Relationships between AFL Player Off-field Activity, Player Characteristics, the Club Environment, and On-field Engagement

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Statement of Authorship

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Matthew Andrew Pink   Date

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Abraham Lincoln proposed that the better part of one's life consists of one's friendships (or something similar), and I can add to that they are also essential for navigating a PhD.

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PhD and gaining suitable re-creation so that I could continue to 'perform'. As I reflect back

on the journey, this has been pivotal and could not have been achieved without a workplace

culture and life away from work that enabled me to do this. There is perhaps more in

common between the PhD student and the elite AFL player than was originally thought.

Despite the struggles, I am grateful for the opportunity and to my reviewers I submit.

Dedication

For Sandra Bray, my mother, who knows how to keep going!

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Abstract

With the increasing professionalisation of the Australian Football League (AFL), greater demands are being placed upon AFL players with respect to their technical, tactical, and physiological training, in addition to increased requirements to promote their club's brand via community appearances. Modern AFL players have an additional challenge as their careers will be typically limited to, at best, a decade or slightly more at the elite level. This means that they are also encouraged to develop an alternative career for when their playing days are over. Thus, given these demands, there is substantial challenge for the modern footballer in achieving a sense of balance between work and non-work life whilst also preparing for their next career.

Although there is a strong ethical argument to support professional athletes' off-field activities and development away from the field, there is also a growing argument from some coaches and athletes that participating in these activities actually carries some benefit for the way athletes perform in their sport. Such an argument is consistent with contemporary human resource and management literature where in demanding professions, the support of employee work-life balance and holistic development has been shown to be associated with employee engagement and productivity. Within the AFL however there has been mixed views concerning the value of supporting player off-field activities and preparations for life after football. This is understandable given that there is often an underlying assumption in elite sport that to be successful you must 'out work' those you are competing with. The present thesis sought to investigate the potential value that participation in off-field activities associated with their lives away from football (i.e., their social, recreational, and career development activities) may

have with respect to AFL players' experience of engagement in their roles as footballers.

A sequential mixed methods design was employed to answer the questions outlined in this thesis. This design first involved an exploratory qualitative phase that helped to identify, confirm, and refine relevant phenomena, variables, and research questions to be addressed in the following quantitative strand. Inferences from both phases contributed to the 'meta-inferences' gleaned from the thesis overall. The thesis was guided initially by the development of a conceptual framework informed by theory that recognised the significance of the person and environment interaction and drew upon the extant literature on athlete career transition and holistic development.

During the qualitative phase the researcher completed a detailed case study involving interviews and observations that investigated an AFL club culture that had been identified by industry as supportive of player off-field activities and development. In addition, life as an AFL footballer was explored through the eyes of the players as well as perceptions of experience in off-field activity. Findings confirmed that life as an AFL footballer was hard work, required sacrifices, and often involved an atypical work schedule. Key elements of the club culture that supported player off-field activities were the genuine support of a balanced life, the care and recognition of the whole person (not just as a footballer), respect for the individual which included the support of their autonomy, the respect afforded the player development department within the club, and the quality of the relationship between the individual player and the Player Development Manager (PDM). A quality experience in off-field activity was described as one where the player experienced a sense of enjoyment/interest, purpose, a social connection, and where the activity had some instrumentality with respect to achieving a

'mental break' from football. These themes were particularly relevant to dual career development activities.

During the quantitative phase a survey package was developed that measured relevant personal, environmental, off-field activity, and athlete engagement components of the conceptual framework, identified from the literature and the findings from the initial case study. Four hundred and thirty professional Australian Rules football (AFL) players (22.93 ± 3.35 years) were recruited for this study from 14 of the 18 professional AFL clubs. Hypotheses concerning the influences of personal and environmental variables on the participation in, and experiences of, off-field activity and in turn the influence of these activities on the experience of athlete engagement were tested. Results showed that time spent in social activities/going out and player perceptions of the quality of their free time significantly predicted athlete engagement. Further, player perceptions of their club's support for off-field life could also predict a significant proportion of the variance in the athlete engagement scores. Finally, perceptions of value with respect to player dual career activity were also shown to be significantly associated with athlete engagement.

The practical implications arising from the studies reported here are that AFL clubs should take steps to support opportunities for players to achieve a sense of quality with respect to their free time. The opportunity to engage in social activities away from football and achieve a sense of balance in life was identified as particularly important. Further, dual career development activities where players had a quality experience were also shown to have a benefit with respect to athlete engagement. Thus, it is recommended that AFL clubs encourage players' participation in dual career activities where they enjoy a valued experience. To ensure benefits from these off-field activities however requires a club that is genuinely supportive of players' off-field lives alongside

the requisite physiological, tactical, and technical training. The findings and results

presented in this thesis suggest that the support of AFL players' off-field activities and

their holistic personal development has an important role to play in the high

performance strategy at any professional AFL club.

Key words: AFL, off-field activity, professional athletes, dual career development

Publications

There have been several publications to arise from this thesis. These are listed below. First, peer reviewed publications are listed before conference presentations.

Peer reviewed publications

Pink, M., Saunders, J., & Stynes, J. (2013). The type and quality of off-field activities at a professional Australian Football League (AFL) club. In A. Kiernan, D. Hynes, & K. Parry (Eds.), *Football and communities across codes* (pp. 37-52). Oxford, United Kingdom: ID-Press.

Pink, M., Saunders, J., & Stynes, J. (2015) Reconciling the maintenance of on-field success with off-field player development: A case study of a club culture within the Australian Football League. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, *21*, 98-108

Saunders, J., & Pink, M. (2015). The relationship between the 'off-field' activities and the 'on-field' engagement of professional Australian footballers. *International Journal of Physical Education, 52*(1), 32-39.

Conference presentations

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Saunders, J., Pink, M., & Stynes, J. (2015). *When more does not mean better? The value of work life balance within a professional football arena.* Paper presented at the 20th Annual Congress of the European College of Sport Science, Malmo.

Chapter One: Introduction

Sport is an indelible part of Australian culture (Adair & Vamplew, 1997). As argued by Nicholson and Hess (2007), Australia as a nation is obsessed with sport and this has been one of the primary ways the nation has become recognised on a global scale. They further described how the importance of sport in Australia can be traced back to the nation's colonial roots, where sport served an important function in developing a national identity and its inhabitants' values and behaviours. As the nation developed, so did the importance placed on the performance of Australian born citizens, particularly against 'big brother' England (Vamplew & Stoddart, 2008). Such performances became a symbol of emerging national pride. At a local level, sport became an increasingly important community social event. Adair and Vamplew (1997) described how during the nineteenth century, many local and amateur sporting competitions were established. These competitions attracted large crowds of spectators who could participate in local rivalries between the suburbs. Given sport's immense popularity and its importance in the place of the developing 'national psyche', it was inevitable that the economic possibilities of organised sport in Australia would one day begin to be realised and capitalised upon.

Sport in Australia has gradually shed its amateur roots and in the present day, sports such as the dominant football codes (i.e., Australian Rules Football, Rugby League, Rugby Union, and Soccer) have developed highly professional national leagues that as Stewart (2007a) described, have transcended the tribal suburban competitions of the past. Stewart and Smith (2000) argued that today's football clubs have become service-oriented entertainment organisations, who compete for the loyalties of fans and

sponsors alike. In turn, it is these fans and sponsors who fund the 'sporting business ventures' and, as highlighted in Pinnuck and Potter's (2006) economic analysis, much of this funding is a function of on-field success. In relation to this 'performance imperative', Dobson and Gerrard (1999) outlined that for sporting organisations, outperforming their opponents not just on but off the field (e.g., superior financial figures, more club members, and broader brand recognition) is of significant importance. Such is the competitive market place of modern professional sport which Kelly and Hickey (2010) described as the "global sports entertainment industry" (p.28).

Stewart and Smith (2000) also argued that the corporatisation of Australian sport has been a result of Australia's move towards a post-modern consumer based society and the needs of television networks to have a glut of cheap readymade programming (see also Murphy & Waddington, 2007; Nauright, 2004). Sport has gradually become sports entertainment, a product to be sold and marketed to the wider masses. Of course, with the professionalisation of sport has come the professionalisation of the elite athlete, who is essentially the 'foot soldier' of the sports entertainment machine (Connor, 2009). The large sums of money that have been injected into professional sport by means of corporate sponsorship, television rights, and the purchasing habits of the consumer have meant that the careers of many professional athletes has become increasingly lucrative. For example, the average wage of a professional Australian rules footballer is approximately A$250, 000 per season with some players earning up to one million dollars per season (Bowen & Ryan, 2013). Although these figures do not match those of European soccer players or American baseballers, professional footballers are some of the highest paid individuals in Australia. However, it can be said that although the earning capacity of modern day professional athletes has increased, so too have the demands placed upon them.

The modern professional athlete

In today's professional sporting 'landscape' there is a substantial amount of investment required on the part of the aspirant who wishes to make it as a professional athlete. To illuminate this it is useful to consider the development of the athlete over the course of his/her involvement in sport. Ericcson, Krampe, and Tesch-Romer's (1993) early work on the development of expert performers suggested that approximately 10 years (or 10,000 hours) of deliberate practice is required in order to develop the levels of skill required for expertise to be gained. These 10 years of deliberate practice (and beyond) involve progression through a series of developmental steps. Bloom and Sosniak's (1985) seminal work on the generic development of talent in young people suggested these steps involve initiation, development, and perfection. In a later extension to the sport domain, Côté, Baker, and Abernethy (2007) argued that the healthy development of young athletes can be split into three distinct stages. Namely: sampling (ages 6-12, involving high amounts of deliberate play and engagement in several sports); specialising (ages 12-15, incorporating deliberate play and practice, balanced with reduced involvement in several sports), and; investment (ages 15+, with high amounts of deliberate practice and the focus on one sport). All these conceptualisations reinforce the idea that to become an elite athlete (and perhaps make a living from it) requires a substantial investment of time and sacrifices that usually begin in early adolescence.

In extending the notion of the development of elite athletes to one based upon the concept of an athletic career, Stambulova (1994) identified seven transitional "crises" (p.226) to be negotiated by athletes during their career. In addition to describing periods of intensive training and specialisation, she also considered transitions from junior to senior and amateur to professional status. Finally, the

culmination of the sporting career and eventual transition into 'non-athletic' life was also identified. Common among the theoretical perspectives of athletic development described here are the delineation of stages and acknowledgement of the escalating personal investment required to prosper as an elite athlete.

In most cases, being a professional athlete in Australia means that the athlete's role is full time. Gone are the days when athletes competing at the elite level in team sports such as rugby league, cricket, and Australian rules football could train and compete whilst holding down a full time position that would colloquially be termed their 'day job'. In the football codes, as the sports entertainment industry has become more competitive, the clubs have sought competitive advantage both on and off the field. For the elite athlete as 'foot soldier' of the professional sporting organisation, this has meant increasing demands on their personal time and space. These involve not just training demands as part of the 'sports science arms race', but as Kelly and Hickey (2010) argued, the additional need for athletes to be presented as marketable commodities of their organisation. This has meant restrictions on social behaviour and additional expectations to engage with the community and promote their club brand. Simply put, in addition to the sacrifices made to get there, once in the system professional athletes work hard for their money!

The welfare of the athlete

Although professional athletes in Australia have the potential to earn a substantial income, their careers at the top level are often fleeting. For example, the average career length of a professional Australian football player is approximately five years (Baldwin, 2014). However, many players do not even reach this milestone. Connor (2009) argued in his essay that professional sport ultimately exploits athletes.

He argued that this was due to performance/commercial imperatives and the massive "reserve army" (p.1371) of athletes that can be drawn upon when a present player is no longer wanted, or not meeting demands. He further reflected on the costs to athletes' physical and psychological well-being, when the sporting experience has not been kind to them. Drawing on Horne (2006), a prominent scholar in sport and consumer culture, Connor attributed this to the capitalist culture of professional sport where the damage done to the athlete is a by-product of the workings of the elite sport machine.

When considering contemporary examples of athlete exploitation, Connor's (2009) argument that professional athletes are regularly exploited by the professional sport machine offers a credible alternative hypothesis to the notion of their existing as a privileged class, as often portrayed in the media. A recent example from the Australian football league (AFL) is the Essendon football club's doping saga (Thorpe, 2014). Here, in pursuit of a performance advantage, players were without their knowledge injected with substances questionable to the Australian Sports Anti-doping Authority (ASADA). In this sense it could be argued that the club failed in its duty of care, since the players (many of them young men below the age of 25) had put their trust in the club to look after their safety and legitimacy as elite athletes. Another example is that of Ian Thorpe, the champion Australian swimmer who following years of dedicated training and intense media scrutiny has struggled to piece together a life after athletic retirement and struggled with issues of personal identity (ABC News, 2014). Yet another example is provided by a highly talented AFL footballer Ben Cousins whose struggle with drug addiction was mismanaged by being 'covertly and passively accepted' while his club the West Coast Eagles were performing well (Seear & Fraser, 2010; Stewart, Dickson, & Smith, 2008).

Although the stories above are disturbing and a career as an elite athlete will always remain tenuous, it will be recognised in this thesis that professional sporting bodies such as the AFL are becoming increasingly concerned with the personal development and well-being of their professional athletes both during, and beyond their athletic careers. The scope of such development often includes that of a dual career (i.e., a second occupation for when the sporting career is over) and the recognition that with time, the profession is becoming increasingly demanding and requiring increased personal resources to participate effectively. There is a growing argument that there may therefore be an on-field performance benefit (see Bennie & O'Connor, 2010) in supporting players' holistic development and balance in life. Further, in supporting the holistic development and well-being of the player, the short and long-term welfare of the player is protected which in turn reflects well on the brand of the sporting club and the sporting code they belong to.

Statement of the research problem

Although there is a recent trend towards implementing strategies to support the holistic development and well-being of professional athletes, these innovations have also been met with scepticism by some within professional sport environments (Chambers, Gordon, & Morris, 2013). Support for maintaining adequate involvement in non-sport activities (e.g., social, recreational, and educational) is seen by some coaches and sport scientists as an unnecessary distraction from the primary task of training and performing as a professional athlete. Such scepticism has been particularly true with regard to the development of a dual career (Henry, 2013; Hickey & Kelly, 2008). In contrast, there are those who champion the idea that the 'balanced' player who is developing and engaging adequately in non-sport domains is in fact more likely to

perform in the sporting domain by being given the opportunity to achieve a 'mental break' and 're-create' away from what is a demanding and full time profession (Bennie & O'Connor, 2010). These two perspectives of the argument have particularly been espoused within the Australian Football League (Collins, 2013). But as so often is the case with most sports, both sides of the argument rely on opinion, supported by anecdotal evidence at best. It is within the framework of this debate that this thesis will investigate players' involvement in off-field activity and the potential for these activities to influence the way they engage in their roles as professional footballers.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Athletes' careers

Even a lengthy career as an elite athlete will be typically shorter than that of a 'traditional' profession (e.g., accountant, teacher, or lawyer). Most professional athletes in Australian sports (particularly the football codes) will have retired (either by choice or forcefully) by their 30th birthday. Only the very fortunate proceed into their mid-30s. Unsurprisingly, early attention in the athlete career transition literature was heavily focussed on the problems some athletes faced when they could no longer participate in an activity that had been their livelihood, their passion, and a substantial component of their identity (See Stambulova, Alfermann, Statler, & Côté, 2009; Wylleman, Alfermann, & Lavallee, 2004). These problems included a loss of identity and physical, psychological, social, and financial distress (Fortunato & Marchant, 1999; Werthner & Orlick, 1986).

