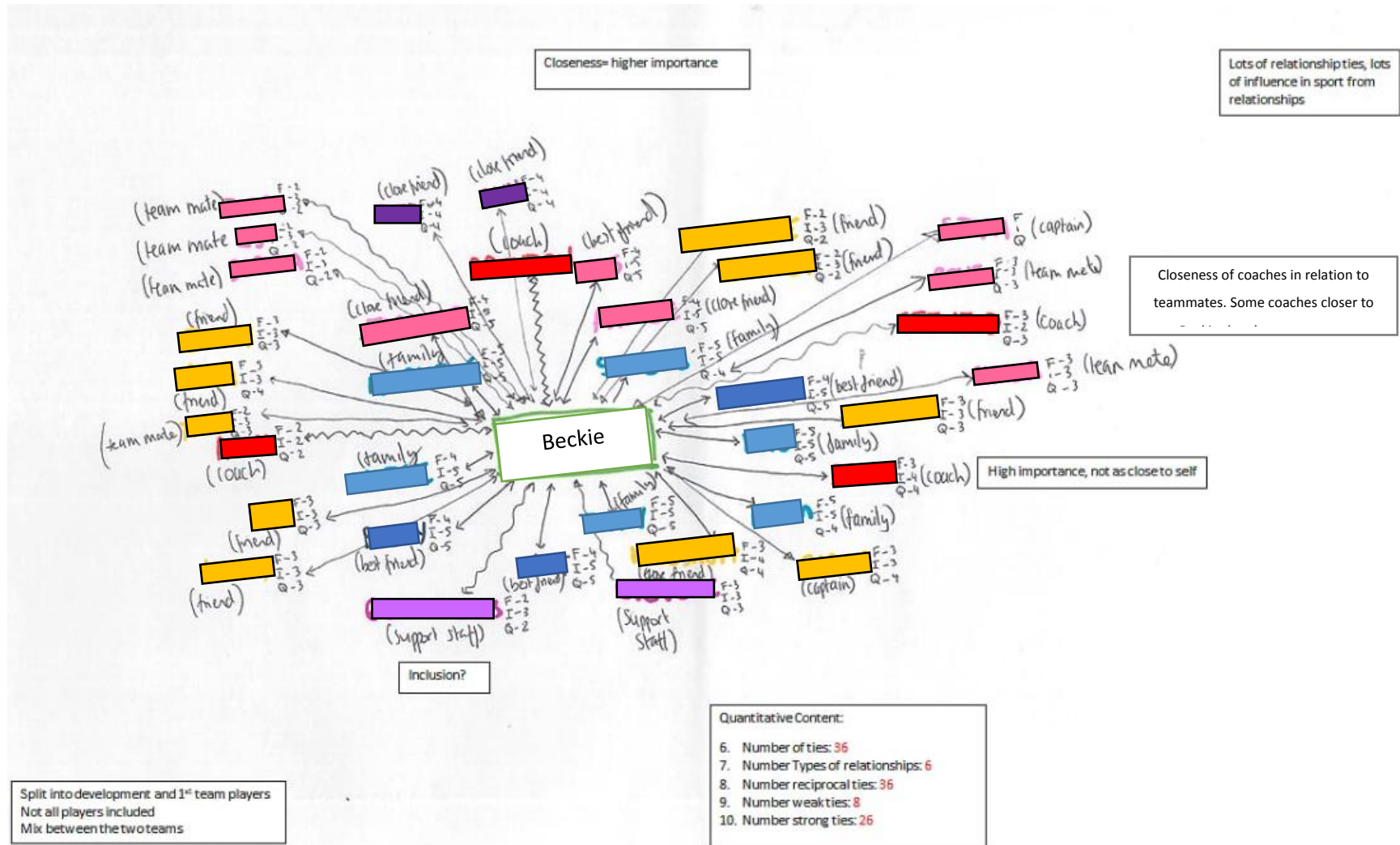
Figure 2 Example of initial content analysis conducted on completed visual concept relationship map

Ethical Considerations

Ethics within the research is highly scrutinised to ensure that the research is conducted in a morally and sociably accepted manner (Gratton and Jones 2009). The ethical concern in qualitative research is heightened because of the frequency with which researchers interact with participants in a face to face environment, over lengthy times and sometimes in intimate situations (Given 2008). To ensure that the study was ethically conducted using human participant, ethical approval was obtained from Bournemouth University ethics panel for the commencement of the research project. Participants were required to sign an informed consent form to be included in the study (Gratton and Jones 2009). Due to the two phases of research where distinct methods were used, it was necessary to obtain consent at each stage to ensure athletes were informed and agreeable to participate. This was chiefly important with this specific sample where an opt-in policy helped to minimise pressures to participate (Valentine 1999). Prospective participants were given time to reflect on their involvement in the study to ensure they did not feel obliged to participate, particularly due to my close relationship and involvement with the club it was important that participants did not feel coerced into participating. Prior to the start of the study, each participant was given a participant information sheet for both phase of the research project where the study aims and objectives are highlighted to ensure that athletes were fully aware of the implications to their participation at each stage thus were not mislead (Gratton and Jones 2009). All participants were aware that their participation was strictly voluntary at each phase of the research. Data from visual concept relationship maps, self-directed photographs and audio files from interviews were used to explore the research objectives. The visual concept relationship maps were stored electronically with original copies destroyed. Audio files were used solely for the purpose of transcribing and were deleted once all the information had been obtained. All data was stored on a private laptop and external hard drive that was solely accessed by the researcher and password protected (McNamee et al. 2007). Anonymity of participants was crucial to address particularly in ensuring the identity of athletes from coaches and teammates in the research outputs was hidden to ensure that athletes could not be identified. Due to the nature of the methods, participants were anonymised at point of publication and not at point of collection. In written texts a pseudonym was used for publication outputs. A debrief was provided to the participants after each phase of the research. As the researcher was a member of the explored culture, the need for a systematic withdrawal from the field was unnecessary. However it was important that in writing the results and discussion there was an element of caution taken to ensure that revealing

certain information regarding individuals did not have any social or political ramifications, especially for those members within the team environment whose professional career may be affected (e.g. coach, team members) (Krane and Baird 2003).

Judging Qualitative Research

Qualitative research does not seek to capture objective "truth" or reality but focusses on trustworthiness and credibility (Merriam and Tisdell 2015). Rigor is often the term used to describe the quality of qualitative research and is a marker of excellence by researchers (Smith and McGannon 2018). According to Tracy (2010) there are eight criteria of quality in qualitative research of which rigor is considered a must. In accordance to this, it was imperative that the data collect was rich in rigor by ensuring that enough time and care was taken into data collection and that there was enough data to support justifications in findings (Tracy 2010). Interviews were an appropriate length of time to ensure sufficient data and clarity was gained from the participants and were transcribed accurately to avoid misunderstanding of answers.

In addition to rigor, trustworthiness was key to promoting a quality research. Member checking has for many years been determined as a must to ensure rigorous and trustworthy research. However, more recently Smith and McGannon (2018) argue that member checking is no longer a form for validity and verification. Instead, member reflections were suggested as more appropriate. Member reflections offer additional data and insight by researchers and participants working together to explore gaps in results or share interpretations of the findings. This was achieved during the interview process where participants were asked to clarify some of the initial interpretations I had made from the visual concept relationship mapping exercise. Furthermore, triangulation has become a source of achieving credibility in qualitative research, where Denzin (1978) proposes four types: use of multiple methods, multiple sources of data, multiple investigators or multiple theories to confirm emerging findings from which two sources were used. Multiple methods were the core aspect of this research, achieved through photo eliciting interviews and visual concept relationship mapping. The information provided through the photographs can be checked against the information provided during the interview and map making process. Further triangulation was achieved through using multiple sources of data where cross-checking of data collected through photographs being taken at different times and in different places in relation to the member's life outside of football and conducting interviews with members with different perspectives.

In line with generating a study that was rigor, the use of a reflective journal to helped to ensure I was understanding my environment and ensure that I was authentic throughout the process by being honest about my own biases. This will be explored in greater depth in the following section.

Impact of Self- Reflexivity

Reflexivity is the process where the researcher acknowledges and takes into account their impact upon the subject matter based on their own beliefs, characteristics, background and values (Jones 2015). Reflexivity has become a crucial process in qualitative research as researchers become more aware of the role of self in the generation of knowledge (Mruck and Breuer 2003). Many factors can influence the researcher in the creation of knowledge including gender, age, race, sexual orientation, personal experiences, beliefs, personal characteristics and theoretical stance (Guillemin and Gillam 2004; Berger 2015). According to Berger (2015) these positions can impact the research in three ways: the field, the researcher-researched relationship and the findings and conclusions from the study. In my experience, these three factors were aided by my positioning. As vice-captain for the women's first team and coach the younger girls' age group for three years, I had become accustomed to the norms, rules and ways of operating within the club thus it was difficult to make the familiar strange. Nevertheless, this benefitted my access to the *field* by working with a typically closed group who were more willing to participate within someone who was informed and sensitive to their environment. My position also aided the *researcher-researched relationships* as I already had a good rapport with the participants due to our existing established relationship which in turn increased the information shared. The shared experience also allowed me to use language and pose questions appropriate for the setting in addition to filtering the information provided from participants through the lens of one who had gone through similar experiences thus *findings and conclusions* were shaped to be more reflective of the research setting.

Despite the benefits, my role within the South-Coast United program both as a coach and player also brought challenges to my objectivity throughout the research project. In my position of high authority, it was important for me to take a conscious stance on ensuring I was objective in all manners when conducting the research. More specifically when working with the women's teams, I was aware that my role as vice-captain could influence the viewpoint and interpretations of the athletes participating in the research. This was particularly true during the

visual concept relationship mapping exercise, where players mapped out their relationship network. It was highly likely that due to my position in the team I was to be included in most of the visual concept relationship maps, thus it was challenging for me to detach myself from my thoughts and feelings associated with the maps and take an impartial approach to the evaluations my teammates made of me. In this study it is easy to become engrossed in understanding the thoughts of my teammates where I were involved, however it was imperative that I took an outsiders perspective, to look upon my name as a another team member and not as myself, thus evaluating the data as whole and not honing in on one aspect of it. I had to acknowledge that I was a part of the research therefore my presence as researcher and teammate were to be reflected on throughout the study and to enable me take an objective approach to the evaluations my teammates made of me. To help with this process, it became increasingly important to keep a reflexive journal throughout the two phases of data collection to help focus my internal responses, particularly in the instances where I were included in athletes discussions, and develop an understanding of the content to help shape my communications and decision making in relation to teammates (Brewer and Sparkes 2011). After each visual concept relationship workshop, my internal discussions were written down and reflected upon as I conveyed the need to analyse my both my own actions and the data produced. The use of research assistants enabled me to take a stand back approach in the delivery of the workshops whilst ensuring that data collected was still trustworthy/ valid, consistent. Having a shared experience with the participants may colour the power relationship between researcher and participant (Berger 2015). Undoubtedly my presence in the field would influence the lives of those in the environment (Etherington 2004), however as well as documenting these effects, the methods used were explicitly selected to reduce this influence specifically in relation to power inequalities. Using photography allowed the athletes to manufacture distance, to participate without my physical presence thus enabling the photos to take center stage (Harper 2002) where later the interview focused on the photos rather than the participant (Collier and Collier 1986). Furthermore, through this collaborative process of sharing where researcher became listener (Loeffler 2004), it was important that my own interpretations and the participants were distinguished to avoid imposing my own values and beliefs on the participants (Krane and Baird 2003). That being said, shared experiences with participants allowed for me to be better equipped with the insights of the team dynamics by my having a better understanding of the team function thus I knew what to ask and how (Berger 2015). At the heart of qualitative research lies the truth in participants own experiences and as such it was imperative to allow for the voice of the athletes to be heard and not to be tainted.

This chapter presented the research design that formed the foundation of the study. The following results and discussion chapter will present the research findings in relation to the social environment of the elite female football setting.

Chapter Four: Results and Discussion

Introduction:

This chapter provides qualitative insight into the dynamic construction and maintenance of identities, attachments and relationships among elite female footballers. Through visual concept relationship mapping and photo participatory interviews, data was coded and organized to generate two key themes from both phases of the study.

The results section was twofold based on the two different phases of methods used. The first section of this chapter will explore the relationships and connections identified from the visual concept relationship maps. The visual concept relationship mapping exercise allowed for initial exploration into relationships, highlighting the key connections individuals had, how close they were and the strength of these relationships and rated them based on importance, quality and frequency. The second section of the results explore the two themes emerged from the analysis from the interview phase (see figure 1): Football identity and attachment to sport and Team-based interactions: exploring the 'teammate', coach and support staff relationship in a competitive team environment.
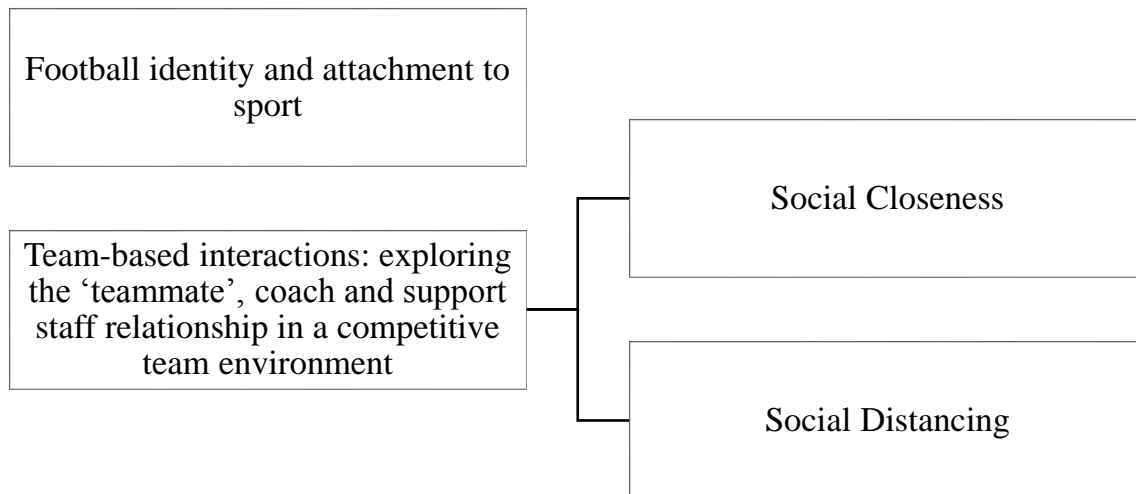
Figure 3 Key Themes and subthemes

Theme one, football identity and attachment to sport will highlight participants thoughts and feelings revolving around being a 'football girl' and how this identity has developed an attachment to the sport. Theme two, team-based interactions: exploring the 'teammate', coach and support staff relationship in a competitive team environment, questions the 'teammate'

relationship and explores interactions between teammates, coaches and support staff and how athletes negotiate and navigate these relationships in the competitive environment.

Mapping, Organizing and Structuring Relationships

Relationships are a complex web of social interactions of which individuals have to navigate multiple connections of varying closeness, importance and strength (Grenville-Cleave et al. 2017). Through the visual concept relationship mapping exercise, participants were able to articulate their relationships using a visual tool, opening their eyes to the multitude of relationships they hold.

According to participants relationships are: *'How close you are to certain people and why you're close to them. How you act to them and what they mean to you.'* (Karen). As such, participants highlighted 5 different types of relationships: teammates, coaches and support staff, family, friends and romantic partners. These types of relationships were evident in all maps, although the number of ties within each category differed per person.