As the research into the field developed, it became evident that many athletes also experienced a positive retirement from sport and the focus of the research shifted to understanding what circumstances (both personal and environmental) were associated with harmonious transitions. The scholarship further developed to conceptualise the athlete career as a series of transitions and ultimately the athlete as a whole person who also develops concurrently beyond the involvement in sport. It is this contemporary conceptualisation of the athlete career that sets a foundation for considering the interconnectedness of the athlete's sporting and non-sporting life and the prospect of the individual's holistic development being associated with his/her level of engagement in sport.

History and theoretical development

As described by Lavallee (2000), Taylor and Ogilvie (1994) and Wylleman et al. (2004), the early theoretical conceptualisations of athletic retirement were imported from fields outside of sport such as the study of retirement from the work force (i.e., social gerontology) and death and dying (i.e., thanatology). Although these conceptualisations were useful in developing early descriptions of the problems some athletes faced, there were deficiencies that precluded a more complete understanding as highlighted by the authors listed above. Some of these deficiencies included the fact that athletes generally retired much earlier than other professions and most often moved across to another occupation. This rendered much of the insight from social gerontology inappropriate. Further, although athletes may experience the 'death' of an athletic career and, perhaps even some 'social death' when transitioning out of that environment, this only represented one facet of the athlete's life and they continued to live on beyond athletic retirement. This of course leaves insights from thanatology limited in their application. Finally, as identified by Grove, Lavallee, and Gordon (1997), even early on it was recognised that not every athlete experiences adjustment difficulties upon retirement. Early estimates put the figure as high as 80%, however in recent times this has been considerably lowered with Park, Lavallee, and Tod's (2012) systematic review suggesting that approximately 16% of elite athletes actually experience difficulties upon retirement.

Research into athlete career transition has progressed to considering retirement from the athletic career as one of several transitions as opposed to a singular and necessarily traumatic event (Wylleman et al., 2004). Taylor and Ogilvie's (1994) conceptual model of athletic retirement highlights this development well. They reviewed the application of transitional theories such as Schlossberg's (1981) model of

human transitions and proposed their own athlete specific model as can be seen in Figure 1. This model considers the antecedents of a quality adaptation to athletic retirement and also the potential remedies when athletes experience crises in retirement.

The first step in Taylor and Ogilvie's (1994) model considers the causes of athletic retirement. These are delineated as age, deselection, injury, or free choice. Ultimately these causes of retirement could be dichotomised as either voluntary or involuntary. Voluntariness which Park et al. (2012) described as the "degree of control athletes have over their decision to retire" (p.34) has been shown to have a positive correlation with the quality of the athletic career transition. Conversely, involuntary retirements have been reported as having the capacity to cause distress. An Australian example of this can be seen in Fortunato and Marchant's (1999) qualitative study of 30 retired professional AFL players. Players in this study who experienced an involuntary retirement described the bitterness, shock, perceived loss of status, distress, and awareness of an uncertain future upon retirement. Although a forced retirement can cause distress for the athlete, this is not the only factor that influences the quality of his/her retirement. Taylor and Ogilvie's (1994) model also considers the athlete's developmental experiences and their available resources.

Moving beyond the cause of athletic retirement Taylor and Ogivlie's (1994) model identifies several developmental factors and resources available to the individual that will influence the quality of their athletic retirement. With respect to developmental factors both the athlete's self and social identities are identified. There has been much athletic career transition literature in the last thirty years that has highlighted the dangers of an excessive athlete identity (i.e., the degree to which an individual identifies with the athletic role, Brewer, Van Raalte, & Linder, 1993, p. 237) and limited development of the self-concept outside of sport. Such 'one-dimensional' development

has been said to increase the chances of poor adaptation and distress upon athletic

retirement. Park et al. (2012) reviewed 35 studies and identified that in 34, there were

negative associations between the strength of the athlete identity and athletes'
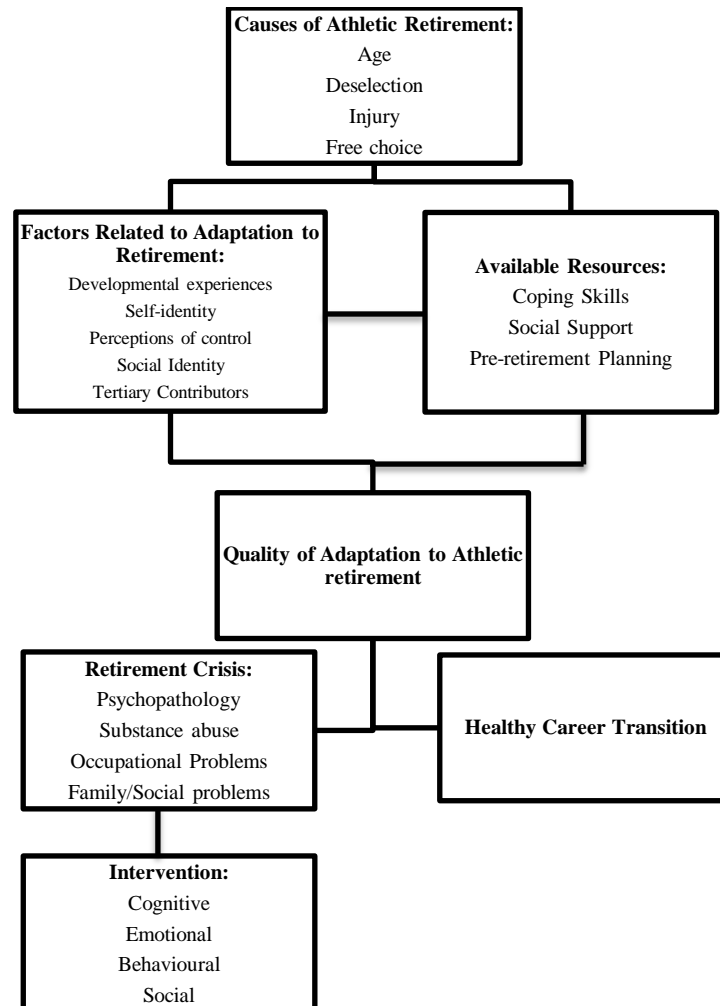
Figure 1. Conceptual model of adaptation to retirement among athletes. Adapted from

"A Conceptual Model of Adaptation to Retirement among Athletes," by J. Taylor and

B.C. Ogilvie, 1994, Journal of Applied Sport Psychology, 6 (1), p.5.

transitions out of sport. Athlete identity and self-concept will be given greater attention

later in this review due to their importance in the present thesis, especially considering

the focus on personal development beyond the athlete role.

The model also highlights tertiary contributions (such as socio-economic or minority status) and perceived control as other developmental experiences related to the quality of retirement. With respect to socio-economic or minority status, this was considered to be reflective of the poorer financial and educational circumstances (outside of sport) that athletes who belong to these categories may experience. With respect to perceived control, in many cases athletes have no control over the cause of their retirement. Their available resources to deal with this transition such as their coping skills, pre-retirement planning and the social support they may receive, are indicated in the model as linked with both their developmental experiences and the quality of their athletic retirement.

The model then dichotomises either a healthy career transition or a retirement crisis which could involve psychopathology, substance abuse, occupational challenges, or family/social issues as examples of the problems that some athletes have faced upon retirement (Miller & Kerr, 2002; Wylleman et al., 2004). In reality, however, the quality of an athlete's retirement is unlikely to reflect either a purely healthy transition, or a total crisis. The presence of a range of both 'healthy' and negative factors is more likely to lead to a degree of difficulties that varies from athlete to athlete. Following this, the final level in the model considers suitable cognitive, emotional, behavioural, and social interventions for retirement crises. However, the most effective interventions would occur during the athletic career (e.g., pre-retirement planning & the development of a multi-faceted identity) and should begin early in their development as an elite athlete (Stambulova et al., 2009). Such an emphasis then incorporates preventative measures as opposed to responses that are only curative. This perspective is implicit in the contemporary career transition literature and its conceptualisation as will be discussed.

A useful and contemporary way to summarise the career transition literature concerning athlete retirement is provided by Park et al.'s (2012) systematic review. The authors reviewed 126 athlete retirement studies (from 1968 to 2010) that were conducted on independent populations, were written in English, and examined correlates of career transition adjustment. The authors organised the reporting of their systematic review based upon two existing athlete retirement models (one of which was Taylor & Ogilvie's, 1994). They considered factors related to the quality of career transition and available resources during the career transition, including additional factors and available resources not specified in the model depicted in Figure 1. This reflects the literature published since 1994 and is useful in understanding the trend of results before progressing to contemporary views of athlete career transition. A summary of the trend of the results reported for each variable associated with the quality of career transition is shown in Table 1. Of course, it is important to note that correlation does not equal cause and effect however many of these relationships appear plausible and have been supported by a number of empirical studies.

What is evident in the results of the Park et al. (2012) review is that there are many factors that influence the quality of retirement from sport. There are some factors of course which it is impossible to control for such as an unavoidable forced retirement, time passed after retirement, or an athlete's satisfaction with their sport career achievement. However, much of the impact of these factors may at least be moderated by interventions in the athlete's environment both whilst they are an athlete, and in their athletic retirement. Throughout the evolution of the athlete career transition literature several key recommendations for supporting the athlete's retirement have been put forward. These are summarised in the Stambulova et al. (2009) position stand on the

Table 1

Correlates of Athletes' Quality of Career Transition and Adjustment

Correlate	*No. of studies*	*Trend of association*	*% of studies*
Athlete identity	35	-	97
Voluntariness of decision	85	+	86
Injuries/health problems	11	-	91
Career/personal development	9	+	100
Sport career achievement	9	+	100
Educational status	8	+	100
Financial status	8	+	100
Self-perception	8	+	100
Control of life	7	+	100
Disengagement/drop out	7	**-**	100
Time passed after retirement	7	+	100
Relationships with coach	6	+	100
Life changes	5	**-**	100
Balance of Life while competing	3	+	100
Coping strategies	32	?	38
Pre-retirement planning	29	+	97
Psychosocial support	29	+	92
Support program involvement	8	+	100

Note. Partially adapted from "Athletes' Career Transition out of Sport: A Systematic Review," by S. Park, D. Lavallee, and D. Tod, 2012, *International Review of Sport and Exercise Psychology, 6* (1), p.25.

career development and transitions of athletes.

Following a synthesis of the extant literature on career transition, the International Society of Sport Psychology (ISSP) developed a position stand outlining its recommendations (Stambulova et al., 2009). Within the document it is suggested that the experience of athletic retirement will vary according to the athlete's coping resources which can be internal (e.g., level of athletic identity, personality, mental skills) or external (e.g., organizational, financial, and social support). The authors argued that the earlier well documented negative adjustments to athletic retirement (e.g., Blinde & Stratta, 1992; Fortunato & Marchant, 1999; Grove et al., 1997) can be ameliorated through 'holistic' support of the athlete during their career. In addition to reviewing the history and development of athletic career transition literature, several recommendations were put forward (p.408) for preparing and supporting athletes prior to and during their eventual retirement. Below is a brief summary of the key recommendations:

- Professional athletes should prepare for their athletic retirement well in advance
- A holistic view of the athlete should be supported where athletes are encouraged to explore multiple identities, balance sporting and non-sporting demands, and focus on transferable skills (e.g., planning, goal setting , time & stress management) that can support athletes' transitions in both athletic and non-athletic domains
- Social support from significant others should be forthcoming with regards to athletes' holistic development

- Coaches and managers should talk to athletes about retirement whilst they are still competing in sport
- Sporting clubs and organisations need to provide more support for athletes during and after their athletic retirement

The Stambulova et al. (2009) position stand also described the shift within the literature from a predominant focus on athlete retirement to considering transitional challenges throughout the entire athletic career. This is where models of talent and athletic development such as those listed earlier in this review (i.e., Côté et al., 2007; Ericsson et al., 1993; Stambulova, 1994) became useful in studying the developmental challenges athletes face when transitioning from one stage of the athletic career to the next. Career transition researchers became increasingly concerned with the development and well-being of athletes at all stages of their career whether that be the transition from early sampling to specialisation, from junior elite to professional ranks, or from being a professional competing athlete to becoming a former athlete. As the field of research has developed it has become increasingly apparent that the development and healthy transition of athletes at any stage of their careers is influenced by more than just training and development in the athletic domain. Athletes also face a series of developmental and transitional challenges 'away from the field'.

A whole of person approach to athlete career transition

Throughout the development of athlete career transition research, coping resources (either internal or external) have been identified as important to the quality of athletes' transitions at various stages of their careers (Stambulova et al., 2009). Many of these coping resources are reflective of the athlete's development 'beyond the sporting field' (e.g., developing a multi-faceted identity, preparing for retirement, and living a balanced life) and the support they receive for that development (e.g., from their

sporting organisations, families, or friends). In addition, the social support they receive during challenging transitions (such as retirement) has also been identified as important. What is implicit in contemporary views of athlete career transition is that athletic development across a career needs to be conceptualised and considered in the context of the broader development of the whole person. This view has been described by Stambulova et al. (2009, p. 397) as the "third major shift" in athlete career transition research.

Wylleman and Lavallee (2004) presented a developmental model of the transitions faced by athletes. In addition to its identification of the stages and transitions of an athletic career, the model put forward the need to take a 'whole of person' approach (i.e., consider athletes' development in both athletic and non-athletic domains). The model, as reprinted in Figure 2, considers the phases of the athletic career in conjunction with concurrent transitions occurring in the athlete's psycho-social, academic/vocational, and psychological domains. To give a practical illustration of the model, if an aspiring professional athlete enters a draft (the current selection process used in the AFL and also the NBA) at 18 years of age, then according to Wylleman and Lavallee's model he/she is simultaneously nearing the end of his/her adolescence and secondary education as well as the 'development' phase for the sport. At this stage, parents, peers, and the coach are the sources of his/her significant psycho-social relationships. On entering the professional environment however, the athlete begins the mastery phase of his/her athletic development, their young adulthood and usually some form of higher education and training. At the psychosocial level there is now an increasing focus on the coach-athlete relationship, the possibility of a romantic partner, and although not expressed in the model, the need to develop relationships with new peers if they have transitioned to a new environment (see Bruner, Munroe-

Chandler, & Spink, 2008; Holt & Dunn, 2004). The boundaries are presented as wavy

in the figure representing an appreciation that the rate of development in all of these

areas will vary according to the individual, the sport, and other environmental situations

faced.

AGE	10	15	20	25	30	35
Athletic Level	Initiation	Development		Mastery	Discontinuation	
Psycho-logical Level	Childhood	Adolescence		(Young) Adulthood		
Psycho-social Level	Parents Siblings Peers	Peers Coach Parents		Partner Coach	Family (Coach)	
Academic Vocational Level	Primary education	Secondary education	Higher education	Vocational training Professional occupation		

Figure 2. A developmental model on transitions faced by athletes at athletic, individual,

psychosocial, and academic/vocational levels. Reprinted from "Career Transitions in

Sport: European perspectives," by P. Wylleman, D. Alfermann, and D. Lavallee, 2004,

Psychology of Sport and Exercise, 5 (1), p.11.

Wylleman and Lavallee (2004) emphasised that non-normative transitions (or

indeed difficult transitions) can occur in any of these domains (at any stage) and these

are likely to affect the athlete's well-being in the present, or have consequences in the

future. Returning to the case of the athlete entering the draft, a young athlete is likely on

the cusp of significant transitions in his/her psychological, psychosocial, and

academic/vocational development in addition to his/her athletic development. It is

plausible then to suggest that athletes' well-being, and potentially performances will be influenced by a sense of well-being in each of these domains. Thus, Wylleman, Reints, and De Knop (2013) argued that the model reflects the "concurrent, interactive, and reciprocal nature" (p.35) of the athlete's development in these domains and therefore the need to consider the 'whole person' in supporting the athlete's development and well-being. Taking both a 'whole of career' and 'whole person' approach to athlete career transition emphasises how each domain and each transition in the athlete's life has the capacity to influence another. In this way nurturing an athlete's educational/vocational development in an alternative career (other than sport) can benefit the athlete's later experience of discontinuation (i.e, athletic retirement) as evidenced by the extant literature (Park et al., 2012).

Wylleman, Reints, and De Knop (2013) discussed recent expansions to the model informed by research which included the identification of four stages within the discontinuation phase of the athletic domain. These are planning for athletic retirement, the actual retirement, starting a post-athletic career and the provocative notion of re-integration back into society. These stages are consistent with athletes' recollections of the transition process (McKenna & Thomas, 2006; Stephan, Bilard, Ninot, & Delignières, 2003). Further, Wylleman, DeKnop, and Reints (2011) proposed adding 'financial stages' to the model, as athletes often experience substantial reductions in pay upon athletic retirement and therefore need to develop financially across the life span in order to successfully negotiate this period.

Professional and elite athletes: transitioning in, developing a career, and transitioning out

A simplified way to conceptualise the careers of professional and elite athletes is as a process of transitioning into professional/elite environments, developing a career as

a professional/elite athlete, and finally transitioning out of the athletic career. Athletes'

experience of transitioning in and out of professional/elite sporting environments has

received substantial attention in the literature. Young athletes have typically described a

desperation to prove their competence (Bruner et al., 2008; Hickey & Kelly, 2005),

issues concerned with moving away from home (Bruner et al., 2008; Christensen &

Sørensen, 2009; Holt & Dunn, 2004; Kelly & Hickey, 2006), a need to seek social

support (Bruner et al., 2008; Holt & Dunn, 2004), and also report finding education

taking a 'back seat' (Bruner et al., 2008; Christensen & Sørensen, 2009; Hickey &

Kelly, 2008) when transitioning into elite environments. Further, the ability to delay

gratification and make social sacrifices related to friends and family has been described

as pivotal to the chances of young athletes' success (Holt & Dunn, 2004).

      With respect to developing a career as an elite athlete there is much literature in

sport psychology, sport science, and coaching concerning the optimal mental,

physiological and tactical development of the athlete. A review of this literature is

beyond the scope of the present thesis, however it is important at this juncture to note

that the development of the athlete as a whole person and the support of a balanced life

as a strategy in maximising athletic performance is a central idea within this thesis. It

reflects the belief that there is likely a limit to the demands that can be placed upon

athletes before they actually begin to impede the way they engage in their sport. This

will also be discussed in the light of contemporary human resource literature.

      At this point a review of the athletic retirement literature (or transitioning out)

will not be repeated as this has been dealt with earlier in the review. It is important

however to note some limitations of Wylleman and Lavallee's (2004) conceptual model

given its theoretical contributions to this thesis. As recognised by Taylor and Ogilvie

(1994) athletic careers can terminate at various stages due to de-listing, injury, age, or

personal choice. Some athletes are blessed with a career spanning over ten years while others are de-listed early into their mastery phase or whilst they are still developing socially, psychologically, and vocationally. Particularly in such involuntary retirements, athletes will experience challenges that are reflective of their development in other domains. It is necessary to recognise that not all athletes discontinue around the age of 30 with a well-developed 'alternative career', a supportive nuclear family, and age appropriate psychological maturity. Although this in part is recognised by the 'wavy' lines within the developmental model, it serves to emphasise the importance of athletes' concurrent development in multiple domains and the support they receive from their sporting organisation to develop holistically (Miller & Kerr, 2002; Stambulova et al., 2009).

Supporting the development of the whole person (and their transitions)

An increasing focus on the personal development and well-being of elite athletes has seen the advent of a number of athlete career development and welfare programs throughout the world (Clarke & Salter, 2010; Lavallee, Gorley, Lavallee, & Wylleman, 2001). Typically these programs are designed to assist athletes in coping with the demands of work as a professional athlete, achieve a work life balance, and prudently prepare for life after professional sport (Stambulova & Ryba, 2013). A contemporary Australian example has been the national athlete career education (NACE) program available to athletes holding scholarships with either state or national sporting bodies. NACE offered support for education, career transition, lifestyle management and personal development courses delivered both online and face to face (Australian Sports Commission, 2010; Martin, Fogarty, & Albion, 2014). The guiding vision of the NACE program was that "Australian elite athletes optimise their sporting and personal development goals by engaging in world-leading career and education

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services" (Australian Sports Commission, 2010, p.2). Implicit in NACE's structure and guiding vision was the development and well-being of the person both within sport and beyond. Chambers, Gordon, and Morris (2013) have described NACE as a leading example of support for the athlete as whole person and a marker of the program's success has been its adaptation in the United Kingdom (UK) where it has also flourished (North & Lavallee, 2004; Park, Lavallee, & Tod, 2013).

In 2010 NACE reported that services were delivered to over 3000 athletes and the most recent survey data collected (non-independently) suggests that athletes were generally satisfied with the service provided (Australian Sports Commission, 2010). Further, athlete opinion was that having access to NACE influenced their athletic performance positively (Fraser, Fogarty, & Albion, 2010). If this belief can be substantiated with higher levels of evidence it would provide an economical argument for both athletes and their sporting organisations to increase the support for such programs.

Although the program received positive reports, engagement in the services provided by NACE has been shown to vary as a function of perceived importance. Gorely, Lavallee, Bruce, Teale, and Lavallee, (2001) identified that 70% of the 878 elite athletes that participated in their study had used at least one of the NACE services during a 12 month period. However, the career transition service was the least utilised service with athletes perceiving a low level of importance for it. In reporting on 561 elite level athletes registered for the UK version of NACE, North and Lavallee (2004) described that the more time athletes perceived they had left in sport, the less likely they were to be planning for athletic retirement. They also reported that 21% of the athletes who were planning to retire in the next 1-2 years still did not have any idea regarding their plans after athletic retirement. Although NACE has been described as one of the

world's leading examples of holistic support for athletic career transition, Chambers et al. (2013) reported that there appears to be a lack of evidence showing program success in supporting athlete career transition. This is not to say that the program is inherently unsuccessful, rather that the evidence base needs to be developed.

Chambers et al. (2013) reviewed the NACE program and commented that only a small number of athletes who accessed this program were professional. They further commented on the current movement in professional Australian sport to better support the off-field development of athletes. An example of this can be seen in the programs provided by the Australian Football League (a central focus of this thesis) in partnership with the Australian Football League Players' Association (AFLPA). Similar to the case of NACE, uptake of the services provided by the AFL/AFLPA vary from player to player and club to club and this is reflective of the priorities and values inherent in their individual environments (Chambers et al., 2013). Similar to NACE, evidence based on-field performance/engagement rationales may have the capacity to influence AFL players' participation in such programs and the support they receive from their clubs to do so.

Recently NACE has undergone a re-branding and re-emerged as 'Personal Excellence'. This re-naming represents a shift in philosophy that recognises the importance of the sporting career yet also the athlete's personal well-being and 'lifelong learning' (including dual career) as part of a whole of person approach (Australian Institute of Sport, 2014). This whole of person approach aims to empower elite athletes' decision making and development that enables them to thrive in their sport and also in life away from sport.

Holistic views of athletic and human performance

The idea that the holistic development of an athlete will aid in that athlete's 'on-field' performance is consistent with the extant human resource (HR) and management literature from 'regular' workplaces. It is therefore useful not just to consider the elite sport literature, but also to turn to contemporary HR literature and the implications this might have for workplaces of professional athletes.

Miller and Kerr (2002) put forward a compelling and ethical argument in their essay that an athlete's performance should not come at the cost of their personal excellence and cited prominent examples where athletes' overall welfare had been compromised in chasing athletic performance goals. They also made reference to the dominant 'performance centric' focus of sport psychology and athlete development literature up until that point in time. As a corollary, they conceptualised that the support of athletes' personal excellence (i.e., development and well-being in other domains) could be integrated into their sporting experience (both on and off the field). They also suggested that these two objectives (i.e., performance and personal excellence) could co-exist and potentially be mutually beneficial. Their argument was geared towards suggesting that at worst, the support of athletes' holistic well-being was ethical, could become part of the elite athlete experience, and would be unlikely to lead to a performance decrement, but at best it might actually enhance athletic performance. One line of further research they suggested should be explored was whether the achievement of personal excellence actually might have a performance benefit for the athletes involved.

More recently, Friesen and Orlick (2010) investigated the philosophies of five sport psychology consultants who claimed to be holistic in their practice. These psychologists had at least ten years' experience, and had at some point taught sport

psychology at a university level. A deductive-inductive approach was used to analyse the data. The consultants identified that non-sport environments may affect athletic performance (e.g., relationships, school life, etc.) and that within an individual there are "multiple selves" (p. 233). It was proposed that if non-athletic elements of the individual are suffering then the athletic self is likely to as well. This implied a need to be caring and authentic in their practice and adopt a humanistic perspective. Although the study was limited by the small number of participants, these reports from 'expert informants' of spending more time developing the whole person for performance excellence as opposed to specific mental skills offers support for Miller and Kerr's (2002) proposal.

Athlete development programs are quick to attach themselves to the argument that developing both personally and professionally outside of sport will improve athletic performance. However this presents as an 'argument of convenience' as elite level athletes (and their sporting organisations), as described by Henry (2013) typically prioritise athletic performance. If athletes believe that developing outside of sport is beneficial for their sport then they will be more likely to engage in development programs. Equally (and potentially more importantly) the athletes' employers are more likely to be supportive of such activities. Essentially the argument has three main dimensions; that maintaining a work-life balance (i.e., engaging in meaningful non-work activities), preparing for athletic retirement through dual career development, and developing personally beyond sport will be beneficial for performance.

Of particular interest with respect to the present thesis is whether athletes' sense of balance in life, their engagement in non-sport activities, and their preparing for athletic retirement has any meaningful associations with on-field performance. Engagement in non-sport activities of an educational or recreational nature and

engaging with family and friends has been described in several studies (e.g., Cresswell & Eklund, 2007; Douglas & Carless, 2006; Price, Morrison, & Arnold, 2010) by athletes and also by elite Australian coaches (e.g., Bennie & O'Connor, 2010) as being positively associated with on-field performance. The following paragraphs consider the current evidence base for the influence of these variables on athletic performance.

Price, Morrison, and Arnold (2010) investigated the types of non-sporting activities pursued by Australian elite athletes ($N = 143$, 61.5% female) from 28 different sports. In addition to collecting basic descriptive data, athletes were also asked to reflect on the importance of these activities. Seventy two percent of athletes in the study believed that their sporting performance had been improved as a function of engaging in outside work or education (15% believed there was no relationship and 13% thought that it hindered their sport performance). Athletes also identified spending time with family/friends and engaging in recreational activities (such as golf or surfing) as beneficial for performance. The participants attributed these benefits to opportunities to have a 'mental break' from the rigours of life as an elite athlete, and in the case of dual career development, reduced worry about the future in addition to providing a focus away from training and competition. A limitation of this research is its reliance on athlete opinion without the support of in-depth qualitative investigation or quantitative empirical testing.

Douglas and Carless (2006) studied the personal, lifestyle, and environmental factors that influenced performance of a group of elite UK athletes. They recruited 21 elite level athletes (11 female, 10 male) between the ages of 18 and 44 from various team and individual sports such as cricket, rugby union, athletics, and judo. They used an interpretive qualitative research design where athletes participated in one of five focus groups and then five in-depth interviews. Similar themes to those described by

Price et al. (2010) emerged. For example, balance in life was identified as important. However the importance of this appeared to vary as a function of age. Younger athletes appeared to be more willing to sacrifice areas of their life to be successful, whereas older athletes believed that eliminating or neglecting other areas of their life was negative for both their performance and well-being. The younger athlete's willingness to sacrifice may be indicative of the desperation to 'make it' that young athletes show when first transitioning into an elite environment (Bruner et al., 2008; Hickey & Kelly, 2005). The older athletes' view of balance is perhaps a result of experience within their career, the diversification of their self-concept, and a decrease in athlete identity with age which have been commonly reported in the literature (Lally, 2007; Martin et al., 2014).

The athletes in the Douglas and Carless' (2006) study identified education as important as it provided not just balance but also a sense of personal control over their future life. Consistent with other research (e.g., Hickey & Kelly, 2008), whenever there was a clash however, education would be the first to be compromised. Further, athletes described familial relationships as particularly important from a performance perspective, as they provided a first port of call during difficult times. Positive relationships with teammates and the coach were also considered to be linked to athletic performance. Further, the athletes were found to be particularly appreciative of feeling some ownership and personal autonomy with respect to their careers, general daily life, and their future. This perhaps is reflective of the basic human need of feeling a sense of autonomy and agency demonstrated in research that incorporates self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2008). Such issues appeared to become more important as the athlete's aged and this sense of ownership and autonomy over their own lives was also

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perceived to influence performance. The importance of maintaining a balanced life and developing outside of sport was expressed richly by one of the participants in this study,

> I remember being back at training and deciding that really I'd given everything to my sport in the most single minded way I could do. … It was all based around training – completely. And I just felt that's crazy. What happens when I'm not an athlete? I feel like I've really gone back to basics, I've got back to me, spending more time with my girlfriend, spend a lot more time in church, and training to be a PE teacher. So I'm working toward a future outside of sport. I don't train maybe as much as I did there but I'm running just as well, I'm fitter, I have around me people that care for me, people that want to help me in sport and so I think that was just something that I just needed to get other parts sorted (Douglas & Carless, 2006, p.4)

Another qualitative study that uncovered themes related to a sense of balance in life was Cresswell and Eklund's (2007) investigation into the burnout experiences of New Zealand Rugby Union players. They longitudinally investigated player burnout among professional rugby players ($n = 9$, Mean age $= 25.33$, SD$= 2.83$), and team management ($n = 3$) across one international/domestic season. They used semi-structured interviews and inductive and deductive content analysis to produce their findings. Mid-season and post-season appeared to be time periods when players most experienced burnout symptoms. Players who experienced burnout attributed heavy training and playing demands, competitive transitions, injury, pressure to comply with demands, public profile and pressure/expectations, pressure to perform, position security, and poor relationships with team management as factors contributing to their symptoms of burnout. Players who did not experience burnout described positive social

support and open and free communication with coaches and management. They also described that the "positive momentum" (p.10) gained through successful engagement in outside activities provided a protective factor against burnout. The flexibility of outside activities (such as dual career development) was highlighted as important.

Holistic coaching philosophies are also beginning to be identified empirically among elite Australian coaches. For example, Bennie and O'Connor (2010) qualitatively investigated the coaching philosophies of coaches from professional cricket, rugby league, and rugby union. They did this through conducting in-depth interviews with six elite Australian coaches and 25 of their athletes were also interviewed providing the means to contrast and triangulate the data. Through inductive analysis they discovered that humanistic approaches (i.e., involving a commitment to developing the whole person) were common amongst the coaches. It was commonly believed among the coaches that there was a responsibility to develop the whole person rather than take a 'win at all costs' approach. To do this effectively required an understanding of each player's individual needs and to treat them accordingly. In congruence with the athlete studies reported earlier, coach opinion reflected that if you develop the whole person, then this person is more likely to perform for you. Similar to Miller and Kerr (2002) tensions between developing the whole person and the performance imperative were discussed however this conflict appeared to be reconciled in the coaches' minds in the belief that the two goals were mutually beneficial.

Summary

The literature reviewed above communicates a growing belief that supporting the development of the athlete as a whole person and their sense of balance in life is more than just an ethical responsibility for sporting clubs and organisations. There is now a growing body of qualitative evidence that suggests that there will also be a

performance dividend for the athletes and their clubs/employers alike. There are

however some obvious limitations in the extant literature. The first is that although

qualitative research can help us understand the richness of human experience (Corbin &

Strauss, 2008) it needs to be supported by quantitative measures that can show

relationships on a larger scale in a more objective fashion. The second is that there is

thus far a dearth of any quantitative links shown between relevant variables (i.e.,

support for athlete's off-field lives, their sense of work life balance, participation in

dual career development) and objective measures of the way athletes engage with and

perform in their sports. Investigating associations between variables concerning the

athlete's development and well-being as a whole person and variables that measure

athlete engagement and 'productivity' would be a valuable contribution to research in

the field.