Key to this study was the magnitude of relationships participants held. Table 2 shows the relationships mapped as part of the visual concept relationship mapping exercise generated from content analysis of the maps produced by participants. In total participants held between 10- 49 relationships; the total number of ties from all 10 maps was 258. Of these 258 relationships, the strength of such ties varied from 6-29 (totalling 144) with weak ties between 2-28 (totalling 84). Where friends and family members were predominantly the stronger ties, teammates and coaches were included in the weaker ties. Additionally, participants perceived 199 of these relationships to be reciprocal.

Parks (2007 cited by Tong et al. 2008) suggest that people hold about 10-20 close relationships however findings in this study highlight a much higher number of relationships participants were required to manage within their sport environment alone. Within this, friends and teammates contained the highest number of connections (friends: 3-16, 85 total; teammates: 7-23, 113 total). This demonstrates the complexity of maintaining this substantial number of relationships and further highlights the emphasis participants placed on their friends and teammates. Despite a high number of teammates included on the map, they were not considered as important as their friends who were rated the highest in importance along with family members. Initial content analysis show that teammates are valued lower in importance, unless

these teammates were also closer friends. Where previous research within the team cohesion literature suggest that the teammate relationship is of high importance to achieve task cohesion (Al-Yaaribi and Kavussanu 2017) and for overall perceptions of cohesion (McLaren and Spink 2018), findings here show a more disjointed viewpoint.

When grouping relationships based on similarity, there was often a blurred categorization between teammates and friend- closer friends that were also teammates but appeared separate from the rest of the team. This signified an element of grouping types of relationships with closer bonds forming a tighter social group. Furthermore, this gave an impression of a layered concept of relationships within each type. For example, participants identified a number of different connections under the 'friend' type, however each relationship varied dependent on the following factors: closeness to self, strength of tie, reciprocal tie, importance, frequency and quality. Thus combined, all relationships associated to one 'type' were a complex layer to be navigated and maintained through their own unique set of interactions. This will be explored in more detail later in the chapter.

This section provides a content overview of the information provided in the concept map, the relationships of which will be unpacked throughout the chapter. Friends and teammates contained the highest number of connections, however these connections were not always the most important and close. Not only do participants have the complexity of maintaining this substantial number of relationships, they also have to negotiate close and cohesive relationships alongside more distal relationships within a high-performance and competitive environment.

Table 2 Findings from the visual concept relationship mapping exercise

Participant	Total Number of connections	Number of types of relationships	Number of reciprocal ties	Number of strong ties*	Number of weak ties*	Number of 'professional' ties	Number of team-mate connections	Number of team-friend connections	Number of coach/ support staff connections	Number of family connections
Karen 1st Team	29	5	25	17	2	10	7	7	6	7
Cheryl 1st Team	30	5	6	18	12	-	23	2	3	1
Beckie Development Team	36	6	36	28	8	-	6	11	6	6
Toni 1st Team	25	7	15	13	12	-	11	8	3	1
Phoebe 1st Team	17	5	5	7	10	-	5	8	2	2
Regina 1st Team	20	7	15	9	2	9	7	4	3	1
Micha Both	34	4	34	29	5	-	10	7	6	8
Penelope 1st Team	34	4	34	29	5	-	14	0	6	10
Charlie 1st Team	19	3	7	11	8	-	11	6	2	0
Alexandra 1st Team	19	3	19	6	13	-	7	6	3	2
Totals	244	4.6 mean av.	177	161	64	19	101	131	40	38

*Connections based on individuals' perspectives and not how they perceive others view relationship

Theme 1: "I'm The Person Who Plays Football": Football as an Identity and Creating an Attachment to Sport

Participants believed football formed part of their identity which gave them a greater understanding of who there were based on their sport involvement. Their football identity allowed them to develop relationships with those who mirrored a similar identity thus sharing a core common interest for relationship interaction and development.

Our identity is an unconscious and evolving sense of who we are (Erikson 1994) and as such is the foundation of our relationship with self. Participants echoed this viewpoint, as Cheryl stated: *'I'm the one who plays football'*; highlighting her identity as being imbedded in her activities and interests. Many participants voiced a similar notion; that their experience and involvement with the sport helped construct their female footballer identity. Sport therefore played a significant role on the lives of these individuals, becoming an internalized part of how they perceived themselves thus going beyond a mere activity to developing an integral understanding of the self. As sport becomes an important aspect of females' lives, the traditional female identity is questioned and altered from 'girly-girls' to a more complex web of interchangeable identities. Instead, participants adopted what is perceived to be the more traditional masculine identity, centred on sport participation which in turn influenced their friendship and relationship structures. Social experiences including playing sport and making friends help to facilitate one's identity development (Pielichaty 2015), therefore sport plays a role in mediating relationships and interactions within the environment. In addition, females no longer fit into the traditional female identity, 'hetero-sexy' (Clayton and Harris 2004) box thus are creating what Pielichaty (2015) describes as a 'web of selves'. Findings in Pielichaty's (2015) study on female footballers highlight that adolescent girls have a number of different identities they recognize and use interchangeably dependent on the environment. Whilst additional identities were not explored further in this study, it is evident that being a female footballer was a core and central identity that influenced their social environment and interactions.

Family were key contributors to initiating participants relationship with sport and have been a permanent fixture in the participants journey throughout their sporting career. As Cheryl described:

> *'My dad was the first person who I ever played football with, he got me into it so it was probably why I put him on there because he was a strong influence in my footballing career or history.'*

This acknowledgment of parental influence on initial sport participation was echoed by Toni:

>*'The reason I started playing football was because of him'*

>*'He had a lot of influence getting me back into football as well'*

Parents were integral to participants introduction to the sport and through their continual supporting mechanisms throughout the years aided a lifetime of sport involvement for their daughters. Because of this, parents were also key contributors to participants developing their football girl identity. Their support enabled participants to safely express themselves in sport, allowing them branch out from the secure base of their primary caregivers and finding an additional safe haven in the football. Despite this, the degree of support does however question for whom the support benefits. Alexandra described how her dad has missed being able to watch her play since her move to South-Coast.

>*'My dad used to come and watch me play every single weekend without fail and I think he missed that.'*

Alexandra's words suggest a mutual responsibility for attachment to the sport. Not only does the presence of her dad at games highlight a highly supportive figure in her father through game attendance, it also demonstrates an acknowledgement that she was somewhat responsible for her parent's attachment to the sport in addition to her own. There is a sense of reinforcement in her attachment to the sport as well as the notion that she shares this passion with family members thus generating a closer bond and maintaining it through her continual involvement in the sport.

Not only did each individual recognize sport as part of or an aspect of their identity, more importantly it was the acknowledgement of their identity from others that imbedded the identity. Participants noted that parents, friends and others often referred to them in relation to the sport. Being referred to as *'football girl' (Cheryl)* or by generating conversations related to their sport involvement (*'the first thing they say is how's football?' Beckie)* suggested that other people perceived them as being as one with the sport. Because of this, being recognized as a *'football girl'* meant others perpetuated the football identity.

>*'They always ask me how's football, that's football girl'* (Beckie)

Acquiring an identity requires the identity to be assigned by others and accepted and internalised by the individual (Ronkainen et al. 2016), more relatedly, the identification within an athletic role is derived from feedback from others such as coaches, teammates,

parents and spectators (Brewer et al. 1993). Thus it is apparent that the athlete's identity is influenced by their relationship with others as well as their self.

When discussing their football experiences most participants cited how their life felt incomplete without the sport. Despite any challenges they faced within the sport, all participants emphasised that they could not imagine a life without their sport; stopping playing was likened to missing part of themselves. "*There was something missing and it was like playing" (Regina).* This feeling was often heightened for participants who were forced to be away from sport due to injuries. Participants voiced a sense of withdrawal and a frustration towards not being able to play. In addition to the enjoyment, personal and team successes, participants often stated that sport provided them with a routine and a sense of belonging. All of which were lost when injured. Participants were detached from the part of them that provided enjoyment, sense of belonging and self-understanding through sport; outside of which may not exist in other social contexts. Penelope discussed the impact injury had on her:

> '*Football is so huge for me like my whole week is just lost. I've got no structure to my week, I just go to work, go to gym.'*

Therefore, when faced with the possibility of losing this part of their lives, participants felt a sense of loss. This is partly due to the number of hours committed to the sport and they long term investment throughout the years.

For many, football has formed part of their identity due to its long-standing relationship with the individual. Most participants started playing football at a very young age and have continued to be involved at varied capacities and levels through to their present involvement. Such commitments to the sport highlighted how continual experiences influenced the self. Alexandra stated how part of her identity was centred around football:

> Interviewer: *What is it about football that you love? What is it that makes you want to play and carry on playing?*
> Alexandra: *It's the only thing I'm good at. I've never done anything but football, so I don't think I really know anything else really. My whole life has been football, football, football really.*

Acceptance of their football identity was primarily a result of identifying it as a skill they were good at. Thus, this acceptance of identity is linked to ones perceived ability. According to Stets and Burke (2000) identities are role-based self-conceptions, with meaning and expectations of identity related to their perceived performance of their role. This individual perception of one's ability was also influenced by others, as those within the environment

judge and make assumptions of another person's ability. Therefore, other people in the environment can impact upon an individual's identity. As Regina stated:

> *'It used to be just loving the sport but now I just go crazy if I don't have it because I played it for so long. I think I'd miss the things that lead up to it like the people, the routine and that, so it's more for myself really now instead.'* (Regina)

Regina's words suggest that football became an unconscious part of her being, highlighting that her relationship with the sport had developed beyond the love of the game, to an innate need and comfort for herself. This was partly due to the enjoyment derived from playing for many years, but more importantly was as a direct result from the people within the environment. Connotations such as '*I'd miss… the people'* demonstrate the important role other people have in creating social experiences that contribute towards the development of an identity and attachment through establishing secure relationships that allow Regina to feel comforted and stable within the sport environment. When exploring attachments, Bowlby's (1973) attachment theory suggests that individuals have an innate need to make secure attachments to key caregivers which will influence our ability to develop successful relationships later in life such as peers. Therefore, we generate attachments to figures that can provide us with security, stability and support. Early exploration into attachment theory has focused solely on the implications of attachments in the social setting; examining the effects of attachment in relation to other people. However, connotations in this study suggest as well as developing attachments to people through playing experiences, feelings of attachment to sport can also emerge.

 As stated, in the elite setting, participants commit long hours to their sport which both reinforces the role it plays in creating a sporting identity and generates an attachment to the sport. The love of the sport was a prominent theme in participant's accounts when talking about their football participation. Every participant described playing from a young age and recalled how their sport has impacted upon their life. *'Football is important; it's the first thing that comes to mind.'* (Beckie). Furthermore, this need to be involved in sport generated an attachment that may suggest some obsession over the sport hinged on the need to escape reality and enter a sanctuary that football can provide. Both Karen and Penelope recognised football as a retreat, suggesting that football *is a way for me to escape and do something that I'm good at' (Karen)* or *'a place to just offload, destress, things like that' (Penelope).* Hodge's work (2018) builds on Bowlby's (1969) attachment theory and uses Ainsworth et al's (1978) primary functions of attachment bonds to explore athlemaphilic relationship attachments. Athlemaphilia is "meaningful effective connections with sport" (pg i, Hodge 2018). Findings from this study resonate with their findings where athlemaphilic bonds, such

as the ones displayed here with football, demonstrate that football can satisfy some of the functions of attachment bonds, particularly the second function of presenting a safe haven. Therefore, secure attachments to the sport can be achieved through recognising that sport provides individuals with the support often associated with other humans. Micha, recognised this obsession to be linked with an inability to break the bond with the sport and as such highlights Ainsworth et al's (1978) fourth function of attachment bonds: distress from separation. This meant that separation from the sport would often receive a distressed response from the individual.

> *Interviewer:*   *what motivates you to play after all of your serious injuries*
>
> *Micha:*   *I have thought about it [leaving sport] but one of the reasons is because I just don't get a rest it's just football, football, football but then I don't think I would like it if I didn't play on a Sunday or have training to go to. I'd feel a bit lost. And not buying football boots stuff like that. I just get so excited when I get new boots or new gloves. And like new kit as well at the beginning of the season, love that. I don't think I could stop.*

In this case it perhaps shows more than just a connection to the sport but a real need to continue playing for fear of losing part of them in the process. This attachment has become so ingrained into their identity. Thus, it relates to how such attachments can develop into part of the individual's identity and can also generate an attachment to the sport.

Football was a central tenant to developing identity caused through an attachment to people and the sport itself as a result of social experiences derived from playing sport. As the female footballer identity was partly shaped through interactions with peers and others within the sport environment, the make-up of these relationship in the elite sport environment will be explored further.

Theme 2: Team-Based Interactions: Exploring The 'Teammate', Coach and Support Staff Relationship in a Competitive Team Environment

Sports teams are understood to be a collection of individuals and personalities expected to work in unison to function coherently and effectively (McEwan and Beauchamp 2014). Athletes and coaches are often the focal point to any team; their ability to coordinate and work together is frequently depicted as the key to team performance, cohesion and success. In coactive teams, interactions between teammates are particularly important as effective communication is a crucial factor to successful performance. Furthermore, a team climate where individuals feel supported result in a positive team mood and heightened team performance (González-Romá and Gamero 2012). Thus unsurprisingly, findings in this study placed emphasis on the teammate and coach relationship by highlighting the complexity of such interactions when navigating through the competitive female elite environment. Furthermore, the terms team-friendships and team-colleagues will be introduced and defined.

Whilst the significance of family member interactions will be explored in relation to identity construction, teammates, coaches and support staff relationships offered the greatest insight into the complex and entangled relationships that athletes have within the sport context and will be the focal point of the results and discussions chapter.

Social Closeness: Developing 'Team-Friendships' and the Importance of Close Connections

When exploring relationships within this elite football setting, social closeness was found to be most significant to understanding the closer, more intimate bonds with teammates referred to as friendships. This level of social closeness was reserved for inter-team friends only, with participants experiencing a more distal relationship with coaches and support staff and those peers characterized as solely teammates. Key to this closeness was the notion that both parties had a shared mutual connection through football that was later developed into wider interests and contexts. Relationship quality was determined by factors such as trust, honesty, similarity, emotional support, showing an interest and positive interactions. These were characteristics consistent in the interteam friendships with factors such as emotional support and positive interactions absent from 'teammate' only relationships.

Friends within the team were considered to be of a higher level of closeness, importance and strength than those players who were just 'teammates'. Friends were players with whom

they spent time both in and out of the football environment and had more intimate interactions. Participants often referred to friends as *'best friends'*, *'closest friends'* or likened them to *'family'*. This demonstrates a heightened level of relationships associated with friendship, with these closer relationships surpassing the normal teammate relationship intensity thus achieving a higher importance and status. In sport the term teammate refers to members within a sports team and is often discussed interchangeably with peers throughout sport relationship literature. The connotation of the word 'mate' suggests that being a member of a collective group provides an automatic passage towards a closer bond with others associated to that group regardless of the quality of interactions. Friendship is therefore assumed. However, friendships differ to teammates and are defined as a deeper and more intimate relationship (Newcomb and Bagwell 1995), demonstrated through emotional support in the form of companionship, help and guidance and loyalty (Hartup 1995). Such qualities are often absent at the elite end of the spectrum, where performance often takes priority. Consequently the findings of this study demonstrate a unique phenomenon in the development of friendships in this elite setting; prior research on peer relationships at the elite end has suggested that friendships are less likely to develop due to the instability of bonds caused by the pressurized environment and uncertainty of one's lifespan at the club (Adams and Carr 2017). However, despite the similar team climate, this study highlights the ability for friendships between team peers to blossom.

In this study, emotional support and loyalty were key characteristics that distinguished teammate relationships from friendships. Loyalty was demonstrated through an understanding of being able to rely on these team friends to *'always be there'* (Karen) both within the team and outside, whereas emotional support allowed individuals to *'feel a lot more confident and comfortable in the football environment'* (Toni). Participants relied on their friends for support, increasing self-esteem and self-worth in an environment that can be intense, unforgiving and lacking sympathy. Therefore, participants pursued closer relationships with individuals who were able to provide this (*'she's my best friend I know I can go to her and she'll make me laugh if I'm upset'* Karen). This challenges the perception that only the teammate relationship exists; instead it demonstrates the ability for more intimate relationships to foster should mutual loyalty and emotional support be provided. Moreover, it questions the assumption that friendship is guaranteed between team members, highlighting that friendship is not a rite of passage and instead must be selected and pursued more intimately than the teammate relationship.

Findings here suggest that relationships founded in the team environment can develop into close friends beyond sporting environment. As Alexandra stated:

> *'[They are] actual genuine friends… I would see some of those people outside of football as well as inside football'.*

As the elite environment is often likened to work, this study offers similar findings to workplace literature when exploring the development of co-worker to friends. For relationships to develop from work colleagues to work-place friends individuals must voluntarily choose to develop a closer bond with others (Pillemer and Rothbard 2018). This is apparent between 'team-colleagues' and 'team-friends' where, despite being involuntarily placed in the same team with others, individuals voluntarily select those they wish to pursue a closer relationship with. Adams and Carr's (2017) work suggest that in the elite environment, friendships are difficult to develop due to the competitive nature and fragility of bonds between peers. However, this current study suggests that whilst some relationships with teammates remain distant, others develop and blossom. It is the selective nature of friendships that allow for individuals to choose whom they wish to spend more time with, creating a layered and blended approach to peer relationships in the team. As such relationships hold different levels of importance that can be interchangeable and work together depending on the circumstances. In addition, these friendships within the team differ to those external to the team due to the added friendship expectations and work-related expectations and roles associated with team functioning (Bridge and Baxter 1992). As such team friends must juggle performance expectations as well as fulfilling their friendship duties which may place additional strain on the relationship. Therefore, implementing maintenance strategies to sustain these relationships becomes vital to ensure that both the relationship and performance does not suffer in times of conflict. As Cheryl voiced: *'if you fall out with someone then it's going to affect the dynamic of things'*. For someone who has low team-friend connections (2), this is vitally important for Cheryl as she faces potential outing from the team if she struggles to maintain these friendships. Successful, quality interactions combined with frequency of interaction were integral to forming a strong bond and maintaining it (Laursen et al. 1996).

To ensure the ongoing interaction, reciprocity of feelings was the golden thread that tied strong relationships together. Often the quality of interaction and frequency was reliant on mutual feelings between the two dyads. Accounts showed that participants' perceptions of the strength of their relationship was determined by reciprocal feelings and effort made.

> *'They have respect for me then I'm going to have a lot of respect for them. If they're honest with me then I'm going to be totally honest with them' (Karen)*

To satisfy their need to belong, individuals are keen for social acceptance and approval often demonstrated through a mutual care for one another. However, where Baumeister's and

Leary (1995) argue that mutuality is a *desirable* factor, it is apparent here that reciprocal feelings are *essential* to continual closeness.

In addition to this need to belong satisfaction, participants further indicated a reciprocal need for security in their relationships; participants needed these relationships but also wanted to be needed by others. Thus these dyadic relationships are built on this reciprocal satisfaction of needs fulfilled by our relationships with others. A history of successful interactions with closest partners help one benefit from social support, give care to others and to capitalize on opportunities for personal growth (Feeney and Collins 2015) which in turn suggest a fulfilment of basic needs for social connection (Pietromonaco and Collins 2017).

Hence, the want to spend time with friends must be mutual and in doing so not only strengthened relationships, but it also ensured a prolonged healthy relationship. This new perception of team relationships based on the workplace paradigm proposes further research into this field is needed to apply workplace theory to the sport environment.

As a primary factor to developing closeness with peers, spending time outside of the football team were considered integral to securing more stable relationships. Where these relationships were initiated from the team environment (e.g. *'Me and Karen have formed quite a close friendship and that's come from football', Regina*), they have now developed greater importance the more time they have spent together outside the football domain. As Alexandra described, these teammates are considered *'actual genuine friends… I would see some of those people outside of football as well as inside football'*. This further suggests that in the elite female sport there is the capacity to make closer bonds that are unlike those bonds found in the male competitive environment (Adams and Carr 2017). As Regina described:

> *'I feel like the more time you spend with someone obviously the more likely you are to be closer to them and understand them.'*

Naturally, in the football environment most athletes explained how interactions were forced to be high with teammates and coaches due to training and match schedules. However, spending time away from the football environment produced a higher quality, healthier and more sustainable relationship, through doing *'stuff away from football' (Micha).* By taking the relationship away from the highly competitive and intense environment participants were able to understand their teammates at a deeper level and remove the barrier to developing such connections. As Cheryl recalled

> *'I think it makes your relationship better if it's not just solely football base. Because you have more to talk about maybe? So I guess by having more in common outside*

> *of football means that when you get to football you have better conversations because you're not just talking about what's happened at football which sometimes can be negative.'*

Participants cited the importance of keeping in contact with close connections not just through spending time with each other physically but also through distal contact in the form of social media (e.g. text messaging and social networking). Beckie says keeping in touch is *'though text and not really phone calls but just text it's quicker isn't it'* as well as *'Facebook and social media'*. Every athlete highlighted the universal use of connecting through this medium with every relationship, meaning that is was easy to 'check-in' remotely and considered inexcusable to not keep in contact: *'I find it hard because a text isn't that hard' (Beckie).* This gave the traditional 'being together all the time' or 'spending time with each other' a reboot, as participants constructed the way they spent their time differently by still communicating and keeping in touch but more remotely than physical contact.

Social media progresses social and romantic relationships (Yang et al. 2016). Consistent with this study, Vaterlaus et al (2016) found that social media (e.g. Snapchat) can lead to enhanced relationships through increased communication and relational challenges in young adults (18-25). Furthermore, Yang et al (2016) state that relationships can be aided or hindered by different communication media, confirming that social media in varying forms can open up opportunities for remote checking in positive and negative forms. In their work, Kuss et al (2013) argue that social networking sites are predominantly used to maintain relationships with offline acquaintances. However, the current study shows that social media has now become prevalent for maintaining close connections as well as more distant.

In addition, by spending more time with their teammates both physically and remotely, athletes felt that this heightened understanding and closer connection allowed them to perform better in the football setting. Cheryl noted:

> *'Having good relationships outside of football makes relationships within football as like working within a team like stronger.'*

A good relationship was considered to be one where individuals could feel comfortable in themselves, high quality, positive interactions achieved by spending time together and sharing common interests and where there was mutual care.

Toni: *One I think is probably making me feel comfortable talking to them period one thing I really hate is feeling uncomfortable and you can only tell because I'm extra, extra quiet. But yeah, I just think being kind and you know when someone actually cares about what you said I think that's quite*

important for me. You can tell when someone's not really that bothered, and I like a bit of humour as well I don't like someone who takes life too seriously that's really boring. But that's really important yeah

Alexandra: *The quality is like, I feel like it's more, I dunno I feel like it's more what I feel towards them and I would assume its reciprocated as highly I hope! Um and then yeah like the next ones are like you Cheryl and Toni because we do have a really good quality of like friendships like um like I wouldn't have a bad word to say about any of you um and anything like that so…*

Such factors are considered important in regard to group cohesion. Group cohesion relates to the degree to which members of a group are motived to remain in the group (Martin et al. 2014). According to Pescosolido and Saavedra (2012), football at college level requires high communication, coordination, real-time player decision-making and social control. This suggests that socializing in key to developing group cohesion and performance success. They suggest that a high investment in social cohesion to generate communication, trust and shared understanding allow for members to be fully engaged in implementing team strategies during competition. Therefore, through developing closer connections and spending more time together, participants are inherently developing greater communication, building trust and mutual understanding. It is unsurprising that participants, such as Beckie, Toni and Phoebe, who had many closer relationships perceived there to be a heightened team cohesion. However, this closeness and perceived team togetherness is not apparent across all team members.

Social closeness was primarily found between peers, where teammates developed closer connections with selected individuals within the team. Friendships developed due to time spent outside of the team environment. Through spending time with peers outside of the competitive team environment, relationships that were first established in the team were able to develop beyond sport the environment generated a closer bond as friends. This level of closeness is often absent in an elite team environment due to competition and the negative hostile climate it breeds. However, these positive interactions contributed to a perceived sense of team cohesion for those in the close friendship group (e.g. Karen, Regina, Micha, Phoebe and Charlie all first team members). Nonetheless, there remains a blurred context between those peers they 'get on' with and those they are 'friends' with. Where there was an element of social closeness in the form of interteam friendship bonds, there also lies social distancing between peers, coaches and support staff where the relationship 'team-colleague' was present.

Social Distancing: Exploring The 'Team-Colleague' Dynamic and Problematic Relationships.

As a high-performance environment, it was unsurprising that some of the relationships were fragile and lacked stability. In this study, participants experienced a sense of social distancing between peers, coaches and support staff caused by the negative climate that made breaking into the social environment problematic. This was key when examining the difference between established friendships in the team and less established more futile connections with teammates.

The 'team-colleague' relationship suggests that some relationships with team members are based solely within the team to achieve team aims and objectives where interactions are more instrumental than emotional. When referring to her teammates whom she was not close with, Karen describes: *'I don't talk to her outside of football so I guess that's what it is. I don't relate to these people as much'.* Conversation is reserved for football only interactions: *'I only really talk to them about football',* with contact time limited and an unwillingness to make an effort to extend the relationship beyond the team domain:

> *'They're part of the team that I would see on a Sunday that's it, that's the way that it is but there's a couple of people on there that I wouldn't converse with or make an effort to you know catch up.'* (Penelope)

The dichotomy here suggests that whilst participants recognized a lack of closeness it is acknowledged as part of the team environment. Similar to the weaker relationships that develop in other work-based environments, team-mates are therefore considered more as colleagues. Interactions are role- based and focus more on the instrumental and organisational aspects of their relationships. These relationships therefore fall into the organizational life categorization where elements such as formal roles, involuntary constraints, exchange norms and instrumental goals are fundamental to colleague specific relationships thus oppose features of friendships (informality, voluntariness, communal norms and socio-emotional goals) (Pillemer and Rothbard 2018). As part of Pillemer and Rothbard's (2018) work on the dark side of workplace friendships, they highlight the differences between co-workers and friendships. Where friendships within the workplace are developed on the basis of voluntarily choosing peers with whom they share communal norms and socioeconomical goals, co-worker relationships are less voluntary where similarity interactions are governed by achieving workplace and organisational goals. In organisations, similar to sports teams, social interactions are predetermined by assignment to teams thus negates the voluntary aspect of friendships (Pillemer and Rothbard 2018). Co-workers must work together to complete organisational tasks and do not develop more

intimate and closer connections on the back of this. These relationships are not extended beyond the realm of the institution and although individuals may get on, they do not harness characteristics that develop closer ties. Hence team member relationships are more complex, layered and changeable than wider sport relationship literature suggests.

A differentiation between friends and colleague became evident in the ability for participants to integrate socially into the team. This was a challenge faced by many new players both coming up from the development team or as a new signing. Their perceptions of how they were received and welcomed determined future quality of the relationship. Where some were successful (*'I think you have to be quite a big personality or just be not afraid to involve yourself... I'll just involve myself rather than somebody be like come over to this group'* Regina) others found difficulty (*'it was a bit intimidating I think'* Toni). The competitive nature of the environment is wrought with players feeling threatened of newcomers for fear of losing out on selection. Toni describes:

> *'They tend to be a bit scared of new people coming in unless you're really loud which I'm not I'm like the complete opposite unless you're loud and really boisterous I don't think you fit straight in.'*

> *'There's not a lot of welcoming with open arms it's quite hostile I think.'*

Participants highlighted the importance of initial interactions and first impressions. Toni's experience demonstrates the difficulty in constructing new relationships due to established players' concern for additional competition and possible fears of deselection. Despite having 8 friend connections in the team, these connections were predominantly with development players thus highlighting a difficulty in making friendship upon her transition into the first team. These negative first impressions resulted in a building of negative quality of relationship causing a weaker bond between the dyad. For many participants it was not enough to share a common fate or interest and rely on this as a means of establishing positive interactions (Carron and Eys 2012), more important was how they were received by others and consequently receiving approval from teammates thus increasing their own self-worth and motivational processes (Harter 1999). For individuals on the receiving end of negativity this perpetuated fears of social rejection, distrust and insecurity of relationships existing within the high-performance environment. Therefore, social distancing was a result of an inability to separate relationships from the competitive domain and as such created a hostile tension that was difficult to socially break through.

In a highly competitive environment such as the one presented by the participants in this study, emphasis is placed on performance and is perpetuated by key characters such as captain, senior players and the coaches and support staff. High expectations were placed on

athletes and those who failed to reach expectations and fall into the team's norms were often subjected to hostility and ostracized from the team. This attitude was perhaps a means to remove unwanted players from the team, to force them out or force them to drop into the development team (*'they don't want to play because of the relationships and so drop back down'* Toni). Players in higher authoritative roles sought to gain control of the team by dictating the players they wanted in the team, based on who they believed to 'fit in' thus removing control from the coaches. This prompted a power struggle between players and coaches similar to Purdy's (Purdy et al. 2008) experience of conflict and power between herself and her coach. In her autoethnography, Purdy (Purdy et al. 2008) highlighted how her influential position as a coxswain in the rowing crew enabled her to remain in power and maintain her position at the expense of the coach. By siding with her teammates during conflict, power was taken from the coach and given to the athletes instead. Similarly, in this study, high authoritive players sought to retain their influence on the team and show they mattered by welcoming some players and ostracising others. Players are therefore continually appraised by their teammates throughout the season, which in turn maintained the hostile cycle, creating divides and cliques within the team. As Toni described:

'They're such a tight group it's a bit like the popular girls at school type thing'

Breaking into this group was a result of being accepted by the 'superior' teammates. Individual playing ability and a willingness to fit in with the group ensured acceptance into the group and the overall team. Consequently, the perceptions of the team environment were integral to participants ability form connections with teammates. For example, if participants felt unwelcome, they perceived a negative environment thus were less willing to build close bonds with team members. Following Adams and Carr's (2017) work, athletes in an elite setting may struggle to form close bonds with their peers due to the competitive nature of the elite football setting. In their study, athletes created ephemeral bonds that were threatened by selection and competition of places, thus relationships that were formed outside of football were considered more important and stable than those within the team. In addition to this, players who were unable to form close bonds with these superior teammates were either ostracised from the group resulting in players moving clubs or moving back down in the development team or formed their own small clique or subgroup. As Pillemer and Rothbard (2018) suggest, close and exclusive friendship groups can lead to perceptions of social exclusion and develop cliques. When these subgroups form, communication is reduced and conflict occurs. Informal activities such as sharing gossip and hanging out with selective friends outside of football can also contribute to perceptions of ostracization and feelings of being the outsider. With social media a huge prevalence in the modern world, it is unsurprising that participants can feel ostracised not only within the team setting but outside

of it through the use of social media platforms. Insecurity surrounding teammate bonds are reinforced by producing feelings of exclusion which in turn develop negative relationships (*'you see on social media as well so you're like okay you're all out together okay so what's being said this time', Penelope*). Where multiple groups are formed, there is a lack of harmony as groups sought to work together despite growing knowledge of their inability to fit coherently together.