Dual career development: Mixed views

Although positive links between support for the whole person and athletic

performance have been reported qualitatively, the link between educational/vocational

development and performance appears to be a little more controversial. There has been

some suggestions in the literature (e.g., Henry, 2013; Park et al., 2012) that

educational/vocational activity may in some circumstances prove a decrement to

performance due to the competing time and cognitive demands placed upon the

athletes, the value the athletes themselves place upon such activities, and the lack of

support received from their athletic environments. For example, Hickey and Kelly's

(2005; 2006; 2008; 2010) investigations around "Getting the Balance Right:

Professionalism, Prudentialism, and Playstations in the Life of AFL Footballers"

reported that some club officials considered that off-field education could be a

distraction from players' football tasks and they merely tolerated these activities as an act of social responsibility. Some players saw their off-field education as something that needed to be complied with however they too held little value towards such activities. However, these studies too have limited generalisability due to their qualitative nature.

Yet an important implication from Hickey and Kelly's (2008) work is that the potential benefits of engagement in any off-field activity (and perhaps not only dual career development) are likely to be mediated by both the value the individual places on that activity and also the support they receive from their athletic environment. As discussed by Chambers et al. (2013), there is a documented tension between the high performance departments of professional sporting clubs (i.e., coaching and sport science) and those responsible for player welfare. Although there is a growing movement towards the holistic support of athletes, not all those involved in elite sport are convinced of its value. The 'regular' human resource and workplace literature may have something relevant to say about the benefits of holistic support on employee engagement and output. This review will therefore turn now towards literature from the general workplace.

A whole of person approach to human performance in the workplace

A study by Watson Wyatt (2002) identified that the human capital index (an index that measures employee mental health, work life balance, and overall company wellness) had a stronger relationship with company performance than the financial figures of two years prior. Grawitch, Gottschalk, and Munz (2006) reported that many organisations are now integrating "seemingly unrelated and novel" (p.129) workplace practices to try to improve their bottom line. They described a movement beyond the use of traditional motivators for employee productivity and commitment such as

money, disciplinary measures, and recognition towards incorporating support for employees' overall health, development, and work/life balance.

Grawitch et al. (2006) synthesised the existing workplace/HR literature and developed the PATH model to a healthy workplace by linking practices, employee well-being, and organisational improvements seen in Figure 3. The PATH model shows a direct interaction between employee well-being and organisational outcomes (such as performance/productivity, absenteeism, & competitive advantage). The model also shows how healthy workplace practices act as a mediator by supporting employee well-being (e.g., motivation, commitment, & mental health) and so having an additional impact on organisational improvements. These relationships are empirically supported and highlight that in contemporary workplaces, initiatives that support employees as whole people beyond the function of their job description, lead to benefits for the organisation.

Work/life balance has been defined as "satisfaction and good functioning at work and at home with a minimum of role conflict" (Clark, 2000, p.751). The ability of an organisation to support the flourishing of their employees in both the work and non-work domains will support feelings of a work/life balance. Conversely, the absence of a work/life balance has been linked with employee burnout (Greenblatt, 2002) which is negatively associated with workplace engagement and which some have argued is the conceptual opposite (Cole, Walter, Bedeian, & O'Boyle, 2012). Beauregard and Henry (2009) conducted a thorough literature review into the link between organisations' work/life balance practices and organisational performance and although they concluded that there is still debate over which mediators are the most relevant, there were consistent positive associations between the presence of work/life balance practices and organisational performance.
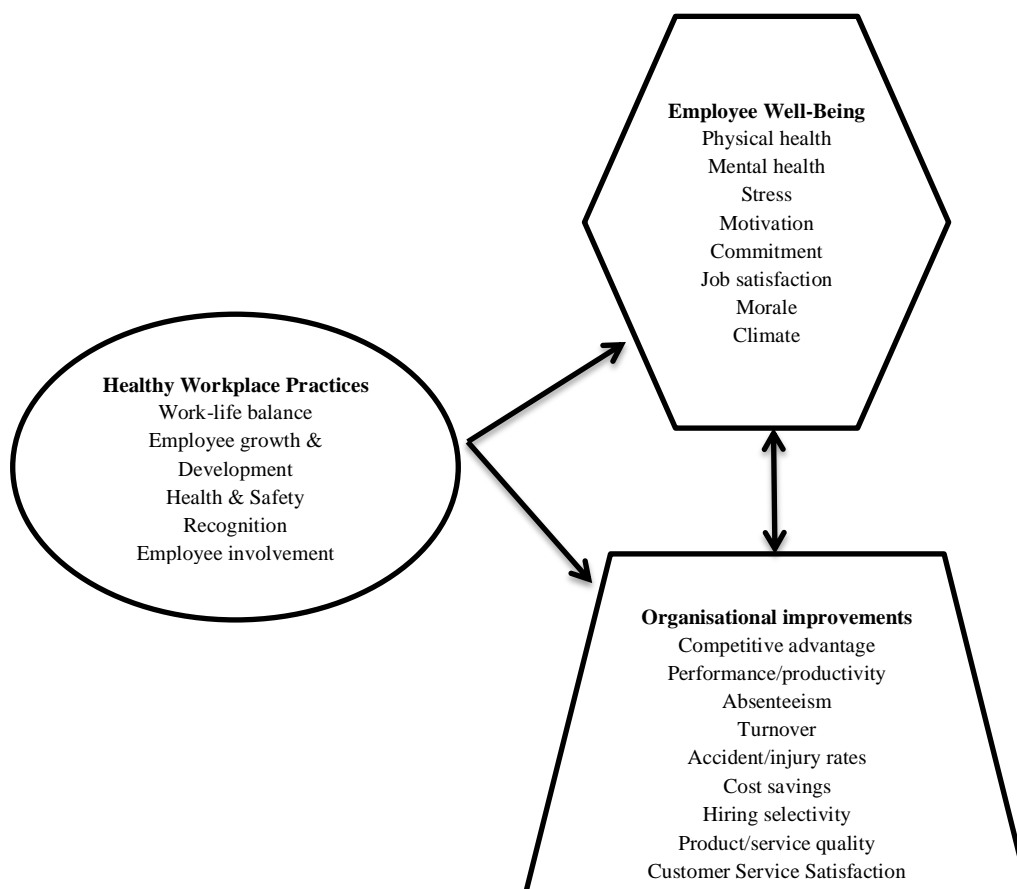
Figure 3. The PATH model. Reproduced from "The Path to a Healthy Workplace: A Critical Review Linking Healthy Workplace Practices, Employee Well-being, and Organisational Improvements," by M.J. Grawitch, M. Gottschalk, and D.C. Munz, 2006, *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research, 58* (3), p.133.

One variable that has gained particular attention within the HR and corporate literature is that of employee work engagement and its influence on productivity. In the workplace setting, Schaufeli, Bakker, and Salanova (2006, p.762) defined engagement as "the vigour, dedication, and absorption one feels for work". Attridge (2009) reviewed the extensive literature that showed higher levels of worker engagement led to higher productivity and lower absenteeism. He also summarised several prominent

antecedents that led to increased employee engagement. They were a company culture of support and openness, opportunities for career growth, and support for the work/life balance and wellness of employees. In this respect, employees' sense of engagement in their work is a surrogate variable for outcomes of increased performance and productivity. Given the significance of the link between employees' engagement in their work and their productivity, it is reasonable to argue that an athlete's level of engagement in their sport is also likely to be associated with their level of productivity (i.e., performance).

Athlete engagement (where the workplace and sport psychology literature meet)

The notion of engagement has also been conceptualised in the athletic setting. Lonsdale, Hodge, and Raedeke (2007) built upon the work of Schaufeli, Bakker, and Salanova (2006) to develop the notion of athlete engagement. Through qualitative interviews with 15 New Zealand based athletes they defined athlete engagement as a "persistent, positive, cognitive-affective experience in sport that is characterised by confidence, dedication, and vigour" (p.464). In building upon the initial qualitative study, Lonsdale, Hodge, and Jackson (2007) developed the Athlete Engagement Questionnaire (AEQ) in the process of which their psychometric analysis identified a fourth dimension, 'enthusiasm'. Thus, the AEQ has four sub-scales that measure the overarching concept of athlete engagement; they are confidence, dedication, enthusiasm, and vigour. The work of Hodge, Lonsdale, and Jackson (2009) showed athlete engagement was associated with flow (i.e., toal immersion in an activity, Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2002, p. 90) which through other research has also been associated with athletic performance (Jackson, Thomas, Marsh, & Smethurst, 2001). Hodge et al. (2009) also showed that the satisfaction of athletes' basic psychological

needs (i.e., feelings of autonomy and competence as conceptualised by Deci and Ryan, 2008) may be viewed as an antecedent to both athlete engagement and flow. Satisfaction of athletes' basic needs (such as expressed in feelings of autonomy, competence, and relatedness) has been shown to be influenced by the support provided by their athletic environment and the staff within it (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003). Consequently, athlete engagement presents as a useful surrogate outcome variable when comparing the impact of interventions on athlete performance.

The AFL as the context of the research

The sport of Australian football or 'Aussie rules' is Australia's indigenous code of football initially developed in Melbourne during the 1850s as a means to keep cricket players fit during the winter (Booth, 2005). The sport quickly grew in popularity and amateur leagues were established in the states of Victoria, South Australia, Tasmania, and Western Australia. The game also spread to the north-eastern states. However, as described by Stewart and Dickson (2007), it struggled to gain as strong a foothold when competing with the popular codes of Rugby League and Union. The Victorian football league (VFL), the leading state based football league, eventually became the basis for an Australian Football League as administrators sought to make it the dominant national competition in Australia. As Andrews (2000) described, the transformation of the VFL to the AFL was a lengthy transition from a parochial and amateur competition to a professional and corporatized sporting brand.

The transformation of the VFL to the AFL was a leading part of what Stewart and Smith (2000) described as Australian sport's transition toward professional, corporately backed, entertainment services for mass consumption on a national scale. The modern AFL, and its clubs, in this sense now exist as a 'mega' sporting

entertainment conglomerate in contrast to a tribal and suburban competition without a strong economic objective (Andrews, 2000; Stewart & Dickson, 2007) . Stewart and Smith (2000) assert that the modern AFL and other professional sports leagues in Australia are reflective of a post-modern consumer based society where commodification, free trade, and competition are valued. It can be argued that many of the 'tribal' based notions of the VFL still remain, through club supporter alliances and they serve an important social function via community meeting points and the dissemination of public health and social order messages (Clarke & Salter, 2010, p.12). At its core however, the AFL is 'big business' that ultimately fulfils an economic imperative within a competitive market. An example of this can be seen in Stewart and Dickson's (2007) recounting of the league's "ground rationalisation" (p.86) initiative which led to the nine Melbourne based teams playing out of one of two 'mega stadiums' as opposed to their former traditional suburban grounds. These stadiums were larger, had better services for fans, and consequently led to greater revenues.

Stewart (2007b) presented the sport-as-business evolutionary phases and features model in the opening chapter of The Games are Not the Same; The Political Economy of Football in Australia. The model depicted here in Table 2 shows the four evolutionary phases as a sport transitions to the corporate stage. What can be seen in this model is a shift in values from amateurism and volunteerism to delivering outputs and building the brand as a sport reaches the corporate phase. Further, the shift from a 'kitchen-table' sporting league that relies on member funds and social club income, to the corporate sporting league where the primary revenue stream comes from brand value and lucrative broadcasting rights is also shown. The structural and management focuses in the corporate phase resemble the contemporary service oriented corporation where there is a heavy focus on policy making, regulation, and measuring all elements

of performance that may affect the brand. For AFL clubs, this means that on-field performance is not the only relevant measure. As Stewart (2007b) described, clubs also need to consider player behaviour, marketability, and also the club's image as a socially responsible and attractive organisation that the fans want to 'buy into'.

The AFL is regularly identified in the literature as Australia's most popular winter sporting competition (Coutts, Quinn, Hocking, Castagna, & Rampinini, 2010; Gray & Jenkins, 2010; Hickey & Kelly, 2008). Stewart and Dickson (2007) reported that the modern day AFL enjoys significantly greater live match attendances and television audiences than any other sporting competition in Australia. The 'nationalisation' of the AFL has opened the way to it becoming a billion dollar industry that contributes strongly to the Australian economy. For example, the most recently signed television broadcast deal was reported to be worth $1.25 billion dollars over five years which represented a figure $369 million better than the previous broadcast deal (Witham, 2011). In 2012 the league expanded to 18 teams across five Australian states and recently the outgoing CEO Andrew Demetriou (2013) reported that the AFL contributed $4.5 billion dollars to the Australian economy in that year alone. The clubs combined employ between 800 to 850 full time professional athletes and numerous 'non-playing' employees in roles such as coaching, sport science, management and administration, marketing, and membership sales. Although the league's substantial expansion and economic development into a billion dollar business has meant higher wages, the increasing professionalization of the AFL has had wider influences on the players than just providing increased financial rewards.

As discussed earlier, professional Australian football players have the opportunity to earn high wages however the industry they work in is particularly fickle. With the average career in the national league only extending for five years, most

Table 2

Sport-as-Business Evolutionary Phases and Features

	Values	Revenue focus	Structural focus	Management focus
STAGE 1 **Kitchen table**	Amateurism Volunteerism	Member funds Social club Income	Management Committee	Sustaining operations
STAGE 2 **Commercial**	Viability of sport member services	Gate receipts Sponsorship	Management portfolios	Marketing of the club
STAGE 3 **Bureaucratic**	Efficient use of sport resources Accountability	Corporate Income Merchandising	Divisions and departments	Improving club efficiency
STAGE 4 **Corporate**	Delivering outputs Building the brand	Brand value Broadcast Rights	Board Policymaking Staff Operations	Increasing Club value Regulating Constituents

Note. Reproduced from "The Political Economy of Football: Framing the Analysis," by

B. Stewart, in B. Stewart (Ed), *The Games are Not the Same: The Political Economy of*

Football in Australia. P.9. Melbourne: Melbourne University Press.

careers will be short lived (Baldwin, 2014). In addition to the training demands and the

risk of physical injuries which often have long-term ramifications beyond their careers

(King, Rosenberg, Braham, Ferguson, & Dawson, 2013), players also have many

expectations placed upon them concerning their professional identities that extend well

beyond the field. For example, the success of the AFL relies heavily on how it is

perceived by consumers and consequently sponsors. This has led to the development of

a strict code of conduct for players, serving the function of protecting the league's

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image (Kelly & Hickey, 2008; Stewart & Dickson, 2007). Many clubs impose curfews, restrictions on the consumption of alcohol, and demand strictly controlled diets whilst focusing on playing results (Kelly & Hickey, 2008). There have even been reports of players' training habits being monitored via global positioning systems (GPS) during annual leave (Pierik, 2013). Such an intrusion of the 'working life' into the employee's 'home life' is unlikely to be rivalled in many other professions with perhaps careers in politics or in the movie world as exceptions. It could be argued, however, that a life-long pension for the politician and the superior earning capacity for the Hollywood actor, in some ways compensate for such public expectations and scrutiny whereas AFL players receive neither pension nor salary benefits to the same level.

Many AFL players have substantial public profiles and much of their personal life is made public via media and social media. Also, as argued by Kelly and Hickey (2010), the modern professional AFL player is expected to be prudently preparing for life after football as part of their professional identity (Hickey & Kelly, 2008). Yet the same authors have also reported issues with the quality of players' engagement in related activities when they have felt forced to do so. Life as a professional footballer within the AFL sports entertainment 'machine', however lucrative, has many risks and requirements that challenge the well-being of the player both in the short and long-term.

It would be hyperbole however to suggest that AFL footballers are merely exploited widgets (albeit briefly well remunerated) as Connor's (2009) thesis suggested was the plight of the modern professional athlete. Rather, they have a strong players' association that advocates for their welfare and fair treatment and; it is fair to acknowledge that the AFL itself projects a face that is also supportive of the players' welfare. The AFL regularly works in collaboration with the Australian Football League's Players' Association (AFLPA) and provides considerable funding for players

and their interests (Clarke & Salter, 2010). Of course, there is likely a public image 'spin off' for the league. However, given their generous support of the AFLPA (i.e., providing over $11 million dollars of funding, Clarke & Salter, 2010) there appears to be genuine concern for the welfare of players. In the following paragraphs, the establishment of the AFLPA, its growing influence on practices concerning its members, and the extensive suite of support provided to AFL players will be discussed.

The Australian Football League Players' Association

The AFLPA (in the form of the VFLPA) was established in 1974 as players came together to campaign for their welfare, workplace conditions, and economic rights (Ryan, 2013a; Stewart & Dickson, 2007). The establishment of the players' association was reflective of the increasing professionalisation and commercialisation of the VFL and the need for players to devote more time to their 'part time job' as a footballer. Given the economic advances of the VFL, the players also sought fair compensation for their efforts. Australia as a nation typically emphasises the concepts of the 'fair go', egalitarianism, and 'mateship' (i.e., friendship as expressed through supporting your fellow man, Feather & Adair, 1999). These values have been echoed in Australia's history of strong unions and their campaigns for workers' rights and the early adoption of the eight hour working day (Australian Council of Trade Unions, ACTU, 2012). In this sense, there are perhaps few better indicators of VFL clubs becoming 'player workplaces' than the establishment of a 'player union'.

The AFPLA mission for player development is to "assist players to realise their `potential through provision of education and training opportunities, and personal support" (Clarke & Salter, 2010, p.34). As described by Alessio (2011), the AFLPA believes that the industry has an obligation to assist players in maximising their careers while still developing themselves as people outside of the game. The AFLPA has grown

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stronger, along with the game itself and has brokered collective bargaining agreements (CBAs) that have supported the welfare of the players (Stewart & Dickson, 2007). The recent 2012-2016 CBA included extensive provisions designed to support the players' welfare both while in the game and beyond (Macgugan, 2011). Some of the current CBA's key features as stated by Demetriou (2011, p.3) are listed below,

Education and personal/professional development:

- The formation of a Joint Industry Education Committee to ensure that education programs have consistent strategies, standards and frameworks across the industry.

- Requirement for clubs to employ a full time, appropriately qualified player development manager

- Requirement for each club to have a fixed day off for players during Monday-Friday each week of the year with four exceptions for scheduling. Any further reasonable exceptions to be approved by AFL/AFLPA

- Requirement for all Clubs to allocate a four hour block per week within schedules for a player's approved personal/professional development activities

Player welfare:

- Best retirement benefits in Australian sport

- Players entitled to minimum 6 week block of annual leave post season

- Enhanced injury benefits to total value of $2-3 million over term

- Past player hardship fund of $250k per annum

- TPD insurance cover increased for players from $500K to $1 million

The AFLPA itself also has an impressive suite of programs that aims to support AFL footballers. It also takes a whole person view of athlete career transition similar to that advocated by Wylleman and Lavallee (2004) aiming to support the educational/vocational, financial, psychological, and psycho-social development of the players. The AFLPA have based their programs around three distinct phases of life as a professional footballer. They are, players coming into the game, players' welfare while in the game, and transitioning out of the game (AFLPA, 2011). Examples of programs in each of these phases are provided below.

Transitioning into the game

- Draft induction camp
- Football apprenticeship (a certificate III level course undertaken by first year players at most clubs to prepare them for life as a professional athlete)
- "Play well" and "Play wise" (mental health, resilience, mental skills, and mindfulness)
- Financial management and planning
- Availability of AFLPA psychologists

Developing in the game

- Work placements
- Education and vocational training support
- Financial management and planning
- Availability of AFLPA psychologists

Transitioning out of the game

- A one-to-one retirement and delisting meeting

- Full PA services for ex-players (one year for rookies, three years for senior listed players)

- Medical support for injuries

- Professional development options

This brief outline of the AFLPA programs serves to identify that AFL players have an extensive systemic support program at their disposal. This is reflective of the ethical obligation that the AFL and the AFLPA believes is owed to the players (AFLPA, 2012). As alluded to earlier in this review however, this support may be problematic at club level due to the competing demands on players and the varying attitudes and values held within an individual club's culture. As Hickey and Kelly (2005) reported in their research, football is often "first, second, and third" (p. 4) in the eyes of both players and the coaching staff. This can mean that initiatives provided by the AFLPA with regard to players' development outside of football are only given token support and even viewed suspiciously as a potential danger to the priority focus on football. As expressed by one of the coaches,

> At the end of the day, they're here to play football. If they can do other
> things, that's fine, but first and foremost they need to perform as footballers.
> I mean, they might be doing alright in a business or in a course, but if they
> aren't getting a kick they're going to come under pressure. Like all the (club
> name) coaching staff, we're in the business of producing a successful
> football team and no matter what else we do, it's the success of our team
> that is going to judge us (Hickey & Kelly, 2005, p.8)

These comments highlight that although there may be a growing argument that the holistic development and well-being of the athlete is linked with performance, if a player is not performing well it is the activities outside of football that come under suspicion first (Chambers et al., 2013). Given that activities such as those of dual career development have also been described as 'positive distractions' (e.g., Douglas & Carless, 2006), there is a need to understand what conditions with respect to the player, the environment, and the activity itself define an off-field activity (dual career or other) that is complementary to football.

The AFLPA and work life balance

There has been an increasing concern from players, the AFLPA, and some notable coaches and executives within football that the player's work life balance is being lost whilst chasing competitive success and that this is to the detriment of the player's short and long-term well-being. For example, Collins (2013) reported that David Parkin, a widely respected former coach, claimed the demands of the modern game were creating 'unbalanced adults'. In the article, Parkin further cited his discussions with current players who described a loss of their love for the game, and activities outside of football being sacrificed for their physiological recovery (due to the increasing physical demands of the game). In the same article, Parkin argued that more training and professional demands will not necessarily mean better on-field results and that supporting a work-life balance may pay some dividends. Sentiments such as these, reports of a reduction in genuine dual career engagement, and also the completion of football/work related tasks in annual leave has coincided with the AFLPA push for a broader and more general idea of work-life balance (Ryan, 2013b, 2013c). As reported by Ryan (2013c), Alessio (2011), and Chambers et al. (2013), although such concerns

are echoed by some club CEOs and coaches, the actual support provided by individual clubs varies.

The player development manager

An important supporter of the holistic development and well-being within an AFL club is that of the Player Development Manager (PDM). As described above, the current CBA requires that each club must have a full-time player development manager. The previous CBA had only denoted that each club should have a staff member who looked after player development. In practice this meant that clubs could either employ someone part-time or pair these responsibilities up with other roles. The player development manager position however is designed to support players' well-being beyond the field and this role has continued to develop and grow within the league as a whole. Alessio's (2011, p.5) report into the recognition of the player development manager within clubs identified that the PDM should,

- Provide a first point of referral for players, coaches and club staff as to the best source of assistance for any player issue.

- Provide an independent person within the club where a player can seek counsel without the fear it will jeopardise their selection in the team.

- Be a person who has an intimate knowledge of the AFL Players' Association Player Development Program and how its services, scholarships and funding can best assist the player and the club.

- Be a person within the club who has a diverse range of skills and experiences to best counsel young players in their off-field endeavours.

- Ensure the smooth transition of players entering and exiting the game.

- Help players to assess and maximise their AFL careers.

Alsessio (2011) also recommended that the PDM should not have any on-field roles or be involved in team selection, as this may make the players reluctant to disclose personal issues through fear that it will interfere with their selection. Further, he identified that the building of trust between the PDM and players is essential. However, this has not necessarily meant hiring an ex-player (especially if they were not suitably qualified). Essentially the PDM role is one of a 'teacher' or 'coach' of player development and an 'officer' of their welfare. The player development manager exists to support the welfare and personal development of players. Apart from Hickey and Kelly's research (2005; 2008) which described some of the challenges PDMs faced in the light of player and coach attitudes concerning holistic development, there has yet to be any investigation into what makes a successful PDM and what kind of club environment enables a person in this role to flourish. Nonetheless, it has become an important role to consider in any investigation into the personal and off-field development and work/life balances of AFL players and their effort and performance on the field.

Personal and environmental considerations

The examination of the AFL, the AFLPA, the PDM role, and various stakeholder opinions reveals that the investigation of any relationship between players' off-field activities, their sense of work/life balance, and their on-field output is likely influenced by a number of variables at both the individual and environmental level. Although it would be impossible to measure every personal and environmental variable that may influence relationships of interest it is important to consider those that are most likely to be relevant as identified in the literature.

Any investigation into the relationship between players' off-field activities and their on-field performance must at least attempt to acknowledge the inherent complexity of the question being asked. Clearly, there first needs to be recognition of the individuality of the player population. Not only will players be of different skill levels and potentials, they will also be at differing stages in their careers, as well as come from vastly different backgrounds, previous experiences and expectations. They will also be functioning within and dealing with a variety of club environments that through their structure and cultural values will be either more or less supportive of the players' holistic development and well-being. Further, these players will be placed in a variety of different external environments (e.g., living arrangements) and immersed in different qualities of activity outside of football. The recognition however, that an individual's behaviour will be influenced by both who they are and their surrounding environment is not new. Theoretical perspectives that might offer insight into these processes necessary for the present investigation are now considered.

Some theoretical perspectives

The psychologist Lewin (1936) is credited with being the founder of an approach that took psychology out of the laboratory into the complexities of the real world. He recognised that behaviour is not a function just of the person nor can it be controlled by the environment alone. Rather, it involves an interaction between both the person and their environment. He therefore formulated the equation B= f (PE), to represent the understanding that all behaviour was a result of the interaction between the person and the surrounding environment. Taking a person in the environment-interactionist view requires acknowledgement of how the AFL club environment and the individual characteristics of the players influence both attitudes and behaviour with

regards to off-field activities, the way in which they are pursued, and under what circumstances these activities may have positive associations with on-field output.

Lewin and life space

Life space is a derivative of Kurt Lewin's (1936) theoretical perspective and represents the total interrelating elements of an environment that affect an individual's behaviour and how their behaviour in turn affects the same life space. In this sense, the way an individual perceives themselves and the surrounding environment will be the key determinant of any behaviour (Lewin, 1951). For example, an AFL player may perceive that they have limited academic ability, little time to engage in dual career development, and the club is not overly supportive of such activities. So he chooses to avoid participating. The avoidance of such activities may only reinforce in the player's mind that it is not an area of importance and further influence the views of other players within the same environment. Alternatively, the player may engage in an activity with token effort only, due to the organisational and cultural expectations of his environment.

A player's perception of the life space will be affected by what Lewin (1951) labelled the general life situation (i.e., their own life history and its effect on their outlook) and the momentary situation (i.e., the present physical, social, and psychological environment). To return to the example of the AFL players' avoidance or 'token effort' in dual career activities, his own perception towards these activities may be influenced by the academic sacrifices he made to become a professional footballer in the first place. Simply put, if past experiences suggest to the player that they only way to succeed as a footballer is to sacrifice academic/vocational development, then this may influence the way he receives encouragement to develop in this domain. Such a

description reflects some of the antecedents of athletes with a foreclosed athletic identity (Brewer et al., 1993). On the other hand, according to the tenets of life space, if adequate and genuine support is provided in the 'momentary situation', the players' view of such activities and effort may be altered. Thus, the momentary situation represents an opportunity for environmental/cultural interventions that may shape player behaviour.

According to the theory, life space is made up of 'regions' that can be social (e.g., a player's relationship with coaches or club staff), physical (e.g., a lack of an appropriate area in the club to work on a dual career activity), or psychological (e.g., player self-concept or motivation with respect to a given activity; Chak, 2002). These regions can influence a player's perception concerning an activity and ultimately the player's behaviour. As described by Christensen and Sørensen (2009) and Rummel (1975), an individual's subjective interpretations of the life space regions are seen as having the most significant influence on behaviour. This also highlights that for any objective set of 'facts' within an environment, there are likely to be multiple subjective interpretations and therefore variance in behaviour. These interpretations of course will be influenced by players' individual characteristics.

The concept of life space also includes a consideration of 'forces' and 'tensions' (Chak, 2002; Lewin, 1936). Tensions, which arise from needs are said to drive goal directed behaviour. To give an example, a player may perceive the need to have a 'mental release' from the pressures of professional football. This creates a tension and they may perceive that a night out at a local bar with friends is an appropriate way to gain a 'mental release'. The linking of this tension to a possible solution (i.e., a night out at the bar) creates what is called a 'positive valence' (i.e., a positive driving force Rummel, 1975). Simply put, the player is motivated to attend the bar. There can

however also be forces that drive the player away from an activity. For example, the player may also be subject to a strict code of behaviour that forbids attendance at bars during the competitive season. This creates a negative valence and the player's attendance or non-attendance of the bar will be the net result of whether the positive or negative valences are strongest. This example simply serves to highlight that any behaviour undertaken by a player will be a result of the competing positive and negative valences that attract and repel that player. This serves as a useful framework for considering players' involvement in off-field activity.

Social, physical, and psychological regions in a player's life space can provide both negative and positive valences with respect to the activities and behaviours a player chooses. Furthermore, a player's perception of these regions (and the resulting positive or negative valences) are influenced by the player's general life situation (i.e., how the player's history influences his outlook). In summary, life space considers the interaction between personal (i.e., individual history, characteristics, needs, and perceptions) and environmental (i.e., social, physical, and psychological regions) influences on behaviour. It allows for a more complex consideration of resultant behaviours and can be used to identify areas in a footballer's world that can be altered or improved in order to change behaviour. Such theoretical insights are useful in conceptualising and understanding relevant personal and environmental influences with respect to research questions such as those that are the focus of this enquiry.

Christensen and Sørensen (2009) provide a rare example of the use of life space theory with respect to player holistic development. They investigated how talented young Danish footballers managed the demands placed upon them in relation to football and education. Twenty five talented Danish footballers between the ages of 15 and 19 participated in the study. Through focus groups and one-on-one interviews they

explored the football environment, further education and training, family and friends, and free time. A deductive-inductive approach was used to analyse the data with Lewin's concept of life space and Schein's (1990) theory of organizational culture used as frameworks. Some of the concepts from Schein's theory will be discussed in greater detail later in this thesis.

Christensen and Sørensen (2009) reported that it was an underlying assumption of the football culture that you had to give it 100% focus. This seemed to compete with the school/government's prevailing cultural belief that gaining an education is the way to a good life. Essentially this created a dilemma between a perceived need to focus almost exclusively on football (i.e., to give 100%) and the need to achieve in school. The opposing values created positive and negative valences in the players' minds with respect to choices around football and education. As it was achievement in football that had the most present psychological relevance and strongest valence, it was education that was sacrificed. This often led to some players dropping out (of school), experiencing disappointment at receiving low grades, and in the case of one participant, experiencing a mental breakdown through trying to manage both domains. For many players, these opposing forces were overcome by doing the bare minimum in education to 'get by' and satisfy the cultural demands of their education system. These results are reminiscent of Hickey and Kelly's findings (2005; 2008). Of course, the cultural values of the education and sports systems were not the only competing valences in the environment. There were also other factors that influenced players' abilities to successfully manage both their sporting and educational dimensions.