In this context, the negative interactions and first impressions have not only impacted interactions with others but also with themselves. Self-esteem was found to be a key barrier to participants initiating and negotiating social interactions which can contribute to an inability to develop closer relationships with peers in the team later on. Toni states:

> *'I think it's a confidence thing. I think I have this horrible fear of like rejection like if someone didn't reply I'd be gutted, I'll be so embarrassed.'*

Toni highlights that a lack of confidence can negatively impact relationships with others. Her fear of rejection created a barrier to build new relationships thus relied on her previous relationships as a buffer to help build new ones. Lower self-esteem has been found to be related to uncertain and negative relationships (Salmela-Aro and Nurmi 1996). Furthermore, Salmela-Aro and Nurmi (1996) found that women who reported negative types of interactions were less confident that those with who reported positive ones. In their study, Friedlandler et al (2007) found that an increase in social self-esteem correlated to an increase in social adjustment. The transitional nature of the women's football team suggests a continual need of social readjustment as new people join and other leave. Therefore, people that feel good about themselves often have better strategies to cope with social demands (Friedlandler et al. 2007), thus are more willing to make social adjustments in the team and develop better relationships moving forward.

Further to this feeling of social distancing is the understanding of the complex nature of relationships across the first and development team. Findings showed a mixed dynamic revolving around the competitive environment. Relationships within the development team were deemed as more secure, with a greater overall team feeling of togetherness. As Toni describes:

> *'My relationships in the development team were a lot stronger than the first team.'*

> *'I was from development for most of the time and I've got really good friendships'*

In addition, players who moved up to the first team were still regarded as friends thus suggesting that the climate in the development team fostered more secure and less ephemeral relationships. This could be due to the less competitive nature of the development team. The

aim of the development team is to produce players to be able to perform at first team level with less pressure on the team obtaining silverware and promotions. As such there was little competition amongst teammate, instead they fostered a supportive climate hinged on celebrating their peers' successes and achievements.

When viewing relationships between first and development team players, instrumental barriers such as training separately inhibited greater development of strong relationships (*'I'm in development so I don't talk to you guys you know in training because its separate'* Beckie) and prevented close relationships to blossom.

> *'You don't really see interaction between the teams.'* (Toni*)*

This physical distance hinders the ability to generate close bonds. Unless previous relationships were made between players who had formulated strong relationships prior to their movement across teams, the distance between the two teams suggest an inability to build new and sustainable relationships across the two teams. Therefore, it is uncommon for strong relationships to develop between a first team player and development team player. Furthermore, from a first team perspective, the underlying notion that development team players could sabotage their first team status results in further social distancing.

> *'Having people in the development squad I've got to make sure that I step up to the mark.'* (Karen)

Because of this hostility, participants perceived development players to lack the willingness to step up into first team as competition breads negative relationships. In addition, it is the change in the team climate between the two teams that may hinder development players from willingly progressing into the first team.

Key to the social distancing theme was the temporality of relationships experienced in the football environment. Participants voiced how closeness of relationships changed throughout the season and across the years. This was often due to player movement between development and first team; new players coming into the team thus changing the team relationship structure and networks and players leaving the team.

> *'I think it's [relationships] got weaker as the years have gone on… changes in the team, new people coming in.'* (Alexandra)

Such changes to the team arguably impacts the ability to make stable relationships as players may not be around for long. Changes in relationships are an inevitable part of life; as individuals change so does the nature of the relationship through increasing the occurrence of some and decreasing of others (Laursen et al. 1996). Whilst some of this change can be

accounted to developmental processes (Laursen et al. 1996), it is also seeming that having a strong *need* for the relationship can determine whether the relationship continues. In this case, participants identified a lack of need to maintain relationships through accepting the instrumentality of interactions and recognising the ephemeral nature of these relationships thus do not implement maintenance strategies to sustain relationship. There is little need of relationships outside of football context so are maintained only through presence in the setting by completing instrumental tasks and goals. Consequently, whilst participants needed their teammates to achieve task goals, they did not need to develop an emotionally close relationship with all peers. Often conflict or absence of contact are causes for changes in relationships, however termination of bonds can be due to lack of need for relationships such as moving from the development into the first team. Thus, when some relationships wither, new ones can be replaced and grow. As Penelope states:

> *'People always go in and out of you life that's just the way it is… relationships blossom or they don't.'*

Participants' recognition of this suggests that there is an expectation for short lived relationships due to an environment that breeds insecure bonds. Karen alluded to the fragile relationships as she described friendships from previous clubs:

> *'But like Jenny, it used to be that when I first left, we'd still speak to each other every day. And then it got to the point where she went to uni and I changed jobs so I didn't have half term to go see her, stuff like that we just didn't have the time, we just couldn't link together.'*

This suggests the temporary friendships that may exist in the football environment, that serve as a need in the selected context but when this need is no longer, or has been replaced by others, the relationship disintegrates. However more research is needed to establish the longevity of friendships and relationships from player movement across teams.

Similar to the temporality of relationships with team-colleagues, participants voiced the inevitable change of their relationship with coaches and support staff. Where changes with peers were often due to frequency of positive interactions, the turbulent relationship between coach and athlete was often a result of participants feeling that their relationship with the coach was determined by the coach's perceptions of their ability and performance As Toni suggests:

> *'I've not been doing too bad at left back so it's a better relationship'*

Suggesting that the quality of coach relationship was dependent on the coaches' impression of the athletes' ability. Such attitudes imply a castaway relationship. In the elite context,

athletes can be easily replaced thus athletes are aware that failure to adhere to the coaches' expectations may result in replacement or termination. In this setting, by having a development team below the first team, there is a continual bank of players that can replace those not performing. Consequently, the environment in which the coach navigates could be the underlying problem for disjointed relationships between first and development players by perpetuating the competition across the teams through fostering a 'fight for your place' team climate. This uncertainty with selection can put strain on not only the coach-athlete relationship but also the athlete-athlete relationship. Furthermore, this fraught relationship suggests a distrust and disconnection with the coach, similar to that found with team-colleagues, with little understanding of how to develop and blossom the relationship when ability is not in contention.

Despite this overall sense of social distancing between team- colleagues, there is evidence to suggest some element of closeness related to instrumental factors. Positional closeness was a prevalent factor in team-colleague relationships and highlights the mid- level closeness. Participants recalled that closer bonds were developed with teammates with whom they shared the same or similar positions. As Cheryl recalls: *'Abby, Charlotte and Penelope play the same position so I guess that's why I got close with them to start with'*. Whilst these relationships were initiated through the need for positional interactions, increased communication developed closer bonds:

> *'It started was probably positional but I would happily maintain that friendship in the team like it might not necessarily be outside of the team but I like those people.'*
> (Toni)

Their fondness for teammates with whom they shared a position was not enough to warrant a close friendship beyond the team environment but they did recall a different level in their closeness with these players. This is perhaps due to the recognition that participants were still required to perform and communicate with their teammates regardless of the nature of their relationship. So, players who shared positions were more likely to have developed a closer connection caused from the need to perform instrumental tasks together.

In sport the coach is arguably the most important facet of any team thus interactions between the coach and athlete can determine how successful a team may be. Given that a coach is responsible for the overall running of the team, in this study it was the instrumentality of coaches and support staff were considered to be their most important contributing factor; hence interactions were hinged on seeking performance related guidance and aids from the coaching staff. As anticipated, the coach was solely a *'professional relationship'* and differed between each coach from the first and development team. For the first team the

relationship with the head coach was often perceived to be a *'bit of a turbulent relationship'* *(Toni)*. Whilst every player respected him *('I do have respect for him' Penelope)*, relationships were often described as fluctuating based on personality (*'I think that perhaps his personality for me' Regina*), perceived coaching ability (*'I don't think he's particularly strong coach' Cheryl*) and coaching decisions made throughout the season (*'It just depends on his decision making' Toni*). Because of this, the coach was the least important relationship participants held within the team. As Regina recalled:

> *'In a manager's position he should probably be one of the most important people to me on a professional level but I wouldn't consider him important to me at all'.*

Regina's recognition of the importance the coach should have in the environment indicates that the level of importance is determined by these factors. However, perceptions of the coach-athlete relationship differed for each player in the first team. Penelope highlights her positive relationship with the first team coach:

> *'I have a lot of time for him and a lot of respect and he's been great since I've been injured so I couldn't ask much more from him'*

Indicating that the quality of the coach relationship is also reliant on the perceptions of each player and their individual relationship with the coach. In the team environment the coach has the additional challenge of satisfying all participants motivations, ambitions and behaviours thus differing qualities in relationships are inevitable.

On the other hand, relationships with the development team coach were perceived as positive based on factors highlighted. As Beckie describes:

> *'[coach] has given me my confidence back. He gives me good motivation'.*

Coaches across all sports differ in their coaching style approach which may be a key contributor to the difference in closeness of relationship between the first team coach and development team coach and their athletes. As the objectives for the development team are not centered on performance, it is plausible that under less pressure the development coach is able to create a positive team environment that allows for open communication, improves confidence in players and creates a safe space for positive interactions between coach and player. This study supports the notion that closeness, commitment, complementarity and co-orientation derived from Jowett et al's (2005) 3Cs +1 coach-athlete theory are needed to develop a positive coach-athlete relationship. Participants noted that failure to adhere to all four factors result in a negatively perceived relationship. The nature of the competitive environment was a key hindrance to adhering to the 3Cs +1 namely due to the inability to develop close, longstanding relationships. In addition, this study further emphasises that

perceived coach ability is integral to the quality of coach relationship. This is due to the perception that, whilst the coach may reciprocate the willingness to develop athlete's goals, ultimately it is their execution of this that impacts the quality of relationship. This is key to developing the coach-athlete relationship where the relationship attempts to achieve athlete excellence and personal growth (Jowett and Poczwardowski 2007).

Social distancing highlights the other type of teammate relationship, team-colleagues, by suggesting that weaker teammate bonds developed an organizational specific relationship whereby instrumentality is the fundamental element of the relationship. This was a result of the competitive nature of the elite football environment which hindered the development of closer friends and instead created ephemeral relationship between teammates, coaches and support staff. Becoming socially accepted amongst peers thus developing closer bonds was a result of adhering to team norms and expectations; failure to do so often resulted in ostracization from the team. This finding was prominent in the first team setting due to the nature of the competitive environment. Conversely, players on the development team were able to create closer bonds due to the less pressurised environment and opted to remain in the development team instead of pursuing a higher level of performance.

Social closeness and social distancing demonstrate the complex nature of interactions within the elite female environment, varying from positive to negative. Whilst social closeness highlighted the ability for close relationships to develop into friendships, social distancing demonstrates the lack of closeness between peers that can have a negative impact on the team environment and perceptions of cohesion.

Chapter Five:

Conclusion and Recommendations

Summary of Findings:

The present study provides evidence of the construction and maintenance of relationships for elite female footballers. Through a visual concept relationship mapping exercise, participants identified the key relationships that were most significant to their sport participation and highlighted their importance and intensity in relation to others within the team environment. These maps identified 5 key relationships: coaches, teammates, friends, family and romantic partners. Content analysis highlighted the complex web of social relationships and networks within the women's football team and demonstrated that team friendships, although fewer to teammate relationships, were the most important relationships participants held. A further exploration into their relationships through photo participatory interviews, two themes emerged: Football identity and attachment to sport; Team-based interactions: exploring the 'teammate', coach and support staff relationship in a competitive team environment.

Football identity and attachment to sport, highlighted that participants believed football formed part of their identity which gave them a greater understanding of who there were based on their sport involvement. Findings depict identity as a core facet to participants relationship with self, highlighting that by identifying as a 'footballer' they had a greater sense of who they were. In addition, their football identity allowed them to develop relationships with those who shared a similar identity thus sharing a core common interest for relationship interaction and development. On the contrary this strong identity can also constrain relationships later on as individuals attempt to protect their space that allows for identity security. This builds on sport identity theory (Vescio et al. 2005) by highlighting how ones identity can impact future relationships.

As a secondary core facet, the findings indicated that participants developed attachments to non-social beings and therefore highlighted the relationship they hold with the sport itself; a relationship with football. Attachment to sport has only recently been explored in research conducted by Hodge (2018) where his findings suggest that people can develop athlemaphilic relationships with their sport. Findings here extend the work of Hodge (2018) evidencing that female footballer's love for the sport has developed into a strong relationship where they feel safe to offload and escape from reality. This could also contribute to why they continue to push to perform at the elite level despite social difficulties that may arise.

These findings show that characteristics often associated with interpersonal relationships are also important when developing attachments to inanimate objects. Furthermore, their attachments developed through socialization contributed to secure attachments to the sport.

Throughout their journey, family were the foundation to participant sport attachment and provided emotional support throughout their sport involvement to ensure continual relationship with football as they navigated through the elite sport setting.

Team-based interactions were key to understanding how athletes negotiated and navigated their relationship within an elite setting. Peers were integral to participants' sport experience, with the make-up of these relationships demonstrating the social complexity of teammate relationships in the elite environment. Social closeness was achieved through spending additional time with selective peers outside of the competitive sport environment allowing for friendships to develop. Selection of these individuals was based on commonalities between individuals and mutual trust and respect. Participants needed to be welcomed and accepted by their peers in order to take the first step towards developing closer connections. On the other hand, social distancing highlighted the implications a high-performance environment has on the ability to make close connections within the team. In this study this was true for some relationships within the team; competition lurked beneath the surface of the team culture thus hindering the development of more secure relationships as similarly found in Adams and Carr's (2017) work. However, this was not the case for all, where evidence suggests that stable, secure and long-term relationships can develop and blossom within the same context. Therefore, indicating an element of selective closer bonds and more complex relationships structures for elite female footballers.

The findings of this study builds upon current workplace relationship literature where distinction between co-workers and friendships within an organisation (Pillemer and Rothbard 2018) align with the differentiation between team-friend and team-colleague relationships. Unfounded in prior research into relationship within sport was the lack of importance the coach and support staff had in the team environment. Whilst it was found that coaches were significant for the instrumentality and organisational aspect of the team setting, interactions with the coach were mostly negative thus generated insecure and unstable relationships. Instead teammates were considered more important and held a greater significance to not only athletes' experiences but also contributed to their attachments to sport.

Conclusion:

This study extends current literature by provide an insight into the types of relationships female footballers construct and maintain. The importance of these relationships were explored both in relation to their identity and sport participation and their experience within an elite environment. Where prior research in similar fields have focused on the construction, importance and quality of one type of relationship, this study highlights the varying relationships important to a female footballer and evidencing a dynamic and complex relationship network. Athletes spend most of their time in the team environment therefore have to manage all these relationships within the team and find time to maintain relationships outside of the team in addition to striving to achieve both individual and team goals. Relationships have become less traditional, falling outside the normative structures of kinship and community networks and instead placing more emphasis on friendships becoming more central and superior to other relationship types (Themen and van Hooff 2017). However, as constructing relationships is voluntary and consists of mutual wants and needs from both parties, relationships within the team are not inevitable as the 'teammate' dichtonmy would suggest. Instead there is a complex layer of relationship categorisation from team-colleague to team-friend that fit along a spectrum of relationship importance and quality. The nature of the competitive high-performance environment means that harmonious and healthy relationships with all teammates may not always be achieved. However, as friendships within the team were considered the most significant to sport participation, enjoyment and success there must be a call for developing a team climate where athletes feel supported and secure, where every player feels important and are able to contribute and to ensure an open platform to discuss tension and conflict. To ensure harmony and promote healthy relationships with peers, it is important to encourage the development of friendships within the team and strip away the aggressive competitiveness to replace with positive and healthy competition.