In the Christensen and Sørensen (2009) study, those players who perceived they were academically strong, were supported by parents through living at home, and had reduced travel time due to living near the club, managed to please both regions (i.e.,

school and sport) the best. They ultimately perceived their environments as more facilitative as well as having a greater efficacy for educational pursuits in the first place. This study was valuable in identifying factors that influenced the athletes' ability to develop educationally. In taking a Life Space view and at least attempting to investigate the "total interrelating facts" (Lewin, 1936, p.27), the authors were able to identify areas where they may be able to intervene successfully with the athletes (e.g., reducing travel time between institutes, increasing social support, improving sporting club culture etc.). Although the concept of Life Space has had little specific use in the athlete holistic development literature, it has much to offer. Another theory that has built upon Lewin's original work and offers useful perspectives for the present thesis is that of Bronfenbrenner's (1977) bioecological theory of human development.

Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory of human development

The bioecological theory of human development (Bronfenbrenner, 2005) is the product of a career devoted to the study of how personal and environmental factors influence the development of the human organism. Darling (2007) reported that Bronfenbrenner produced 50 hypotheses with respect to human development whilst developing his theory, however these are rarely specifically tested. Similar to Lewin's (1936) field theory which has many complex mathematical equations that are rarely used in research, it is the conceptual ideas and model put forward by Bronfenbrenner that are most often utilised. Darling (2007) argued that his greatest contribution to the field of developmental science was that of drawing attention to the need to study development 'in-situ'. This was in order to address the complex array of personal attributes, social interactions, and contextual factors that influence the person's experiences and therefore also the person's development. Thus, Bronfenbrenner (1977)

argued for the need to study a person's development with as much 'ecological validity' as possible.

Similar to Lewin, Bronfenbrenner (2005) emphasised the importance of the person's subjective interpretations of the environmental context, themselves, and their social interactions with others in shaping that person's development. As described by Krebs (2009), many of Lewin's ideas can be seen in Bronfenbrenner's model. As will be identified in the following paragraphs however, Bronfenbrenner's final conceptualisation extended Lewin's work through its level of detail with respect to personal and environmental influences. It also involved a shift from a focus on behaviour to development. For the purposes of this review the theory offers further conceptual insights into how personal and environmental factors might influence the off-field development of the AFL player.

> Bronfenbrenner (2005, p.107) described the ecology of human development as,
>
> The scientific study of progressive, mutual accommodation, throughout the life course, between an active, growing human being and the changing properties of the immediate settings in which the developing person lives, as this process is affected by the relations between these settings, and by the larger context in which the settings are embedded.

Implicit in this quote is that development occurs over time and is a process of interaction between the human being, their personal attributes, and the various settings in which that being functions. Further, the quote also identifies that these immediate settings where a person operates are also influenced by factors in the broader environmental context.

Bronfenbrenner adapted Lewin's equation to reflect $D = f(PE)$ (or development is a function of the interaction between a person and their environment). Given that

development occurs over time Bronfenbrenner (2005) argued that that this added a further dimension (that of time) to Lewin's original conceptualisation. Taking a life space view however it can be argued that behaviour is often a result of a person's development, which of course occurs over time (Chak, 2002; Christensen & Sørensen, 2009). Given that life space theory considers a person's life history and its effect on the way they perceive themselves and the surrounding environment, these two theories have perhaps more in common than is generally acknowledged. Whether the focus is on development or behaviour, both theories consider both past and present internal and external influences on the person. Bronfenbrenner's model and associated theory is substantially more detailed however. It considers human development with respect to the process, person, context, and time (PPCT) and will be described below with examples of how the relevant ideas may relate to the present investigation.

Development as a proximal process

Bronfenbrenner (1977) believed that the human being is a growth-oriented organism that strives to display competence in various activities. This represents a humanistic view that is also implicit in other theories concerning the development of the human such as self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000) or Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs. As described by Krebs (2009), Bronfenbrenner argued that human competency can be displayed as either an achieved social status, through evaluations by others within a social setting, or the mastery of culturally defined and familiar activities. With respect to the latter point, Krebs (2009) provided an example of an athlete who could develop successfully both in and outside of sport according to cultural norms and expectations. This links with Miller and Kerr's (2002) conceptualisation of personal excellence in sport and beyond. Of course, which specific activities are culturally

sanctioned and whether they are workable propositions are subject to both personal and environmental attributes.

Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006) proposed that development (and thus the display of competences) occurred via "proximal processes" (p.795) which are interactions between the person and their environment (i.e., objects, people, or symbols external to the person). These proximal processes usually occur through "molar" (Krebs, 2009, p.113) activities which is Bronfenbrenner's term for activities that have developmental potential (i.e., ongoing activities that have intent and meaning for the participants, Krebs, 2009, p.118). An example of a molar activity in an AFL setting might be a player's regular engagement in a social activity on the weekend. The meaning, intent, and regularity of the activity are of particular importance as this allows the human organism appropriate time and opportunity to adapt and thus develop within a contextually relevant activity. As previously discussed however, any proximal developmental process will be influenced by personal and environmental attributes.

Personal influences on development

Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006) described three broad types of personal characteristics that were proposed to interact with the proximal developmental process and the surrounding environmental context. They were a person's dispositions, personal resources, and demand characteristics. Dispositions referred to the person's typical emotional responses and attitudes. Some examples of dispositions could include an athlete's impatience (generally considered a developmentally disruptive disposition) or an athlete's ability to delay gratification (generally considered a developmentally generative disposition). The person can simultaneously have generative and disruptive dispositions which will both provide positive and negative motivational forces with respect to a developmental process. In this sense Bronfenbrenner's generative and

disruptive dispositions act in a similar way to Lewin's valences albeit the dispositions are person bound whereas Lewin's valences were to do with elements in the external environment that attracted or repelled a person towards activity (Rainio, 2009). Both concepts highlight the understanding that both personal and environmental aspects can encourage or discourage engagement in an activity or any associated development.

The second personal attribute that Bronfenbrenner described as influencing the developmental proximal processes of the individual was that of resources. Resources (Darling, 2007; Krebs, 2009) are the biopsychological/physiological strengths and weaknesses of an individual that can include factors such as intelligence, health, genetic advantages or deficiencies, and physical fitness. Of course, the importance of these characteristics varies according to the area the person is attempting to develop in. Nonetheless, the concept identifies a source of variance in the person and hence their developmental potential and needs.

The third type of characteristic that Bronfenbrenner described was that of demands. Demands were considered characteristics that either encouraged or discouraged interactions from the surrounding social milieu (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). As argued by Krebs (2009), many of the person's dispositions and resources could also be classified as a demand characteristic dependent upon whether the attribute encouraged either acceptance or rejection by the social environment. Examples of demand characteristics that encourage positive interactions with the social environment include the attractiveness bias (Gray, 2006) or in the case of Australian football, it might be the above average height of a young draft prospect.

Influences of the context (setting)

In addition to the attributes of the person, Bronfenbrenner also identified the importance of context and developed a system for classifying various levels of

contextual factors exerting influence on the individual's development. He developed

several 'systems of context' that were either proximal or increasingly distal to the

person (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 2005). Bronfenbrenner like Lewin (1936) recognised the

individual's subjective interpretation of their surrounding environment as a key

influence on their behaviour (Krebs, 2009). He identified four levels of context with

respect to the ecological environment. The first and most proximal to the person is that

of the microsystem. The microsystem is where the proximal processes of development
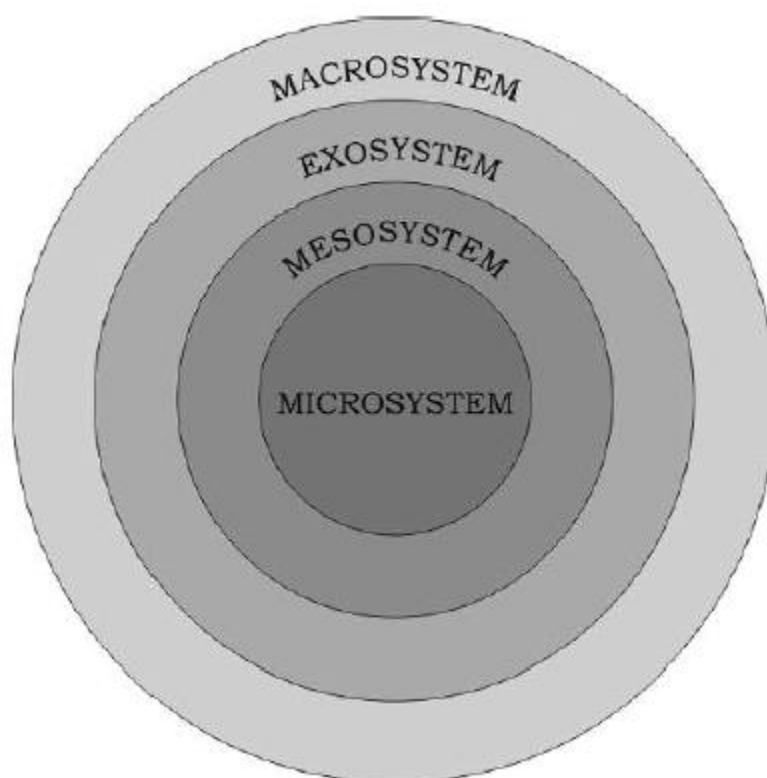
Figure 4. Bronfenbrenner's four levels of bioecological context. Reprinted from

"Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Theory of Human Development and the Process of

Development of Sports Talent," by R.J. Krebs, 2009, *International Journal of Sport*

Psychology, 40 (1), p.112.

actually occur and includes the spaces where the person engages with others in day-to-

day activity and spends the majority of time. In the case of an athlete, for example, this

could be the sporting club but also other settings such as the family home, or a social setting given the 'all inclusive' nature of the model. As can be seen in Figure 4, the microsystem is most proximal to the person given its location at the centre given that this is where the individual interacts and develops on a daily basis.

At the next level is the mesosystem. The mesosystem concerns "interrelations among two or more settings in which the developing person actively participates" (Krebs, 2009, p.118). In the case of an AFL player this could represent the influence that activities in the player's social milieu outside of the club may have upon their functioning within the club. The mesosystem could also include the relationship that an external education provider may have with the player's club, and the experiences the player has meeting the demands of both domains. At the next level to the person in the model is the exosystem. The exosystem can involve several environmental entities/settings that do not directly involve the person, yet still exert influence on the quality of their developmental environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). In the case of an AFL player this could include the AFLPA and the influences they exert on AFL clubs by way of requirements concerning the development and well-being of players.

The most distal system is the macrosystem. The macrosystem encapsulates all the other more proximal systems. It is at this level that national culture or the overarching culture of a sport, exert influence on all the other relevant systems in the model. This could include the ways in which the culture of a sport influences the operation of the governing body or how a national culture influences the values of individuals interacting within a person's microsystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Henriksen, Stambulova, & Roessler, 2010a). All of these 'systems' or levels of context are said to exert influence on the development of the individual. Concerning athletic development, Henriksen (2010) was able to use many of Bronfenbrenner's ideas to

qualitatively investigate successful talent development in three national contexts. He considered macro and micro influences on athletic development and his work will be drawn upon later in this review.

The ecological model allows the consideration of environmental influences at various levels of proximity to the person/athlete in a holistic and 'contained manner' in addition to the individual's personal attributes. All of these personal and environmental elements will affect the developmental process. The model is useful as a 'thought exercise' and conceptual map in considering influences on an athlete's holistic development. Finally, Bronfenbrenner also considered time within his model and this is logical given that development occurs over time as opposed to being an isolated incident (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). In addition to the mere fact that development takes time, Bronfenfrenner (2005) also highlighted that the cultural values of the time period a person develops in and the quality of a person's socially and culturally defined transitions will also influence their progression as a human organism. Finally, Bronfenbrenner (2005) also categorised time as micro (a single episode of a proximal process such as a lesson at school), meso (a period of proximal processes e.g., a week at school), and macro (the events of a larger period such as an athletic season) groupings. Thus, the length of time over which an event occurs may also be an important consideration when considering its significance to the athlete.

The discussion of Lewin and Bronfenbrenner's theories highlight the complex dimensions surrounding the array of personal and environmental variables that influence the behaviour and development of an individual in their various pursuits. Both theories highlight the importance of how individuals perceive both themselves and the environment surrounding them. What these theories also highlight is the complexity and difficulty inherent in understanding and measuring the influence of AFL players'

immersions in off-field activity, the nature and level of the support they receive to become involved, and their level of athlete engagement. Such a 'systems based' and holistic analysis lends itself to qualitative case studies. However, the current state of the extant literature as reviewed above also suggests the need to assemble evidence at a more 'system wide' level. There are several variables that have emerged from the extant literature as the most relevant and suitable for initial quantitative investigation. These variables are discussed in the following section. First considered will be those relating to the athlete, followed by those reflecting key elements of their surrounding environment.

The athlete

There are several athlete (person) based variables that have been identified in the literature. The first is athlete identity and also an athlete's broader self-concept in intellectual, social, and moral domains.

Identity, athlete identity and broader self-concept

Stryker and Burke (2000, p.284) defined identity as the "parts of a self-composed of the meanings that persons attach to the multiple roles they typically play in highly differentiated contemporary societies". Implicit in this definition is the multi-dimensionality of identity and also that individuals will attach different meanings to the various roles (e.g., student, athlete, brother, friend, etc.) that they undertake in their surrounding society. Thus, elements of an individual's self-identity will vary in their salience and importance placed upon it by the individual concerned (Côté, 2009; Grove, Fish, & Eklund, 2004; Hardy & Moriarty, 2006). In this sense, as described by Stryker and Burke (2000), the different elements that make up the person will be organised in a hierarchy that is shaped by the person's experiences in the surrounding environment. As

summarised by Fraser (2008), an individual's self-identity develops and is maintained

by a complex interaction between the person's social experiences and that person's own

cognitions and emotions. As a person's identity influences the importance they place

upon certain activities and thus the effort and time they dedicate to them, it is an

important construct to consider when adopting a person in environment view of

behaviour.

Much of an individual's identity formation is said to occur during adolescence

and young adulthood. Erikson's (1980) stages of psycho-social development have been

broadly influential and were also incorporated into Wylleman and Lavallee's (2004)

developmental model of career transitions. Erikson (1994) proposed eight identity

'crises' or challenges throughout the life span with particular challenge occurring

during adolescence when youth are typically attempting to gain a sense of personal

identity as opposed to role confusion. During this phase adolescents will typically

explore multiple roles as encouraged by those in their surrounding society, and

particularly with respect to activities where the individual shows talent and activities

that are 'culturally sanctioned'. A review by Côté (2009) of identity formation in

adolescence summarised James Marcia's expansion of Erikson's work. Marcia

proposed that an individual's identity status could either be diffuse (typified by low

commitment to any identity and a lack of present and future direction), foreclosed

(where a commitment to an identity and related role has been embraced with little

exploration or open-mindedness to other roles), moratorium (where a person is

exploring multiple roles without a firm commitment to any), and identity achievement

where a person has overcome the 'identity crisis' and has 'arrived' at an identity

(hopefully multi-faceted) and has committed to its related roles.

A diffuse identity status is considered the least mature and 'identity achievement' considered the most mature state (Côté, 2009). Identity moratorium is considered a typical part of the adolescent process of identity formation allowing some experimentation before finally settling into roles that the person is most comfortable with. This period however can be accompanied by anxiety and uncertainty, typical of the adolescent phase of life. The state of identity foreclosure, despite being considered more mature than a diffuse identity (Côté, 2006) can have drawbacks especially when the person has low self-complexity due to a lack of exploration and the failure to develop a multi-dimensional sense of self. Linville (1985, 1987) identified that those with low self-complexity are more susceptible to negative psychological reactions to failures or setbacks in their most highly prioritised identity domains (e.g., as when an elite athlete is 'cut' from the team). In contrast, individuals with a multi-faceted identity are more protected when experiencing difficulty in one aspect of their identity. Individuals who have explored multiple identities before settling on the aspects that primarily represent their conceptualisation of self are more likely to have a sense of multi-dimensionality than one who has experienced an early foreclosure (Côté, 2006).

Moving into young adulthood (where professional footballers are mostly located), Erikson (1994) identified the key identity crisis as being in the need to form intimate relationships as opposed to feeling a sense of social isolation or experiencing only shallow relationships. In a 'perfect world', the young adult now has a coherent sense of their personal identity and is looking to connect with others at a deeper level. It is important to note though that Arnett (2000) has proposed a new period, "Emerging Adulthood" (p.469) which is an extended period (beyond adolescence) of identity formation, role experimentation, and the development of world views. Arnett (2000) argued that in the contemporary post-industrialised western world, favourable economic

conditions have made an extension of this period of emerging adulthood possible. Previously, young people had been constrained into full time careers, marriages, and mortgages soon after completing their high school education. Now this process most often tends to be delayed in affluent western individualistic cultures. The case of professional athletes however is somewhat different, as they typically have transitioned into a highly committed professional role at a time when many of their same aged peers are entering a relatively 'free' period of exploring multiple identities (Côté, 2006, p.87). They have already invested and specialised (Côté et al., 2007; Stambulova, 1994) heavily into their athletic role as a teenager, meaning there is a risk of a level of foreclosure, or, adoption of an excessive athlete identity with risks for their holistic development and well-being.

Athlete identity

Cecić-Erpič, Wylleman, and Zupančič (2004) have described how the substantial investment needed for the athlete role can often come at the cost of developing and flourishing in other areas of life such as educational and social development. Through this sustained investment in the athlete role, professional athletes often develop a strong 'athlete identity' (Brewer et al., 1993). This strength of athlete identity has been shown to be both a help and a hindrance for athletes and their progress through life as will be discussed in the following.

Athlete identity has been associated with increased effort, commitment, and higher levels of sporting performance (Brewer et al., 1993; Grove et al., 2004). For example, Horton and Mack (2000) examined the associations between strength of athletic identity, performance, and life priorities amongst a sample of marathon runners. They recruited 236 runners (176 male, 60 female) ranging from 19 to 72 years of age

and of amateur to semi-professional status. Participants were given questionnaires including the Athlete Identity Measurement Scale (AIMS-10, Brewer et al., 1993) and the life roles inventory (Stryker & Serpe, 1994) which considers the psychological centrality of six life roles (e.g., athletic, family, friendship, dating, academic, and extracurricular activities in the case of college students). They also measured runners' levels of commitment to the sport and running performance by way of personal best times. The results showed that strength of athlete identity was positively associated with better personal best times ($r = .17$, p <.05). Moderate correlations (ranging from .35 to .47, p <.001) were also found between AI and all five subscales of the sports commitment scale (Scanlan, Simons, Carpenter, Schmidt, & et al., 1993) suggesting that those with a stronger athlete identity are more likely to have higher levels of commitment to their sport.

Interestingly, in the Horton and Mack (2000) study, high AI and low AI participants did not differ significantly in their ratings of the importance of life roles other than the athletic (e.g., family, academic/occupational, etc.) and this was perhaps due to their amateur status. Although runners in the study considered these other areas of life important, associations were reported between AI and negative social consequences ($r = .32$, p <.001) such as decreased time with family and friends, and general negative consequences ($r = .16$, p <.05) such as decreased occupational performance, susceptibility to illness, and financial difficulties. Given that to train and compete in a marathon (even at an amateur level) requires a significant amount of training and investment, it could well be that the requirements and culture surrounding the participation in marathon running meant that these other aspects of their life were neglected despite the value the participants held for these areas.

Although strength of athlete identity may be associated with greater effort and performance 'on the field', it appears that it may be related to difficulties in developing in other domains and how they cope with challenges of athletic retirement. In the following paragraphs the association of potential problems with athlete identity are discussed both during the athletic career, and beyond.

During the athletic career

Despite the suggestion in some literature that a strong athlete identity can cause problems for the athlete whilst they compete, the evidence is inconclusive with respect to many of the issues. For example, in the earlier literature, athlete identity was proposed to be related to a lack of alternative career exploration, career decision making self-efficacy, and development (Albion & Fogarty, 2005). More recent literature suggests that this may not be the case (Fogarty & McGregor-Bayne, 2008). Recent research has shown positive links between strength of athlete identity and decision making and exploration around careers (Cabrita, Rosado, Leite, Serpa, & Sousa, 2014). A common limitation to such conclusions has been the lack of consideration of other facets of the athlete's identity and their environment that may influence their development 'beyond the field'.

Albion and Fogarty (2005) investigated the influence of athlete identity on career decision making among 226 (50.8% male) high school aged Australian elite athletes from various team and individual sports. Using the AIMS-10 and the Career Decision Difficulties Questionnaire (CDDQ) they discovered small to moderate yet statistically significant associations between athlete identity and dysfunctional myths (i.e., believing that because they were an athlete they would simply 'fall' into a good job), general career indecisiveness, a lack of knowledge about possible occupations, and where to seek advice on careers. All of the correlations ranged between .15 and .27 (P

<. 05) with dysfunctional myths having the strongest association. Interestingly though, the athletes in this study did not differ significantly on any of these measures in comparison with a cohort of same aged Australian secondary students, except for a lack of motivation to make a career decision. It is therefore possible that much of the athletes' career decision issues may have been more related to their adolescence as opposed to their athlete identities.

More recently, athlete identity has also been shown not to be associated with career development issues in the case of athletes who are still involved in their sport. Fogarty and McGregor-Bayne (2008) investigated the influence of athlete identity on both career decision making difficulties and career decision making self-efficacy among 117 elite Australian athletes ($M = 21$ years, $SD = 5.0$) involved in various team and individual sports. Their results showed no significant association between AI and career decision making difficulties or self-efficacy. Similar results have also been reported in other studies (Brown, Glastetter-Fender, & Shelton, 2000; Brown & Hartley, 1998; Kornspan & Etzel, 2001). More recently, Cabrita et al. (2014) discovered that AI had positive associations ($r = .22$, $P < .01$) with career decision making self-efficacy amongst a sample of 153 Portuguese (M age $= 17.9$ years, $SD = 2.8$), predominantly male elite athletes from various team and individual sports.

The more recent trend of studies to show either positive or no significant associations between AI and the athlete's career development and exploration has been suggested by Fogarty and McGregor-Bayne (2008) as possibly due to many athletes now participating in career development programs that encourage them to prepare for life after sport. Further, at a fundamental level AI does not measure other aspects of self-identity (e.g., academic self-concept) that may influence the individual's openness to dual career activities outside of sport. Cabrita et al. (2014) suggested that the global

confidence reflected in a strong athlete identity may also support the athlete in exploring and developing in other domains. There may also be a simpler explanation that, given a strong AI has associations with athletes' performances (e.g., Brewer, Selby, Under, & Petttpas, 1999; Horton & Mack, 2000), high achievement in a prioritised domain may make the athlete more comfortable to develop a dual career. Further, as identified and discussed in the research of Albion and Fogarty (2005), a strong athlete identity does not necessarily mean a foreclosed identity where the athlete is not open to the exploration of other roles. Brown et al. (2000) reported that although identity foreclosure, as measured by a sub-scale of the Objective Measure of Ego-Identity Status (Adams, Shea, & Fitch, 1979), had a negative association with career decision making self-efficacy ($r = -.177$, $P < .05$) athlete identity showed no relationship of note. Furthermore, the same study reported only a weak positive correlation between identity foreclosure and athlete identity.

In addition to a strong athlete identity not necessarily indicating foreclosure, evidence is emerging to suggest that a salient athlete identity does not preclude an athlete from maintaining a multi-dimensional self-concept. A recent study by Fraser (2012) examined the identity profiles of 917 elite Australian athletes ($M = 19.3$ years, $SD = 4.9$) involved with either national or state academies and found that their athlete identities operated largely independently of other aspects of their self-concept. This study measured the social, moral, and intellectual domains of athlete's self-concept as measured by the Self-Description Questionnaire III (Marsh & O'Neill, 1984). The sample had mean AIMS-10 scores beyond the mid-point of the scale suggesting salient athlete identities. Participants also generally reported feelings of efficacy and importance with respect to other life domains. These findings suggested that athletes

can maintain a strong athlete identity whilst also developing competence in and ascribing importance to other areas of life.

There has also been some suggestion in the literature that strength of athlete identity may be associated with burnout. However, Goodger, Gorley, Lavallee, and Harwood's (2007) systematic review into correlates of burnout could only identity three studies that considered athlete identity with mixed results. As suggested in Cresswell and Eklund's (2007) study on professional rugby union players, maintaining a life outside of sport and being involved in non-sport activities in a meaningful way is said to protect against sport burnout. Rather than try to decrease the athlete identity, these activities allow the athlete an escape from the sporting domain as well as the chance to develop the other aspects of their self-concept. Maintaining a multi-faceted identity and interests outside of sport is also recommended in the Stambulova et al. (2009) position stand on athlete career transition. Although a strong athlete identity appears to support athletic effort and performance in the present, there is mixed evidence with respect to its potential to harm or help athletes in other domains.

Beyond the athletic career

The evidence base for athlete identity being associated with difficulties for athletes upon retirement is more conclusive. Park et al. (2012) in their systematic review on athletes' transitions out of sport identified 35 studies that investigated athlete identity and athletic retirement. Thirty four of these studies identified a negative association between either a strong athlete identity or identity foreclosure and the quality of athletes' transitions out of sport. In the same review, environmental factors such as involvement in a support programme (whilst competing and beyond), psycho-social support, balance of life while competing, in addition to the athlete engaging in career development were all identified as having positive associations. Given

professional athletes' focus on their sport, it is unlikely that they would have a weak athletic identity. What can be seen in the literature is that other variables can mitigate their chances of experiencing trouble on their retirement from their sport, namely, other aspects of the person (e.g., their broader self-concept and coping style), the surrounding environment, and the non-sport activities they immerse in (see Table 1. for a summary of the Park et al. systematic review results). In addition, the strength of athlete identity appears to decline with age (Martin et al., 2014), perhaps signifying that given the opportunity, most athletes will begin to diversify.

This section has highlighted that AI can become problematic upon retirement if the person has little else beyond their sport and has not been supported to experience other life dimensions. While the athlete is competing, AI appears to have a reciprocal relationship with performance however this does not necessarily mean that athletes' identities must be foreclosed or that they cannot participate in other activities in the present that might offer benefit in both the present and future.

Broader self-concept

Côté (2009) reviewed two major streams of research concerning the development of the self, specifically identity theory and the development of self-concept (i.e., 'a person's perceptions of him or herself', Marsh & Shavelson, 1985, p.107). Through synthesising the literature in both these traditions, he argued that an individual's self-concept is the subjective self-opinion of their abilities in role related behaviours and exists as "first order schema content" (Côté, 2009, p.290) related to what he considered the second order domains of an individual's personal and social identities. Under this conceptualisation, self-concept is the core of an individual's identity and is based upon the individual's reflection on their behaviour in various activities. The person gravitates towards certain activities where self-concept is

consolidated and where the person attaches meaning, importance, and thus commits to roles and activities as their identity forms and consolidates. Both the 'first order schema' and perceived importance notions of self-concept and identity are encapsulated in Marsh and O'Neill's (1984) Self-Description Questionnaire III (SDQ-III), a widely used measure of self-concept (Fraser et al., 2008).

The SDQ-III (Marsh & O'Neill, 1984) was the third developed version of the self-description questionnaire based upon Shavelson, Hubner, and Stanton's (1976) multi-faceted and hierarchical model of self-concept. The instrument asks participants to declare their level of agreement with personal statements about, their physical, social, moral, emotional, and intellectual self-concepts (Hardy & Moriarty, 2006). Individuals completing the SDQ-III give a rating both to the accuracy of each statement and the importance of that statement with respect to their overall self-concept. These accuracy and importance ratings are sometimes considered individually but also together by calculating a 'self-concept cross-product' as can be seen in the work of Hardy and Moriarty (2006). These cross-products provide a cumulative weighting of the participants' perceived abilities in each domain together with the importance they ascribe to them with respect to how they feel about themselves.

The original version of the questionnaire contains 136 items that explore these areas of self-concept extensively. The SDQ-III in its original version is one of the most psychometrically sound multidimensional instruments of self-concept available (Fraser et al., 2008). To use an instrument with 136 items however is often impractical for research purposes and so Marsh and O'Neill,(1984) developed the Self-Description Questionnaire-III summary items (SDQ-III-SI) which validated the use of a single item to measure each of the 12 constructs, thus creating a 'short-form' more practical to many research purposes.

The SDQ-III has been used to study several athletic populations and has been useful in understanding more about how athletes' see themselves outside of their sport. For example, Hardy and Moriarty's (2006) investigation of 506 Irish university students (of which 183 were high level amateur athletes) provided some evidence that this cohort 'discounted' the importance of domains where they perceived they had limited ability. This was seen as a protective mechanism for individuals' global self-concept/self-esteem. For an AFL player, this could mean, for example, that perceiving he had limited mathematical ability, the attribution of limited importance to this domain would be a means to protect his overall self-concept. It is then plausible that this may deter the player from attempting dual career activities that involved mathematics.

An athlete's physical/sporting self-concept has been shown to be associated with athletic performance and this is consistent with the links between AI and athletic performance. Jackson, Thomas, Marsh, and Smethurst (2001) showed that athletic self-concept and the use of performance strategies predicted athlete flow (dispositional, R^2 = .64, F (14, 220) = 27.47, $p = <$ .0000; state, R^2 = .44, F (23, 183) = 6.33, $p = <$.0000), and flow in turn predicted athletic performance (R^2 = .46, F (9, 196) = 18.70, $p = <$.001) as measured by athletes' self-ratings of their performance.

Career stage

Consistent with Wylleman and Lavallee's (2004) developmental model of transitions faced by athletes, there is evidence that the challenges athletes face on and off the field varies as a function of their 'stage of career. In the case of AFL players, Kelly and Hickey (2006) identified three career stages. They were; early (0-4 years), middle (4+ to 8 years), and late (8+ years). They also illuminated experiences related to each career stage. For example, early career players described sacrificing their

education to make it on to an AFL list, the shock and fatigue associated with adjusting

to training demands, which made it difficult to engage in much else outside of football.

Middle career players described a feeling of having 'made it' as an AFL footballer and

for some, this meant they were more open to pursuing off-field interests and education

while for others this further solidified the need to almost exclusively focus on football

given the financial incentives. Such a finding further reflects variability in players'

athlete identities. The late career players felt privileged to have had a long career at the

top level and many were trying to 'hang on' in their careers as long as possible. They

generally recognised that their careers were coming to an end; nonetheless, the players

in this study generally believed that they would have plenty of time to consider

retirement when it came. Similar to the variability found among middle career players,

there were also examples of players actively seeking guidance and preparing for life

after football.

Hickey and Kelly's work (2006) highlights that players experience different

challenges both on and off the field at different stages of their careers. The career stage

'variable' is then a relevant consideration in any examination of how the 'non-sport'

elements of player's lives may influence their performances.

To summarise, it is probable that athlete identity will play a role in

understanding the influence that athletes' immersions in off-field activity have upon

their on-field engagement and performance. Players' broader identity beyond the

athletic role may also prove to be important. An athlete's broader identity will be

influenced by that athlete's self-concept and an athlete's self-concept may tell us much

about that person's orientation toward an activity. In addition, career stage has been

identified as a potentially important variable as the needs of players and thus their

orientations towards off-field activity will vary across the professional career lifespan.