As coaches who are identified as being key to the team environment it is important that they recognize the complexity and readily put in place mechanisms to support athletes. Furthermore, coaches need to understand the value that athletes place on developing strong relationships within their team as these relationships impact wellbeing, enjoyment, motivation and performance. Where athletes placed emotional support as a strong indicator to relationship quality, to generate a stronger relationship with their athletes, coaches should ideally provide both instrumental support (by providing athletes with tools to develop personally and achieve their aims) and emotional support (to show care, stability and support).

Recommendations

In line with objective 4, recommendations for coaches and support staff are offered. Coaches are recognised to be key to the team environment and the relationships they maintain with athletes can be complex. Such relationships need to be fostered and maintained to negotiate challenges that may arise in competitive situations. Coaches can work hard to get to know their athletes and build meaningful relationships that place a primacy on understanding individual needs. Athletes in this study placed a significant emphasis on emotional support as a strong indicator to relationship quality; to generate a stronger relationship with their athletes, coaches should ideally provide both instrumental support (by providing athletes with tools to develop personally and achieve their aims) and emotional support (to show care, stability and support). In the competitive elite environment coaches need to be approachable and open to communication even in situations of conflict. Developing skills to resolve and respond to conflict are highlighted here as essential relationship maintenance strategies.

There remains a need to place an emphasis on developing strong relationships within performance environments. Findings here support existing research which suggests that such relationships can have an impact upon wellbeing, enjoyment, motivation and performance; relationship maintenance lies at the heart of enhancing many of these areas. Coaches should foster climates that support working relationships within teams but can further allow relationships to deepen through social interaction. Educating athletes on the differences or complexities of relationships may enable them to value connections which are instrumental, but also afford more meaningful social connection where these arise. The promotion of psychologically safe environments is championed here in order to create climates in which all members of a team can thrive and feel like they are a part of the collective.

Limitations

Limitations for this study were twofold. The first is regarding the visual concept relationship mapping exercise. As this was the first time this method has ever been used, tweaks to the process were anticipated. The overall success of the exercise was high; the process easy to follow and execute for individuals. However, as there was a break between phase one and phase two of the research, athletes often struggled to recall the reasons behind their placement of relationships. Although once prompted athletes were able to answer questions effectively, I propose that to negate this limitation in the future the exercise could be conducted individually and combined with phase two so that athletes can create and justify

at the same time. A follow-up meeting can then discuss any changes to the relationships since completing the visual concept relationship mapping exercise. Alternatively, athletes can be given their map prior to the interview to allow for a revision before the interview thus generating better recall.

Another limitation includes the use of a smaller sample size than originally planned for. Despite reaching saturation point with the interviews for all athletes, it would have been ideal to have a higher number of development team players included in the study. This would've allowed for a greater detailed insight into the relationships of the different teams and explore the differences between the teams at greater length. Whilst the three players who either currently played for the development team or had transitioned into the first team from the development team recently gave a foundation of information, I would like to have explored this further using athletes who were core development team players. This can perhaps be explored further as part of future research and possible PhD thesis.

Future Research

Future research should explore the use of visual concept relationship mapping as a psychological tool for relationship interventions. More research is needed to explore this method as a viable psychological tool and present any modifications when applied to other sport settings. As an under researched area, additional attention to the implications of multiple relationships should be explored further to develop an understanding of how each relationship impacts upon the other and the sport environment. Furthermore, female adult footballers have received little attention in sport literature when examining their relationship constructions thus greater exploration is needed to solidify current knowledge obtained. Finally, this research focusses on the construction and maintenance of relationships in reference to relationship quality and importance without considering the impact of these relationships on individual wellbeing. As evidenced here, female athletes have to juggle a high number of different types of relationships both in and out of sport which will inevitably put strain on their emotional wellbeing. Thus, future research should explore the impact of multiple relationships on athlete wellbeing, how they may impact sport participation and performance and how these relationships are successfully or unsuccessfully managed and maintained.

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Appendixes

Appendix 1: Participant demographics

Pseudonym	Background Story
Karen	Karen has been at the club for two years and has been a prominent member of the team throughout her time. This season she has suffered from an injury that has seen her struggle with understanding her role in the team and has tested her will to play. As well as her constant battle with fitness, Karen has also experienced changes in her relationships with certain members of the team as she has developed a closeness with new members of the team.
Cheryl	Cheryl has been at the club for two years. Last season she was a key member of the first team, however with new additions to the squad and a change in the team dynamic she has found herself distancing herself from the team and specifically members within the team. She has recently flitted between first and development teams but has now taken a step back from the team altogether and has lost her starting role in the squad. Cheryl still trains when she can and attends matches however, whilst still being selected for games, has chosen to not play and instead attends as a spectator.
Beckie	Beckie has been at the club for two years and is a development team player for this season. She has had her experience of training and playing at first team level particularly last season where she was considered to be more of a first team player, however this season has a more permanent role within the development squad. In what most people would consider a redundancy in level, Beckie actually prefers being part of the development team despite having closer relationships with players in the first team with whom she has known for many years.
Toni	Toni has been at the club for two years, starting in the development team before working towards an opportunity to represent the first team. This season (her second year at the club) she has because a starting member of the first team squad. However her relationships with first team players has been futile with only a few close friends in the first team- the rest in the development team.
Regina	Regina joined the club this season having recently moved to South-Coast. Key to her joining the club was her desire to make friends. She has had a turbulent start the season not only with members of the team but also coaches. Despite this she has become as key member of the squad socially

	and has seen her relationships develop and blossom throughout the season.
Micha	Micha is the youngest player of the first team squad and has transitioned into first team status across the three years at the club, starting in the u16s team before moving into the development and then first team. She has been a key player season before acquiring an injury towards the end of the season. As the youngest member of the team and the only player in this study to have transitioned from the u16s to the development to the first team she has a variety of relationships across the different teams.
Penelope	Penelope is new this season having joined the club from a local rival team. Despite having a successful start to the season she unfortunately suffered from an ACL injury in the first game of the season. Since then she has had to watch the team from the side-lines in a supportive capacity which has in turn impacted upon her relationships both in the team and outside of the team. She voices her perspective through the eyes of a teammate on the outskirts.
Alexandra	Alexandra has been at the club for three years joining the club as she moved to South-Coast to begin her studies at university. Across the three years she has juggled her football career with her studies. During this time, Alex has had to undergo constant changes both in the performance setting and social. Along with these changes Alex's friendships have changed dramatically which has centred her participation around performance rather than socially.
Charlie	Charlie has been at the club since the women's team was founded in 2015 and has been a permanent fixture in the first team starting every game she has been selected for. She has been a key member of the squad throughout the four years, experiencing league and cup wins and promotion. Charlie is one of the four players who joined the team after graduating from university to continue her playing career. She plays alongside her partner, Phoebe, who joined the club at the same time having started their relationship prior to joining South-Coast United. Charlie was unable to attend the interview so was only involved in phase one of the study.
Phoebe	Similarly to her partner Charlie, Phoebe has been a starting player for the first team in the four years she has been at the club. She joined the club with her partner after graduating from university in the same year. Her experience has been more temperamental due to competition for her place in the second season and changes in her position. This has led to a complicated relationship with the coach and some of her teammates. This season in particular has been equally difficult due to injuries. Phoebe was unable to attend the interview so

	was only involved in phase one of the study.

Appendix 2: Participant Information Sheet

Study Overview

The title of the research project

Exploring the construction and maintenance of social relationships within an elite female football club using photo interviews and visual concept mapping

Aims and Objectives

Aim: To explore the relationships constructed and maintained within an elite adult female football environment.
Objectives:
1: To develop the combined use of visual concept mapping and participatory photography interviews as a method for exploring relationships in sport;
2: To explore the types, importance and intensity of relationships within an elite football setting, and to explore how these relationships are constructed and maintained;
3: To examine differences in relationships at two interconnected levels of play (from 1st team to development);
4: To provide recommendations for coaches and practitioners toward relationship maintenance and development strategies.

Introduction

Social relationships and friendships form a central part of individuals' lives and can both enhance and hinder their experiences in a variety of settings. In team sports, this is especially true as relationships between teammates are integral to team performance, success and wellbeing. Little is still known about the female team environment and the complexity of relationships that are intertwined and woven into the fabric of a women's football club. Therefore, the purpose of the research project is to explore the relationships within the AFC Bournemouth Ladies Football Club.

Using qualitative methods in the form visual concept mapping and photo interviews, this study will gain an insight into the types of relationships that bare importance to female football players, how these relationships are constructed and maintained across different levels of performance and offer recommendations to coaches and practitioners on relationship maintenance and management in the team environment. By using innovative methods to collect data for this project, this study will further examine the perceived impact of photo interviews and visual concept mapping as broader sociological method. The duration of the study will be throughout mid-season (November to January) with participant interviews anticipated to conclude the data collection by end of January.

What does the study involved?

Data collection for this project will be twofold:

Phase One: Visual Concept Mapping

Participants will be asked to take part in a visual concept mapping exercise to illustrate their relationship network within the AFC Bournemouth Ladies' Football Team. The visual concept map will allow participants to write down all of their relationships within the team environment and organise them under certain categories and criteria. This exercise will not only provide an insight into the types and number of relationships ties but also indicate to you the frequency, quality and importance of these relationships to you and the researcher. This information will help to explore the relationships within the AFC Bournemouth Women's Football Programme and to gain an understanding of the different relationships that are formed and how they are constructed and maintained within an elite setting. The task will be completed independently with the aid of the main researcher and research assistants. Once all completed, the researcher will select certain individuals considered to be key informants based on the information provided in their visual concept map to take part in Phase Two of the research: photo-interviews.

Phase Two: photo-interviews

As part of Phase Two of the research project participants will be asked to take new photographs or send existing photographs taken from before the project started representing "your experience of being in the AFC Bournemouth Ladies Football Team". What photographs they take is solely down to the individual. Using their own photography device (camera, mobile phone etc), participants will be asked to email these photographs to the researcher. The photographs, as well as the visual concept maps, will be used during the interview. The interview will involve a discussion about their relationships within the women's football team using the visual concept map and photographs as prompts for discussion throughout. Within the interview you will be asked questions related to your involvement in the AFC Bournemouth Ladies' Football Team including questions directed towards your relationships as highlighted in the visual concept mapping exercise. This information will help to explore the relationships within the AFC Bournemouth Women's Football Programme and to gain an understanding of the different relationships that are formed and how they are constructed and maintained within an elite setting.

Conclusion of study

All of information collected through both phases will provide a layered and contextual understanding of the relationships within the AFC Bournemouth Ladies Football team, highlighting the types of relationships constructed and maintained within an elite setting. Furthermore, it may help to understand the role relationships have within the team environment which in turn can provide coaches and practitioners with recommendations on maintenance strategies.

Participant Information Sheet
Phase One: Visual Concept Mapping Exercise

The title of the research project

Exploring the construction and maintenance of social relationships within an elite female football club using photo interviews and visual concept mapping

Invitation to take part

You are being invited to take part in a visual concept mapping exercise as part of phase one of a broader study concerning relationships in women's football. Before you decide whether to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being conducted and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

What is the purpose of the project?

Social relationships and friendships form a key part of individuals' lives and can positively or negatively impact their experiences in a variety of settings. In team sports, relationships between teammates are key to team performance, success and wellbeing. Little is still known about the female team environment and the complexity of relationships within a women's football club. Therefore, the purpose of the research project is to explore the relationships within the AFC Bournemouth Ladies Football Club.

This study will gain an insight into the types of relationships that are important to female football players, how these relationships are constructed and maintained across different levels of performance. It is anticipated that the results of the study will allow recommendations to be made to coaches and practitioners to help support relationship maintenance and management in the team environment. This participant information sheet contains information relating to phase one of the research project: Visual Concept Mapping.

The duration of the overall study will be throughout mid-season (November to January), however for the visual concept mapping exercise we ask for one hour of your time during November or December to complete the workshop.

Why have I been chosen?

You have been chosen to take part in this study due to your involvement with the AFC Bournemouth Ladies Football Programme. AFC Bournemouth is a club that represents the elite women's football programme in England, providing a development and first team level that enables transitions across both teams. You, and your teammates will be asked to complete a visual concept map. We are looking for a minimum of 30 players to partake in this study.

Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a participant agreement form. You can withdraw during the visual concept mapping exercise at any time without needing to provide a reason. Once the visual concept mapping exercise has finished you can still withdraw your data up to the point where the data has been analysed and has become anonymous, so your identity cannot be determined. Deciding to take part or not will not adversely affect your treatment/ selection/ involvement with AFC Bournemouth.

What would taking part involve?

As part of Phase One of the research project, you will be asked to complete a visual concept map to illustrate your relationship network within the AFC Bournemouth Women's Football Team. The visual concept map phase will be a practical exercise that will allow you to write down all your relationships within the environment and organising them under certain categories and criteria. This will be completed independently with the aid of the main researcher and research assistants.

What are the advantages and possible disadvantages or risks of taking part?

Whilst there are no immediate benefits for those people participating in the project, it is hoped that this work will give some insight into the culture of women's football in relation to the relationships constructed and maintained within the team. On a personal scale, this study may help to illustrate your personal relationships within the team as well as providing recommendations for coaches and practitioners on relationship maintenance and management in the team environment.

There are no known disadvantages or risks in taking part in this study, however it must be noted that you may encounter some psychological discomfort in discussing personal relationships in regard to team members.

What type of information will be sought from me and why is the collection of this information relevant for achieving the research project's objectives?

For the purpose of this study, the information collected will be in the form of written visual concept maps. You will be asked to highlight the type of relationships you have formed in the team which will be illustrated through a visual concept mapping exercise. This exercise will not only provide an insight into the types and number of relationships ties but also indicate to you the frequency, quality and importance of these relationships to you and the researcher. This information will help to explore the relationships within the AFC Bournemouth Women's Football Programme and to gain an understanding of the different relationships that are formed and how they are constructed and maintained within an elite setting.

Will I be recorded, and how will the recorded media be used?

You will not be recorded during the visual concept mapping exercise.

How will my information be kept?

All of the information we collect about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly in accordance with current Data Protection Regulations. You will not be able to be identified in any reports or publications without your specific consent.

All personal data relating to this study will be held for 5 years after the award of the degree. BU will hold the information we collect about you in hard copy in a secure location and on a BU password protected secure network where held electronically.

Except where it has been anonymised, we will restrict access to your personal data to those individuals who have a legitimate reason to access it for the purpose or purposes for which it is held by us.

The information collected about you may be used in an anonymous form to support other research projects in the future and access to it in this form will not be restricted. It will not be possible for you to be identified from this data. Anonymised data will be added to BU's Data Repository (a central location where data is stored) and which will be publicly available.

If you have any questions about how we manage your information or your rights under the data protection legislation, please contact the BU Data Protection Officer on dpo@bournemouth.ac.uk.

Contact for further information

If you have any questions or would like further information, please contact Chloe Tape (ctape@bournemouth.ac.uk), Emma Kavanagh (ekavanagh@bournemouth.ac.uk or Adi Adams (aadams1@bournemouth.ac.uk) .

In case of complaints
Any concerns about the study should be directed to Dr Emma Kavanagh on ekavanagh@bournemouth.ac.uk . If you have concerns about the conduct of the study, please contact the Deputy Dean for Research & Professional Practice Professor, Michael Silk in the Faculty of Management, by email to researchgovernance@bournemouth.ac.uk.

Finally

If you decide to take part, you will be given a copy of the information sheet and a signed participant agreement form to keep.
Thank you for considering taking part in this research project.

Participant Information Sheet
Phase Two: Photography Interview

The title of the research project

Exploring the construction and maintenance of social relationships within an elite female football club using photo interviews and visual concept mapping

Invitation to take part

You are being invited to take part in a photography interview as part of phase two of a broader study concerning relationships in women's football. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being conducted and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

What is the purpose of the project?

Social relationships and friendships form a key part of individuals' lives and can positively or negatively impact their experiences in a variety of settings. In team sports, relationships between teammates are key to team performance, success and wellbeing. Little is still known about the female team environment and the complexity of relationships within a women's football club. Therefore, the purpose of the research project is to explore the relationships within the AFC Bournemouth Ladies Football Club.

This study will gain an insight into the types of relationships that are important to female football players, how these relationships are constructed and maintained across different levels of performance and offer recommendations to coaches and practitioners on relationship maintenance and management in the team environment. This participant information sheet contains information relating to Phase Two of the research project: photo-interview. The duration of the overall study will be throughout mid-season (November to January). For the photo-interviews, participants will be invited to take photographs of their experience for a 1 week period followed by an interview.

Why have I been chosen?

You have been chosen to take part in this study due to your involvement with the AFC Bournemouth Ladies Football Programme. AFC Bournemouth is a club that represents the elite women's football programme in England, providing a development and first team level that enables transitions across both teams. You have been selected based on information provided in Phase One to take part in photo-interviews as part of the second phase of the research project. This selection may be based on the following: your role within the club; the types of relationships you have; the number of relationships you hold; ratings of these relationships; the team you play for (development or first

team). The aim is to interview players with different experiences. We are looking for a minimum of 30 players to partake in this study.

Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a participant agreement form. You can withdraw during the photo taking and interviews at any time and without giving a reason and we will remove any data collected about you from the study. Once the photo-taking and interviews have finished you can still withdraw your data up to the point where the data has been analysed and has become anonymous, so your identity cannot be determined. Deciding to take part or not will not adversely affect your treatment/ selection/ involvement with AFC Bournemouth.

What would taking part involve?

As part of Phase Two of the research project you will be asked to take new photographs or send existing photographs taken from before the project started representing "your experience of being in the AFC Bournemouth Ladies Football Team". It is up to you what photographs you take. Using your own photography device (camera, mobile phone etc), you will be asked to email these photographs to the researcher. These photographs, as well as the visual concept maps, will be used during the interview. The interview will involve a discussion about your relationships within the women's football team using the visual concept map and photographs as prompts for discussion throughout.

What are the advantages and possible disadvantages or risks of taking part?

Whilst there are no immediate benefits for those people participating in the project, it is hoped that this work will give some insight into the culture of women's football in relation to the relationships constructed and maintained within the team, whilst developing an understanding of the cultural environment of women's football at an elite level. On a personal scale, this study may help to illustrate your personal relationships within the team as well as providing recommendations for coaches and practitioners on relationship maintenance and management in the team environment.

There are no known disadvantages or risks in taking part in this study, however it must be noted that you may encounter some psychological discomfort in discussing personal relationships in regard to team members.

What type of information will be sought from me and why is the collection of this information relevant for achieving the research project's objectives?

For the purpose of this study, the information collected will be in the form of photographs and audio footage of an interview. These photographs will be used in the interview process as visual aids to guide the discussion. Within the interview you will be asked questions related to your involvement in the AFC Bournemouth Ladies' Football Team including questions directed towards your relationships as highlighted in the visual concept mapping exercise. This information will help to explore the relationships within the AFC Bournemouth Women's Football Programme and to gain an understanding of the different relationships that are formed and how they are constructed and maintained within an elite setting.

Will I be recorded, and how will the recorded media be used?

The audio recordings of your activities made during this research will be used only for analysis and the transcription of the recording(s) for illustration in conference presentations and lectures. No other use will be made of them without your written permission, and no one outside the project will be allowed access to the original recordings.

How will my information be kept?

All the information we collect about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly in accordance with current Data Protection Regulations. You will not be able to be identified in any reports or publications without your specific consent*. Research results will be published by September 2019.

All personal data relating to this study will be held for 1 year** after the award of the degree. BU will hold the information we collect about you in hard copy in a secure location and on a BU password protected secure network where held electronically.

Except where it has been anonymised, we will restrict access to your personal data to those individuals who have a legitimate reason to access it for the purpose or purposes for which it is held by us.

The information collected about you may be used in an anonymous form to support other research projects in the future and access to it in this form will not be restricted. It will not be possible for you to be identified from this data. Anonymised data will be added to BU's Data Repository (a central location where data is stored) and which will be publicly available.

If you have any questions about how we manage your information or your rights under the data protection legislation, please contact the BU Data Protection Officer on dpo@bournemouth.ac.uk.

Contact for further information

If you have any questions or would like further information, please contact Chloe Tape (ctape@bournemouth.ac.uk), Emma Kavanagh (ekavanagh@bournemouth.ac.uk or Adi Adams (aadams1@bournemouth.ac.uk) .

In case of complaints
Any concerns about the study should be directed to Dr Emma Kavanagh on ekavanagh@bournemouth.ac.uk . If you have concerns about the conduct of the study, please contact the Deputy Dean for Research & Professional Practice Professor, Michael Silk in the Faculty of Management, by email to researchgovernance@bournemouth.ac.uk.

Finally

If you decide to take part, you will be given a copy of the information sheet and a signed participant agreement form to keep.
Thank you for considering taking part in this research project.

Appendix 3: Participant Agreement Forms

BU
Bournemouth
University

Participant Agreement Form
Phase One: Visual Concept Mapping Exercise

Full title of project: Exploring the construction and maintenance of social relationships within an elite female football club using photo interviews and visual concept mapping

Name, position and contact details of researcher: Chloe Tape BSc (Hons), Postgraduate Student, Masters of Research, ctape@bournemouth.ac.uk

Name, position and contact details of supervisor: Dr Emma Kavanagh, Supervisor, ekavanagh@bournemouth.ac.uk & Dr Adi Adams, Supervisor, aadams1@bournemouth.ac.uk

PART A

In this form we ask you to confirm whether you agree to take part in phase one of the project.

You should only agree to take part in the Project if you understand what this will mean for you. If you complete the rest of this form, you will be confirming that:

- You have read and understood the project participant information sheet (Version 1) and have been given access the BU Research Participant Privacy Notice which sets out how we collect and use personal information (https://www1.bournemouth.ac.uk/about/governance/access-information/data-protection-privacy)

- You have had the opportunity to ask questions;

- You understand that:

  o Taking part in the research will include taking part in a Visual Concept Mapping exercise where a photograph of your completed visual concept map will be taken and used for transcribing purpose
  o You may be invited to take part in a photo-interview as part of phase two of the research project

  o Your participation is voluntary. You can stop participating in research activities at any time without giving a reason, and you are free to decline to answer any particular question(s).

  o If you withdraw from participating in the project, you may not always be able to withdraw all of your data from further use within the project, particularly once we have anonymised your data and we can no longer identify you.

  o Data you provide may be included in an anonymised form within a dataset to be archived at BU's Online Research Data Repository.

  o Data you provide may be used in an anonymised form by the research team to support other research projects in the future, including future publications, reports or presentations.

Consent to take part in the Project	Yes	No
I agree to take part in the Project on the basis set out above	☐	☐

Part B

Consent to use of information in Project outputs	Yes	No
I understand that my words may be quoted in publications, reports, web pages and other research outputs. Please choose one of the following two options: I would like my real name used in the above. ☐ I would not like my real name to be used in the above. ☐		
I agree to my Visual Concept Map to be included in research outputs.	☐	☐

Consent to take part in the Project	Yes	No
I agree to take part in the Project on the basis set out above	☐	☐

_____   _____   _____

Name of Participant   Date   Signature

_____   _____   _____

Name of Researcher   Date   Signature

This Form should be signed and dated by all parties after the participant receives a copy of the participant information sheet and any other written information provided to the participants. A copy of the signed and dated participant agreement form should be kept with the project's main documents which must be kept in a secure location.

BU
Bournemouth
University

Participant Agreement Form
Phase Two: Photography Interviews

Full title of project: Exploring the construction and maintenance of social relationships within an elite female football club using photo interviews and visual concept mapping

Name, position and contact details of researcher: Chloe Tape BSc (Hons), Postgraduate Student, Masters of Research, ctape@bournemouth.ac.uk

Name, position and contact details of supervisor: Dr Emma Kavanagh, Supervisor, ekavanagh@bournemouth.ac.uk & Dr Adi Adams, Supervisor, aadams1@bournemouth.ac.uk

PART A

In this form we ask you to confirm whether you agree to take part in phase two of the project.

You should only agree to take part in the Project if you understand what this will mean for you. If you complete the rest of this form, you will be confirming that:

- You have read and understood the project participant information sheet (Version 1) and have been given access the BU Research Participant Privacy Notice which sets out how we collect and use personal information (https://www1.bournemouth.ac.uk/about/governance/access-information/data-protection-privacy)

- You have had the opportunity to ask questions;

- You understand that:

  - Taking part in the research will include taking photographs using your own device that represent your experience of being in the AFC Bournemouth Ladies Football Club for a 1 week period, after which you will be taking part in an interview and being recorded (audio) on the basis that these audio recordings will be deleted once transcribed.

  - Any photographs taken will be used as prompts during the interview process and that reference to photographs containing persons in the final publication will be in the form of descriptive writing and anonymised.

  - Your participation is voluntary. You can stop participating in research activities at any time without giving a reason, and you are free to decline to answer any particular question(s).

  - If you withdraw from participating in the project, you may not always be able to withdraw all of your data from further use within the project, particularly once we have anonymised your data and we can no longer identify you.

  - Data you provide may be included in an anonymised form within a dataset to be archived at BU's Online Research Data Repository.

o   Data you provide may be used in an anonymised form by the research team to support other research projects in the future, including future publications, reports or presentations.

Consent to take part in the Project	Yes	No
I agree to take part in the Project on the basis set out above	☐	☐

Part B

Consent to use of information in Project outputs	Yes	No
I understand that my words may be quoted in publications, reports, web pages and other research outputs. Please choose one of the following two options: I would like my real name used in the above. I would not like my real name to be used in the above.	☐ ☐	
I agree to any photographs I have taken to be included in research outputs and that those photographs containing other persons will be in the form of descriptive writing and anonymised.	☐	☐

Consent to take part in the Project	Yes	No
I agree to take part in the Project on the basis set out above	☐	☐

_____   _____   _____

Name of Participant   Date   Signature

_____   _____   _____

Name of Researcher   Date   Signature

This Form should be signed and dated by all parties after the participant receives a copy of the participant information sheet and any other written information provided to the participants. A copy of the signed and dated participant agreement form should be kept with the project's main documents which must be kept in a secure location.

Appendix 4: Research Assistant Training

Visual Concept Mapping Training

SESSION	ATTENDEES (7)	ABSENTEES (2)	DATE
MRes Training	Adam, Krystian, Beth, Cameron, Simon, Jamie, Emma, Adi	Josh	11/11/2018

OVERVIEW

Training for the research assistants on the Visual Concept Mapping workshop.

ACTIVITY	SESSION GUIDE	OBJECTIVES
INTRO: STAGE 1 1600-1605	Presentation on the project objectives RA roles and responsibilities Stage of mapping (Hays et al 2010, Butler and Hardy) Stage One of Procedure: Introducing Idea. Brief overview of the workshop	1. RA know overview of project 2. RA's roles and resp 3. RA understand stages of procedure
DISCUSSION: STAGE 2 1605-1615	Stage Two: Have RA's discuss the following: – What are relationships? – Different types of relationships? – Why do we have them? – What would we be interested in when looking at relationships? – List different relationships you might have Mind map on main whiteboard ideas from each	1. Overall understanding of relationships and why we might study them 2. What we are looking to identify in the VCM workshop
PILOT RELATIONSHIP MAPPING: STAGE 3 1615-1635	Procedure: Stage Two: Eliciting Constructs 1. On the A4 sheet of paper, list all of your relationships within the team 2. Group these relationships together according to the type of relationship they are (i.e. teammates, friends, coach, support staff etc.) 3. On A3 sheet of paper, put yourself in the middle	1. Gives athletes opportunity to recognise what relationships they have 2. Understand the different types of relationships they have within the team 3. Self 4. Understanding of the similarity between the relationships and closeness to you

ACTIVITY	SESSION GUIDE	OBJECTIVES

	4. Add the names from your previous list to create a concept map. Think about the place according to:
	   a. Similarity between relationships (i.e. close friends)
	   b. Closeness to self
	   c. Group types of relationships together
	
	Stage Three: Assessment:
	
	5. For each relationships rate on a scale of 1-5 (1 very low, 5 very high) next to the name the following:
	   a. Importance of relationship to you (I)
	   b. Frequency- how often you see them in and out of football (F)
	   c. Quality of the relationship (Q)
	6. Starting from yourself in the middle, draw arrowed lines to highlight whether your relationships are reciprocal (does the relationship go both ways?).
	   a. The lines can be zig zag to indicate weak ties or straight to indicate strong ties
	   b. Multidirectional arrow if the relationship is reciprocal
	   c. One direction if the relationship is not reciprocal
	7. Finally- next to each relationship add some words/ images to describe the relationships (i.e. close, best friends, teammates)
		5. Ratings demonstrate your perceptions of different factors of your relationship
		6. Reciprocity of relationships. You may feel that the value of relationship goes both ways, or that you value the relationship more than them or vice versa.
		7. Descriptors give athletes opportunities to provide some insight into the relationship and additional prompts to talk about later on
		
		• Complete map individually
		• Opportunities to troubleshoot the procedure
		• Create map related to university course relationships

ACTIVITY: PRACTICE MAPPING 1635-1655	1. Work in pairs/ threes 2. Create new concept map based on difference scenario 3. Participants ask as many questions as they can to give RA's practice in dealing with questions 4. 10 mins each and switch	1. Opportunity to practice assisting the process 2. Lead by C Tape but assisted by RA's in partners

ACTIVITY | SESSION GUIDE | OBJECTIVES

ACTIVITY	SESSION GUIDE	OBJECTIVES
SUMMARY	– Overview of questions asked and how to deal with these questions. Discussion: ask RA's what questions they might be asked and how they would answer them – Buzz word quiz. Split into two teams. First team to buzz in with the answer to the question wins a point – Summary	1. Troubleshooting questions that might be asked and how to deal with them 2. Know meaning of terms used. How to term to athletes 3. Feedback on the session/ workshop

REQUIREMENTS

- Small classroom with AV
- Visual concept mapping presentation

RESOURCES

- AV projector
- A4 paper
- Whiteboards x 7
- Pens, different colours
- Print out of procedure
- Scrap paper
- Chocs/ sweets

NOTES

Take photos of my progress through doing my own map as an example of what it should look like. Photos at each stage

Appendix 5: Visual Relationship Mapping Exercise Workshop

Visual Concept Mapping Exercise

Preparation:

[Insert table/ calendar of participants and research assistants attending workshop]

Date	Time	Research Assistants	Participants
05/2	1815		

- Participants split into groups of 5-8 (dependent on numbers of participants volunteered)
  - Minimum of 3 research assistants + me facilitating the exercise or all in at the same time (work out ratio 1:1)
- Where: Vitality stadium boardroom/ equivalent
- 45 – 60 minutes per session
  - Introduction and study overview
  - Build and add layers for the visual concept map

Equipment:

- 30-50x A3 paper
- Pens
- Water/ refreshments booked with catering

Procedure:

For this activity identify and key people with whom you maintain relationships within South-Cost United [may want to break into teammates, coaches, external club members).

Stage One: Introducing the Idea

Introduce the study and research aims and provide a brief overview of the content of the workshop

Stage Two: Eliciting Constructs

1. As a group, discuss and input on menti.com
   o What are relationships?
   o Different types of relationships?
   o Why do we have them?
   o What would we be interested in when looking at relationships?
   o List different relationships you might have
1. On the A4 sheet of paper, list all the people within the team who you have a relationship with.
2. Group these relationships in broad categories, such as teammates, support staff etc.
3. On the A3 sheet of paper, write your name in the middle
4. Start to add the names of people from your list onto your Visual Concept Map (A3 sheet of paper/ whiteboard). Position names on the page in relation to:
   a. How similar these relationships are to each other. Group people with who you think are most similar. E.g. close friends
   b. How close they are to you (closer to your name in the middle)
   c. Types of relationships together (teammates, support staff)

Stage Three: Assessment

5. Next to each name, rate on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 low 5 high):
   a. Frequency of contact (F)- how often you see them in and out of football
   b. Quality of relationship (Q)- positive/ negative, how good it is
   c. Importance of relationship to you (I)
6.
7. Using straight or zig zag lines, indicate how strong the tie is between relationships
   a. Straight lines indicate a strong tie between the relationship
   b. Zig zag line represents a weak tie between relationship
8. Using an arrow at the end of the line, indicate whether these ties are reciprocal
   a. Arrow out from self to relationship indicates relationship goes one way (you feel strong/ weak tie between relationship but don't think they reciprocate)
   b. Arrow at both ends indicate a reciprocal tie (you and your relationship have reciprocal strong/ weak ties)
9. Next to each name, write 2-3 descriptive words or drawings associated with that relationship. E.g. Friend, girlfriend, family, strong, best friend, good player etc.
10. Debrief
11. Take photo of visual concept map- depart

Appendix 6: Interview Transcript

Interviewer: okay so what we'll start off with Alexandra… is we'll talk about the photos that you've sent across and well jut have a chat about that and then well move on the the concept map, and then we'll just have a real chat about everything really. Is that cool?

Alexandra: sounds good.

Interviewer: Okay so…. Um, do you wanna choose which photo we talk about first?

Alexandra: ummmm..

Interviewer: you can choose and then we can go from there (pause)

Alexandra: I don't know (Pause). We'll do chronologically so we'll do the earliest one (points)

Interview: okay. Okay so like talk to me about this picture.

Alexandra: (laughs)

Interview: you can tell how old that is because you've got your shaved head

Alexandra: I know! Um yeah it's probably, I think it was one of the first games I ever played for South-Coast….. um and I scored a goal and obviously that pictured was captured and it kinda one that's I dunno been one my my favourites.

Interviewer: whys is been one of your favourites?

Alexandra: Um I dunno cause like… I dunno whether it's like, looking back now people i didn't really know at the time but they were kinda like obviously happy that I scored a goal and I think it's kind of just the start of like making my friends at South-Coast.

Interviewer: okay. Yeah that makes sense. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Definitely. Have those friendships kind of changed? Cause I mean I know from my own knowledge there's like Nicole who's no longer there anymore, so like are there others in the photos that are still around… um have they changed a lot or….?

Alexandra: hmmmm…. Uh yeah I would say so. From then to now definitely.

Interviewer: so what was good about the relationship back then?

Alexandra: um… I dunno we just kinda be like actual genuine friends sort of thing. I would see some of those people outside of football um as well as inside of football. And especially because I was new to the area it was nice to have other people like outside of uni as well.

Interviewer: cool. Do you wanna pick another one?

Alexandra: Okay.

Interviewer: Which ones next?

Alexandra: (points)

Interviewer: Is this next one in chronological order?

Alexandra: I think so yeah…

Interviewer: Crickey… alright cool so talk to me about this one. So this one looks like cup final win?

Alexandra: Yeah… cup final win. Was a good time. I dunno really I just really like that photo

Interviewer: Does that like sum up your experience playing football?

Alexandra: Yeah… um. I don't really know what you mean?

Interviewer: Like in terms of sorry like in terms or winning trophies and like winning things. Is that like a big art of your involvement and playing sport?

Alexandra: Umm… not really, like obviously I play football because I love it. Um, that was just a really good season that we had um like everyone was on the same level like um everyone wanted the same sort of thing and it all just kinda fell together quite nicely at the end of the season when we won that we won the league and got promoted.

Interviewer: So like the winning stuff was almost the cherry on the cake a little bit?

Alexandra: Hmm yeah.

Interviewer: so what would you say was more important then in that sort of year… the winning or like how you were with the team?

Alexandra: um I think the getting to know everyone… and like they were a good group of girls. They were like a good group of girls um that…. Everyone talked to everyone it wasn't like any cliques or anything like that

Interviewer: so this was last season.. oh the season before… so like you said that's like the start of your first year of being at South-Coast. So how, has there been a lot of players that are no longer around?

Alexandra: yeah like in that photo I can see three people who aren't there now already. So like chloe Nicole chloe

Interviewer: oh yeah chloe's face is like… (inaudible). So do you think that's like um quite, like quite a noticeable thing that these players aren't around much

or, like has that impacted you and your like involvement or enjoyment of playing?

Alexandra: ummm… I dunno, I think like maybe because zoe and Nicole we a similar age as well um… I dunno if I like, dunno not like related to them more but like it was maybe easier to talk to them and like have banter.

Interviewer: yeah that makes sense

Alexandra: yeah…

Interviewer: Okay cool so next one. Which one do you want to go with?

Alexandra: (points)

Interviewer: love this picture.

Alexandra: its so cute aint it?

Interviewer: Okay so I guess like talk me through this one.

Alexandra: Um so that one was at the end of last season we'd just played at the vitality stadium. Um just there with my fan… chloe Tape

Interviewer: Number one fan (laughs)

Alexandra: um and yeah I just think like that season again was kind of it was like a good season, we got promoted again um…. Yeah

Interviewer: What was it like… because obviously that game is like in the stadium so what um was that like for you?

Alexandra: I mean it was like really great experience to play there, and like wear a South-Coast shirt and play in the stadium. It's a bit different to when I played in the sportbu kit (laughs). With all the old geezers. But yeah it was like, like really good experience, all my friends came um like the support was like unreal as well.

Interviewer: nice… and obviously its like you and I so why is that important as opposed to… like did you have any pictures taken like in a group? I can't remember if we did…

Alexandra: um not really no. I think it was because all of the uni girls had come there and so wanted to get a pic and I was like come on then!

Interviewer: I love that. Its such a cute picture. Cool. Go on then next one. We've got two more I think..

Alexandra: umm I don't know which way round that one is. I think that's this season. So again that one was last season which, we lost the cup final but we won the league so we got our league presentation as well which was good.

Interviewer: another bit of silverware!

Alexandra: another one yeah…

Interviewer: again so this one was obviously last season. We've got a picture from your first season to now sort of last season…. Has that sort of changed a lot? Team's changed compared to first and second year?

Alexandra: yeah there's a lot of like new, well theres not a lot of new faces but a coupe of new faces and like the girls that have come up from like 16s and devs and stuff um…. But yeah like, I don't think a that point like nothing has changed like dramatically.

Interviewer: So even though there were new players (in this picture from lat season) you didn't feel like there was like a big change?

Alexandra: Not really no.

Interviewer: When you say change, what, what do mean by that? Like what part was changing or hadn't changed?

Alexandra: um just like the vibe of the team. Yeah so like everyone was still like as one kind of like unit in my opinion um yeah…

Interviewer: Okay cool… so we've got one more… which is obviously this one from this season.

Alexandra: Yeah so that I think was FA cup game against um….

Interviewer: new haven? Did I just make that team up?

Alexandra: um yeah it was somewhere far away. I remember my parents came to watch that game. Um.. yeah and um we obviously won that and got through to the next round of the cup which is good but again theres a lot of different people that were to the end of last season um but that game was just a really good game to play in like everyone just like played so well um… that was quite early on in the season I think. Um.

Interviewer: So like all of those pictures that you've like selected have been like you playing or you and your teammates. Is that like quite significant for you, is that what you think about when you think about like playing football or like your experience of playing?

Alexandra: yeah….? Like I don't. I don't go to a team because I know someone there or because I just wanna play with my best mate or whatever I go to a team because I think they're a decent team to play with. And like even when I came here like in my first year before I even come to uni I was searching around for teams i could join sort of thing um. Obviously got in contact with coach 1 before I came to in and just ended up joining.

Interviewer: was that like an important thing then, has like football always been something that has like been important to you?

Alexandra: so like yeah since college ive always like played. So I played at college and then played outide of college as well so like it was constant so I would train like twice a day. And that's something that I was used to so like going in to uni I thought if I don't do that I'll have too much time on my hands

Interviewer: keep you busy…

Alexandra: yeah I like to keep busy

Interviewer: so what is it about football that you love? Like what is it that makes yu want to play and carry on playing?

Alexandra: umm…. It's the only thing im good at (laughs).

Interviewer: I don't believe that! (laughs)

Alexandra: no I dunno it's just something that, ive just never done anything but football so I don't think I really now anything else really. My whole life has just been football, football football really so.

Interviewer: so what about football um like draws you to it?

Alexandra: um like being part of the team, like being a player that can effect how the team play um… yeah. I dunno, any mates you make is kinda like a bonus.

Interviewer: yeah that's fair, that's totally fair. Okay so um what we'll do now is… I want you to rank your photos from like least favourite to most favourite photo and we can like chat about that. So which one would you say is your least favourite?

Alexandra: hmmm…

Interviewer: or maybe like least important?

Alexandra: least important… oh I don't know. Um. I'm not good at decisions! Um (pause). Um

Interviewer: they're all like good times aren't they like

Alexandra: least important in terms of what?

Interviewer: I mean in terms of like your experience so….

Alexandra: umm… probably this one to be fair.

Interviewer: so that's this seasons one right? Why is that? Do you know why?

Alexandra: um… like I dunno like yeah it was like a good win and stuff but like theres not really anything but that. So like I dunno its hard to explain

Interviewer: so even though the, it was a teams success…

Alexandra: and I feel like I personally succeeded in that game as well um… but that's all there is pretty much to it and um like I don't thin, like I don't think I would've gone out after the win and celebrate with anyone there sort of thing do you know what I mean?

Interviewer: yeah yeah got you yeah. So what would be the next one?

Alexandra: um probably, probably that one.

Interviewer: so the last season league win but cup final loss…. So why would that be the next one?

Alexandra: um I think I remember um I didn't start that game um… yeah so probably the only reason why

Interviewer: is that like an important part like for you, is that important for you?

Alexandra: yeah… I think. Yeah absolutely. Like it's all good being like part of a wining team but if you don't play you kinda feel like ahhhh

Interviewer: yeah I get what you mean. Whats the next one would you say?

Alexandra: hmmmm…. Yeah that one (points)

Interviewer: so celebrating the cup. Why um why that one?

Teri: um again like it was like a really good moment um but again I hadn't really formed any relationships with anyone there um well some people but they're no longer here. Yeah but yeah that's pretty much it. My parents came down to watch it as well which was good…

Interviewer: your parents comes down a lot to watch your games don't they?

Alexandra: yeah the ones that are more north they try to get to

Interviewer: whats that like having your parents come to watch?

Alexandra: yeah it's good cause um in the first couple of years like they didn't come a lot um I don't now if that's just because we didn't play that many teams more north or

Interviewer: yeah I feel like we are playing a lot more sort of London way at least

Alexandra: yeah so I think that's probably why and then my dad hasn't really seen me, my dad used to come and watch me play every single weekend without fail and I just thinking he missed that

Interviewer: yeah definitely. Okay so two more. So which one would you say?

Alexandra: that one (points)

Interviewer: nice. So one of me and you so why is that one next?

Alexandra: cause um well it was like a big day, big game, the experience um and a I got to share it with one of my good mates!

Interviewer: ah so cute love that

Alexandra: yeah

InAlexandra: okay so what makes I guess our relationship good do you think? Like what is that quite a significant thing that its of you and I and not the team or whatever?

Alexandra: umm (pause). I dunno cause I support like you were kinda the first person I met down here and yeah and maybe I see you a bit as a role model. Yeah.

Interviewer: that's nice. So number 1 then so the most important one is this one here. Which is interesting because this one is the first one. So why is that important to you?

Alexandra: um I think it's just because its kind of the start of something. Um yeah so that's like my first picture in a South-Coast shirt, first goal in a South-Coast shirt um and first proper experience of like starting playing against new Milton which everyone seemed to hate…

Interviewer: was that against new Milton? Ah that's an even better picture.

Alexandra: yeah so it just has a lot of significance.

Interviewer: cool love that. Okay so what we'll do now is we'll chat about your map if that's cool? So do you want to just talk me through it, what do you see when you have a look at that… well first of all what was it like creating this? How was the exercise did you enjoy it? Was it easy, hard I dunno..

Alexandra: It was interesting. Um. I think it was, it was a bit difficult at the beginning but once I got it in my head it was fine. Um cause its interesting to think about like obviously your relationships with other people cause its not something, its something you take for granted and you don't really think about. So obviously when you're put in that position you kind of think about it and its like oh yeah there probably is some problems here!

Interviewer: that's really interesting you say that. Do you think that, like you were saying there might be problems or whatever, has that maybe changed how you might approach certain relationships or has it made you try to work on those relationships or not really?

Alexandra: um not really… I just think I dunno at this point in time I don't really see the point in sort of trying to make any new friends there. I dunno I feel like I'm just there to get a job done t the moment

Interviewer: okay so a lot of your connections are like sort of teammates or sort of people in the team, um, how come you've focussed on them or why are most of the teammates? And not maybe people outside of that?

Alexandra: um cause I don't feel like anyone outside of the team or like the team environment really know like what its like in that sort of environment. I mean like um I wouldn't add like any really of my uni friends in there um even though a couple of them have been in and out of South-Coast team but I wouldn't see them having a relationship with me in that team sort of now

Interviewer: yeah… would you say its sort of an education thing going through this process for you?

Alexandra: yeah, yeah its kinda interesting when you think about obviously um the importance of each of the relationships down um. It really makes you thin about your relationships with other people on the team. Especially when you go into like the coaches as well. That's one you don't thin about much as your teammates.

Interviewer: why is that? Why would you say you teammates you might think about more than the coach?

Alexandra: um I think its because they're obviously people you spend time with all of them as a whole but like ou spend more intense time with the team I think like hanging rooms, bus um travelling and stuff like that. Um.. so it is a lot more intense with teammates than you would be kind of with the coach. He's kind of just there and then everyone else is like (inaudible)

Interviewer: right intense, right in your face

Alexandra: yeah all on top of each other.

Interviewer: how did you determine, because you were talking about importance and stuff, how did you determine who was going to get ranked highly in importance and who was gonna get… like how, what were the factors that were highly ranked or lowly ranked if that makes sense?

Alexandra: um I think the people who I spend time with who I consider good friends um and family they were obviously gonna be the ones I thought of first because they were closest and then I thought about the ones that I'm not close with at all, so like meg like Mandy I don't really have a relationship with them apart from when I see them on a Wednesday which is not very often cause either I'm not there or they're not. Um and then I kind of thought about the people in the middle so like, can I say names?

Interviewer: yeah!

Alexandra: okay cool so like Phoebe Charlie Karen…. Was friends like good friends with them when I started so now there's not like I just feel like we just like not friends but we, civil's not quite the right word but do you know what I mean?

Interviewer: you kind of…

Alexandra: we're just both there…

Interviewer: coexist

Alexandra: yeah! Yeah like theres no conversation about anything part from football sort of thing

Interviewer: okay yeah that makes sense. So like frequency, how did you how did you do that in terms of who you saw more? What ranked someone quite highly, what ranked someone quite lowly?

Alexandra: umm I suppose its just the frequency I see them. I see too much of you (laughs) um Cheryl and Toni I see outside of football um quite a bit, everyone else I just see 3 times a week I see them. So still quite frequent just not….

Interviewer: what about in terms of like did you think about how often you like text people. Cause you might not see like Cheryl and Toni you might not see them every day but they're ranked quite highly is that because you're still in contact with them?

Alexandra: yeah so I'll either speak to them, I probably speak to Toni more than Cheryl because I speak to Toni on lie twitter and stuff but um yeah I spose. Like theres always some sort of contact between them to and obviously you as well

Interviewer: what like determined high quality rating in your relationships? Like what made yur relationships highly ranked in quality?

Alexandra: um so like my highly ranked ones are like mum dad partner cause they're like my family. The quality is like, I feel like its more, I dunno I feel like its more what I feel towards them and I would assume its reciprocated as highly I hope! Um and then yeah like the next ones are like you Cheryl and Toni because we do have a really good quality of like friendships like um like I wouldn't have a bad word to say about any of you um and anything like that so…

Interviewer: and the ones like lower…?

Alexandra: yeah so like with Phoebe, Charlie, Karen I probably see those three kind of, not outside of football but like I do in the sense that like Karen more so now um obviously doing our coaching courses. And when I first started like last season she would always like pick me up for training and stuff on her way through um so there is um we do have quite a good relationship when

it's just me and her but I think when she's around other people she's just not really the same. Um and Phoebe and Charlie like they'll give me lifts sometimes um and then yeah. We just talk in the car and I just mainly listen to their conversations (laughs)

Interviewer: earwigging (laughs). Um okay talk me through the different types of relationships you've got. Like what different types of relationships have you associated with?

Alexandra: um so I've got teammates in pink, um coaching people um in orange and then lie family in green

Interviewer: so how do all of these three relationships kind of, do they mingle together, do they fit together does it work does it not? Are they classed kind of separately or? How would class them all together?

Alexandra: um... I feel like they don't really come together. Well like my family don't really come in contact with either coaching staff or the team. Obviously they're down and it's again only certain people who kind of like interact with them. Coach 1 will come and say hi to my mum, I don't think a coach 2 has ever I don't think he even knows who they are. And it's the same like if partner comes to watch it's always like you Cheryl Toni will go over and say hi and make conversation like but yeah apart from that they're quite separate. Apart from the coaches and the team

Interviewer: yeah... so you've very much got like the team environment with coaches and teammates and then your family kind of separate to that? Interesting love that. So if we talk about like just your teammates so um, talk me through them. Like talk me through who you've put down why you've put them down?

Alexandra: um I put down people that I could remember at the time (laughs), but I think that like tells you obviously who is in my brain at that time. So if they're not there they probably don't really have that sort of relationship with them. Um I've kind of like sectioned it. So I've obviously got like Chloe Cheryl Toni closest ones um and then I've got like Phoebe Charlie Karen they're kind of like the second section. And then I've got Lola, Daisy, Danielle who I've kind of got like we're friendly but I could have a conversation with those three

Interviewer: and would it like be a good conversation or a bad conversation?

Alexandra: I think it would be a good conversation yea. And then I've got Mandy who I just don't really know, speak to at all. And then like Sienna and Regina who are like on the outskirts who...

Interviewer: which Regina is this?

Alexandra: Two. Um who are just kind of there. And they're big characters in the team but I just don't really want anything to do with them

Interviewer: um so obviously there's people you haven't included on there. You kind of touched on it before, is it because you didn't think of them at the time or?

Alexandra: yeah I think like people like Spencer um obviously hasn't been here for a while now she's been injured um but I feel like she should be on there before I feel like we had quite a decent relationship before um yeah but not she's not really around much so I don't really speak to her. Um

Interviewer: so if she was around she probably would be on there

Alexandra: yeah probably, and then um jade who again I feel like don't really know her that well I don't really know what she's all about apart from the rapping. Um oh yeah and then the goal keepers kath and Micha um again I don't really know them that well and no dont really interact with them. Obviously I play quite high up the pitch and their goalkeepers as well so we don't really….

Interviewer: is that one thing that's quite key, that you're looking at people you might interact with based on your position as well?

Alexandra: um maybe yeah. So I was just thinking a little bit about jade as well cause obviously we compete against each other for positions um so yeah I speak to her sometimes but it'll only be at football. Same as the keepers. I just don't really interact with them

Interviewer: so are these people, teammates, like important to your like involvement and your experience in football?

Alexandra: some of them are

Interviewer: okay. So which ones are the ones that ae important?

Alexandra: just teammates?

Interviewer: yeah…

Alexandra: um…. Chloe Cheryl Toni (laughs)

Interviewer: so why would you say those three in particular?

Alexandra: cause I can call them probably genuine friends.

Interviewer: okay yeah whereas the others you don't necessarily have that relationship with them?

Alexandra: yeah…

Interviewer: okay… that makes sense. Umm you haven't really talked about the development players, why is that?

Alexandra: I just don't know any of them. Yeah.

Interviewer: in terms of training are you… they're quite separate aren't they with development and firsts team? Would you say there would be some kind of benefit in some integrated training would that be something you'd be interested in or are you happy to be separate?

Alexandra: I think sometimes it would be good to do stuff with them because for them you can see what kind of level they're at compared to what we're at and obviously if we're not at our best it'll show if we get beat by them do you know what I mean? Because at the end of the day we should be beating and playing better than them. Um but I thin, I dunno maybe it'll be good sometimes on a Wednesday if there are low numbers just to do something with the.

Interviewer: would that help with building relationships with them?

Alexandra: yeah I think so, I think a lot of the team sees the development as um I don't know. I now I see them as like younger um. And I know a lot of them are probably like my age. Older than me um but yeah.

Interviewer: okay cool. Um in terms of like the overall quality of these relationships, do they differ hen between each players? Like your relationship with them? Are they quite different? With each individual player would you say you have a different relationship with them?

Alexandra: yeah, yeah I think so.

Interviewer: um so like looking at some of your ties, obviously you've got some that are straight like strong, some that are kind of in the middle. Are these middle ones like charlotte Daisy Danielle Karen and then like Mandy Regina Sienna and meg are really weak. Like what determined that, like how strong the relationship or how weak it was gonna be?

Alexandra: um I think its kind like the interaction that we had. Like Daisy charlotte Danielle, theye come in new to the tam but they, we can still talk um and yeah. The same kind of with Danielle I feel like I met Danielle before she came to the team um so we ind of had a very small relationship before that. Lke I know who she is and not a new person. And with Phoebe Charlie and Karen like I feel like there was quite a a good relationship but it's not got to the point where its like bad, its just there. Um

Interviewer: what's weakened that relationship then?

Alexandra: um just changes in the team, new people coming in. um… just yeah I don't know. I feel like it's mainly new people coming in the team.

Interviewer: and other people maybe being pushed out?

Alexandra: hmmm yeah.

Interviewer: okay cool so if we talk about coaches. Um talk me through what you've got.

Alexandra: um well we've only got three kind of people like coaches I interact with is Ste, Alvin and then sometimes, rarely Coach 3 will make an appearance. Say hi.

Interviewer: so Coach 1 is head coach isn't he?. Um so what's your relationship like with him?

Alexandra: umm I think it differs depending on what mood we're both in and I think when I first joined it was quite, I dunno I think it was quite strong. Um but it's I think it's got a bit weaker as the years have gone on.

Interviewer: how, like what do you think it's got weaker?

Alexandra: umm…. I don't know (long pause)

Interviewer: so what about Alvin? Alvin's like assistant coach so what are your thoughts on your relationship with him?

Alexandra: um I don't think we've really got a relationship because um as such hes sometimes there most f the time he's not (laughs). Um.. but like when he is there its good but it's just not really consistent so there's not really anything, he's not like there enough to kind of build a relationship there do you know what I mean? So I don't really see the point in trying to make a relationship with him because you don't really now if he's going to stay or leave.

Interviewer: um so looking at I guess your placement (on map) with coach 1 would you say that you're closer to Coach 1 than some of your teammates? Like if you based it on comparing or is that just quite separate?

Alexandra: oh I dunno. Um I mean he probably should've been a little further out um (pause). But yeah I feel like I probably talk to coach 1 more than I do some of my teammates.

Interviewer: is… as coach is that quite an important part of like your experience? Like within the team?

Alexandra: umm yeah, I mean like hes a decent coach um (pause). He could be worse, he could be better sort of thing.

Interviewer: you just see him as kind of average?

Trri: yeah like he's not the best coach I've had but….

Interviewer: does he have quite a big impact or influence on the overall team environment would you say?

Alexandra: um I think yeah sometimes I just think the way he is he just clashes with some of the players in the team. Um. Just because they're probably not getting their own way or yeah coach 1's just not ery good at explaining himself or backing himself

Interviewer: okay yea. Um good quality relationship like ish? Coach 1's kind of a wavey line so does that wavey line kind of signifying it was strong now its got weaker like you said?

Alexandra: yeah I think its just up and down depending on what happens

Interviewer: um so relationship with your family, kind of talk me through that and their influence on you playing. I know we kind of touched on it earlier on

Alexandra: yeah um… dad's probably like my biggest fan. So he's like probably the closest one there. Um

Interviewer: do you like that?

Alexandra: it's cute yeah. Yeah.

Interviewer: has he always been a big support of you like playing football?

Alexandra: yeah. Maybe sometimes too much? You know when I'm like a moody teenager and I'm like I just don't want to play football anymore! (laughs)

Interviewer: he kept you going?

Alexandra: kinda yeah…

Interviewer: okay and then your mum is another….

Alexandra: yeah she hates watching me play football (laughs). No… I just don't think she likes standing out in the cold. Um I think that now im playing in places where there's actually seating shes fine to watch (laughs). But like when I was younger she wouldn't really come to watch unless it was a big game. And then every time she would come watch me in a big game we would lose so she'd be lie I'm not coming to watch you anymore (laughs). Like my college cup final she came to watch and we lost both of them. And she was like I'm not coming to watch you again!

Interviewer: I would probably send her away as well! (laughs). Okay so then you're obviously got Partner who's your girlfriend. Partner doesn't play football, isn't in our team so what's that relationship like and….?

Alexandra: um she comes to watch when she can. She doesn't play on Sundays anymore so she always asks if my games at home and stuff. She'll like drive me to training, pic me up.

Interviewer: is she quite a big support?

Alexandra: um yeah I think so. She hasn't really said anything that she doesn't support

Interviewer: she hasn't indicated otherwise so…. Okay has it over clashed like your relationship ever had any issues because of your involvement in playing football or no does she just get it?

Alexandra: no she just gets it. She loves to hear the goss um she'll come and hang out with some of (the group) when we have games night and stuff um which is nice.

Interviewer: so you have like included obviously friends like outside of the team, cause you said obviously they don't really much impact, but we've spoken quite a lot about certain players that you do see outside of the team. So do you wanna talk about that and why you hang out with them more so outside?

Alexandra: um I think its kind of like because you and Cheryl I've known you whilst you were at uni so we were friends before, even when Cheryl joined South-Coast. Um…. Yeah I just feel like…

Interviewer: does seeing like us three outside of football give us like a better relationship would you say? Like is that quite an important part of….

Alexandra: yeah I would say so. Um… yeah.

Interviewer: I guess there's some kind of indication that you obviously want to hang out with us more? I mean hopefully I dunno (laughs). Um so out of all those relationships, what would you say was the most important relationship that you have?

Alexandra: so I have to pick a person?

Interviewer: yeah or you an pick a couple maybe.

Alexandra: just relating to the team or?

Interviewer: just like how you feel. You and your experience of football who's probably the most important person there?

Alexandra: oh probably my dad.

Interviewer: yeah? So why your dad number one?

Alexandra: um (pause) just cause he always has been.

Interviewer: who out of all your teammates would you say are the most important?

Teri: ummm….. you….

Interviewer: you say that like you don't want to say it… you can!

Alexandra: yeah I know! Yeah probably you

Interviewer: okay so why me? I know its awkward because its me but…

Alexandra: um yeah probably because I have known you the longest out of all those people. Um we work together, friends, footballers… I dunno even in uni and stuff as well and yeah…

Interviewer: I like how you've put life coach next to my name… (laughs)

Alexandra: omg yeah you've got me through some times (laughing)

Interviewer: that's what I'm always here for Alexandra you know that (laughing)

Alexandra: you know all my secrets!

Interviewer: okay so interesting that you don't really talk about the coaches

Alexandra: yeah I just feel like the coaches are just someone who is just there. Um they don't really make the experience unless obviously they're like an outstanding coach. That focusses on each individual, but I feel like coach 1 doesn't really do that and just what he wants to do.

Interviewer: um okay so looking at like all of your different lines, squiggly lines, so for the strong lines what like characteristics make that a strong relationship.

Alexandra: probably reciprocated in the same way that I think about it… hopefully. Um yeah they're probably like the ones that are reciprocated in the same way. I dunno I would probably go to anyone with the straight lines and they'll help me out.

Interviewer: And then what about the middle ones, what characteristics make them not really really weak but middleish?

Alexandra: Umm… again they probably feel the same way um. They probably see me as closer to some of the other people. Um but yeah I feel like I would have some banter with them and actually have a conversation.

Interviewer: and then I guess the ones that are really weak, the really jagged ones then what determines them as a weak relationship or tie?

Alexandra: Um just I dont know them and I don't really like them.

Interviewer: so um looking at the team, a lot of your lines and ties are not really that strong. You've got three that are really strong and then the rest are a ixed between weak and sei weak, Why is that?

Alexandra: Um… I think um… I spose its kind of the effort they make with me um and the effort I obviously make back. I feel like I've got friends outside of football anyway so I don't go in there looking to be best friends with everyone cause I've got a group of mates already. I'm just there to play football um just not really interested in kind of making friends…

Interviewer: if you make friends out of it then its cool? If not then…

Alexandra: …. If not then as long as everyone is ok and no ones like my worst enemy then it's fine

Interviewer: Do your relationships impact um like how you play or your attitude to wanting to play? Like your motivation to play?

Alexandra: umm… not really. Um…

Interviewer: so even if they were all weak you would still be happy and want to play?

Alexandra: oh what relationship wise? Um I 'spose if we were doing well and that. But obviously if we were really shit and relationships were weak then see ya (laughs). There would be no point. Like we're a really decent team we if we can get promoted again then that's kind of level that I personally want to be at

Interviewer: so for you the priority is more like performance and achieving stuff and playing well as a team as opposed to your relationships?

Alexandra: yeah… in this team yeah… like obviously if I compare that to the uni team then obviously winning is really good but you cant its hard to progress in the uni team because there's nowhere to go so you're kind of there for the more social… I know you're going to hate me saying that but.. yeah.

Interviewer: umm.. so out of your closest relationships, what characteristics um make them really close, really strong?

Alexandra: um because I like them as people and players, friends. Um they're nice people um I feel like they probably don't bitch about me behind m back. I mean some people probably do (laughs) but yeah…

Interviewer: okay cool… umm so with these stronger relationships well like all relationships how do you maintain them?

Alexandra: um… I mean I see you every day. I make sure of that so you don't forget my face. Um yeah I kind of make effort to talk to those people. Like if I see something and it reminds me of one of those people I'll send it to them like with Toni on twitter if I see something that I know she'll get them I'll tag her in it.

Interviewer: and then with the weaker ones how could you improve them?

Alexandra: um I think I could make effort to go out with them outside of football umm…

Interviewer: so what stops you from doing that?

Alexandra: some people I would hang out with easy but then some people that are also there just aren't my cup of tea…

Interviewer: so there's like a group and you probably wouldn't…

Alexandra: yeah I wouldn't consider myself friends with al of the people in the group

Interviewer: yeah that makes sense. I think that's it. I know we were a little while but I really appreciate your time so thank you.