Activity

In addition to the variables concerning the individual players themselves, it is important to consider the sort of non-football activities that these players engage in. There are players who both do and do not engage in dual career development and there will be differences in the amount of time spent in such activities. Similarly, the recreational and social habits of players are likely to vary. To the author's knowledge there has yet to be an academic investigation into the off-field activity profiles of AFL players. Both the type and time spent in relevant off-field activities are likely important variables to consider in any investigation concerning the influence of engagement in off-field activities on players' engagement in their football.

Supportive environments

In the drive for enhanced performance and in the support of athlete welfare, attention in the literature has recently turned to understanding the influences of the surrounding environment. Fletcher and Wagstaff (2009) argued that given elite level athletes develop within complex sporting organisations and environments, the use of organisational psychology can offer much in the way of identifying factors external to the athlete that contribute to performance. They identified six lines of inquiry with respect to organisational issues and two of these, "organisational success factors in sport and business" (p.428) and "performance environments in elite sport" (p.428) are of particular interest to this thesis. At the core of these lines of inquiry was that the influence of organisational structure and culture on athletic performance needed greater examination.

In extending Fletcher and Wagstaff's (2009) ideas, Wagstaff, Fletcher, and Hanton (2011) proposed the value of applying concepts from Positive Organisational

Running head: AFL PLAYER OFF-FIELD ACTIVITY AND ATHLETE ENGAGEMENT

Psychology in Sport (POPS). POPS is informed by previous theory concerning organisational psychology and the positive psychology 'movement'. As described by Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000), positive psychology is concerned with the psychological study of the conditions that lead to human flourishing. This line of inquiry is in contrast to much of the early psychology research that has focussed on the pathology of the human mind (i.e., psychological suffering and potential remedies). The central tenets of POPS underpin Fletcher and Wagstaff's (2009) delineation of the study of successful performance environments in elite sport and associated organisational success factors. In the context of the present thesis, this suggests the value of a focus on aspects of professional AFL clubs that lead to players flourishing in both their on and off-field lives. Such an approach would be a departure from previous reports on AFL clubs' support for player off-field lives (Alessio, 2011; Hickey & Kelly, 2008; Kelly & Hickey, 2008). Previous efforts have primarily highlighted shortfalls in club functioning and culture. Although such studies have been valuable in identifying issues concerning the holistic support of players it is argued here that there is now a need for positive examples as a basis for the investigation of club support across the league.

Descriptions of positive environments in sport are beginning to emerge in the literature, particularly with respect to athletic development and performance. Examples can be seen in Henriksen, Stambulova, and Roessler's (2010a; 2010b, 2011) investigations into successful Scandinavian athlete talent development environments. Henriksen et al. used a holistic ecological approach which incorporated Bronfenbrenner's (2005) bio-ecological theory of human development and Schein's (1990, 2010) levels of organisational culture to explore complex interactions between athletes and their environments that contributed to successful development. The authors considered micro, macro, athletic, and non-athletic influences on athletes within the

Athletic Talent Development Environment (ATDE) and also the factors (i.e., the pre-conditions, processes, and organisational culture) that contributed to the success of an organisation. At the micro level, this related to the spaces where athletes spent their daily lives within both athletic and non-athletic domains (e.g., the sporting club, dual career activity, coffee shop etc.). At the macro level this considered the influence of sporting bodies, educational institutions and both sporting and national cultures. In applying this approach to environments that were considered successful in producing high performing athletes, they were able to provide a context specific 'blueprint' for the support of athletic development, one that went beyond merely describing coaching strategies or the coach athlete relationship.

To illustrate this approach further, Henriksen et al. (2010a) explored a successful Danish sailing talent development environment through interviews, participant observation, and the analysis of club documents. Their analysis sought to identify the success factors within the club in light of the environmental settings (i.e., micro, macro, sporting and non-sporting) within which the athletes developed. The success of the talent development environment was attributed to an organisational structure which allowed: regular interaction between the 'prospects' (i.e., young aspiring sailors) and elite members of the national team; regular training and exposure to high level competition without the specific goal of winning, and; an open process of learning via knowledge sharing between the coach, elite athletes, and prospects. These processes were supported by the organisational culture where the espoused values of teamwork, knowledge sharing, and having fun were underpinned by a series of coherent and complementary basic cultural assumptions (Schein, 2010). These assumptions concerned: the importance of teamwork in enhancing the performance of the group's members; the importance of individual autonomy and responsibility in athletic

development; the duty elite members had in developing the prospects; the assumption that individuals could always improve, and; that open knowledge sharing led to the improvement of all. Observations of the daily behaviours of the prospects, coach, and elite athletes showed them to be consistent with these values and assumptions, mainly through the way they worked together as a coherent group.

As described by Schein (1990), organisational culture is reflective of the way an organisation has solved its problems of external adaptation (e.g., selling a product in the market place or competing in a national league) and internal integration (e.g., organisational functioning in order to produce a 'saleable' product, or a successful team). Drawing on theory that pays credit to the interaction between person and environment in producing behaviour (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Lewin, 1936) and the micro and macro (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006) environmental influences, Henriksen et al. (2010a) were able to go beyond mere description of what made the Danish sailing environment successful. Their study considered issues of external adaptation (e.g., lack of funding from sailing federation and schools and a national culture that supports the rights of individual development) and internal integration (i.e., how the club will solve the problem of developing its athletes in light of macro-environmental influences). The club's approach to team work and open knowledge sharing as well as individual responsibility and autonomy could be seen as a means to overcome the lack of resources but also with respect to the national culture that supports the rights of the individual with respect to their flourishing. In this sense, the elite athletes had a 'duty' to support the development of the prospects and the groups focus on teamwork and knowledge sharing helped solve the problem of a lack of resources and funding. This perspective can explain why the club's particular processes and culture worked within the Danish sailing setting.

There remains a need to understand, in the AFL environment, what constitutes the successful support of player off-field development and well-being and how this can be reconciled with respect to the on-field performance goals of the clubs. A research design that allows the consideration of the organisational culture, club processes, and sporting and non-sporting influences in the micro and macro environments (Henriksen et al., 2010b) would be well placed to do this. As discussed earlier in this review, there is a growing belief that the holistic support of athletes (i.e., on and off the field) carries a performance benefit for the player (Douglas & Carless, 2006; Price et al., 2010) however there is little description of how this support can be integrated into the functioning and culture of a professional sporting club.

Aims of the thesis

The present thesis aims to explore the relationship between AFL players' participation in off-field activities and their on-field engagement as footballers. Several relevant variables of the person have been identified in the review and also the need to understand the surrounding club environment that the players are immersed in. This inclusion of personal and environmental variables identified in the literature has led to a series of 'sub-aims' that will allow a more holistic, interactive, and ecologically valid approach to exploring players' involvement in off-field activity and its possible relationship with their on-field engagement as footballers. The 'sub-aims' listed below will seek to explore some of the many questions that have been raised in the literature review.

Aim: To investigate the relationship between AFL players' participation in off-field activities and their on-field engagement as footballers.

Sub aims

1. Investigate a club culture identified as supportive of player off-field activities and development and identify and confirm relevant personal and environmental variables to be sourced for the ongoing investigation

2. Identify the off-field activities AFL players participate in and the purpose of these activities

3. Understand relationships between professional AFL players' athlete identities, their broader self-concepts and participation in off-field activities

4. Understand the influence of club environments on off-field activity

Chapter Three: Research design and overarching methodology

Introduction

Any investigation into the relationship between players' off-field activities and their levels of engagement in their work as a professional footballer is inherently complex. Clearly, such an investigation first needs to recognise the individuality of the players themselves. Not only will players vary in their personal attributes and characteristics but they will also be at differing stages in their careers, as well as come from vastly different backgrounds. They will also be operating within a range of differing environments, most important of which will be the individual club that they work for. There also needs to be a consideration of the many activities that players may become involved in as their choice of social, recreational, and educational activities may also influence the way in which they engage with their working life. The variables listed above are just some of those that may be relevant. The list of significant personal and environmental attributes could indeed be extensive. Given that the present investigation is relatively novel, particularly with respect to an AFL player population, an overarching conceptual framework and a heuristic methodology are needed.

A conceptual framework to guide the investigation

Andrew, Pedersen, and McEvoy, (2011) and Miles and Hubberman (1984) have argued for the importance of developing a conceptual framework when analysing complex phenomena. Figure 5 outlines the initial conceptual framework used in the present thesis.
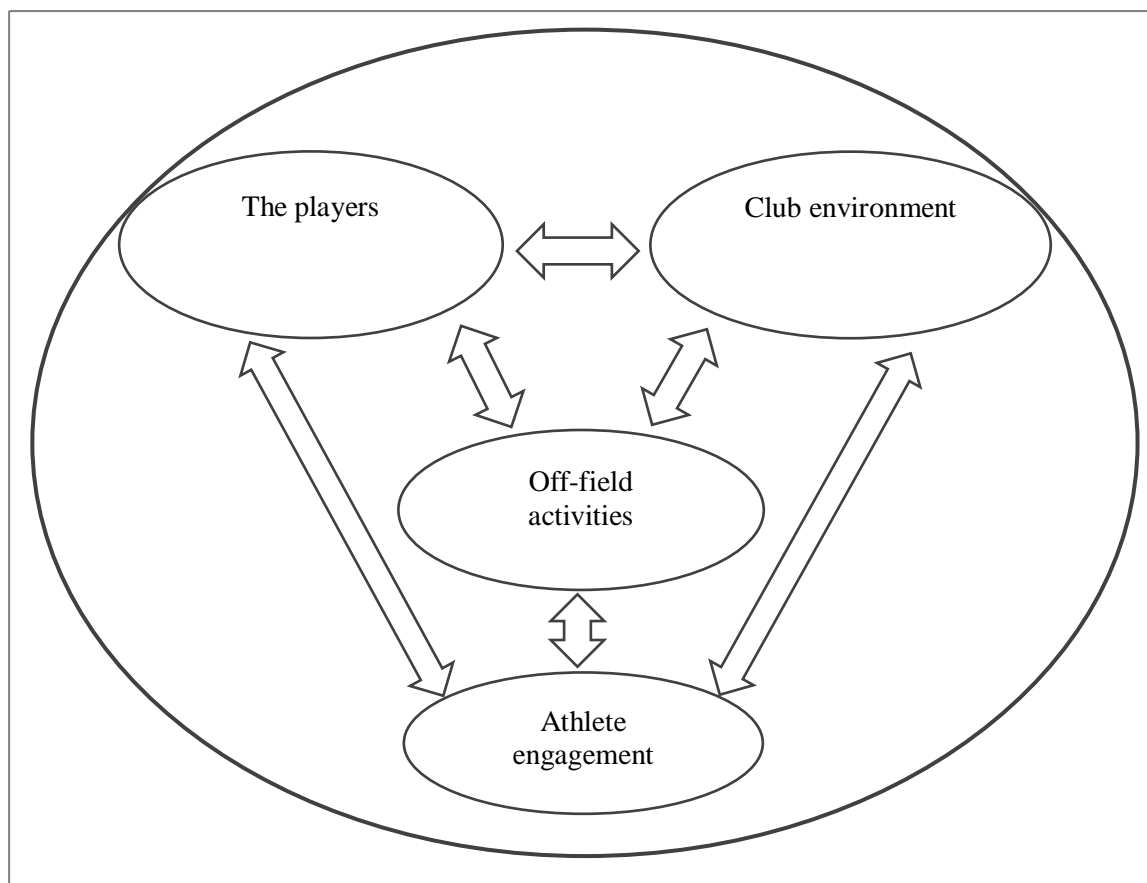
Figure 5. A conceptual framework for the relationship between players' off-field activities and athlete engagement**.**

In line with a view that behaviour is a result of the interaction between a person and their surrounding environment, variables that represent both the person and their environment provide a starting point. The dependent variable of interest in this thesis, athlete engagement (as measured by the AEQ, Lonsdale, Hodge, & Jackson, 2007) will be a product of the interaction between these. An intervening group of variables will elaborate the 'off-field activities' that players participate in, whether they represent, for example, a dual career activity or more recreational purposes. The Double headed arrows that connect the players, club environment, off-field activity, and athlete engagement recognise the interactive nature of the variables located within these spheres. Finally, these groupings are bounded by a larger circle that gives recognition to

the fact that any relationships occur within a wider cultural and environmental context (Henriksen et al., 2010a). Consideration of this wider context will provide a necessary framework for the discussion of relevant findings within this thesis.

The conceptual framework then provides a 'blue print' for the ongoing investigation. The variables can then be sourced and mapped according to the relationships proposed within the figure queried. Hypotheses tested and emergent statistical models can be expected to evolve in the ongoing analysis. Hence, it is important that the specific design of the study be sufficiently flexible to support an open-ended enquiry and exploration.

Study design

The present thesis seeks to be innovative. It aims to identify relevant features of an AFL club's organisational culture (Henriksen et al., 2011; Schein, 2010; Wagstaff et al., 2011) that will be supportive of player off-field development and immersion in off-field activity. It aims to explore the range and nature of footballers' engagement in off-field (i.e., unrelated to their roles as footballers) activity and the meaning players associate with these activities. It also aims to identify and illuminate variables that are most likely to be important in understanding relationships between participation in off-field activity and levels of engagement in football. Such aims suggest the use of qualitative methods to generate 'rich data' required to provide initial understanding in what is both a novel and complex line of inquiry.

The present thesis also aims to illuminate the relationship between players' participation in off-field activities and engagement in football in a more comprehensive way than can be achieved by case study alone (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2010; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). This suggests a need to identify and explore relationships through

a sample that is representative of the wider AFL population. Thus, there is a need for an overarching methodology that supports the exploration of a relatively uncharted area of investigation, adds to available knowledge, and enables the testing of some emergent hypotheses.

Mixed methods

Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009) described mixed methods researchers as the "third research community" (p.4) which has emerged in recent years, providing an alternative research focus to those who are primarily quantitatively oriented (e.g., post-positivist/positivist social scientists) and those who are qualitatively oriented (i.e., mostly constructivist). They argued that mixed methodologists are interested in both narrative and numeric analyses as they seek to find solutions to their research problems within a pragmatic (i.e., 'what works) world view. The pragmatism of mixed methods research is also commonly mentioned in other mixed methods literature (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, & Turner, 2007; Yvonne Feilzer, 2010). Johnson et al. (2007, p.125) defined pragmatism in mixed methods well when they stated,

> Pragmatism offers an epistemological justification (i.e., via pragmatic epistemic values or standards) and logic (i.e., use the combination of methods and ideas that helps one best frame, address, and provide tentative answers to one's research question[s]) for mixing approaches and methods.

Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009) further argued that mixed methods in essence provides a 'circuit breaker' to the so called "paradigm wars" and recognises the value that both qualitative and quantitative approaches can bring to knowledge without the need to adhere to only one notion of truth or reality (e.g., positivist or constructivist). Bergman (2008) also supported this notion and suggested that mixed methods has the

potential for even greater ontological/epistemological and practical flexibility than is currently proposed and imagined in current mixed methodology texts. In this sense, Bergman (2008) argued for mixed methods processes, data collection, and analysis to be logically connected to the research design as opposed to more abstract notions such the nature of knowledge and reality.

As outlined by Cresswell and Plano Clark (2010), researchers can switch from using approaches usually associated with constructivism to those more aligned with positivism (for example) without the fear of having to 'please two gods'. In many mixed methodologies it is the cumulative production of knowledge that adds strength in the light of the particular research problem and the constraints that researchers have to contend with. Bergman (2008) warned against such pragmatism being seen as a methodological 'green light' to abandon all notion of rigour. Rather, mixed methods designs have the flexibility to be tailored to a research problem and context as opposed to a research problem and context being 'fitted' to a pre-set design and 'way of seeing the world'.

Mixed methodologies are proposed to lead to a more extensive and considered understanding of complex phenomena in both a pragmatic and tailored manner (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2010, p.54; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009, p.7). This approach takes advantage of the inherent strengths of both qualitative and quantitative research methods, while at the same time serving to account for limitations in each. For example, although quantitative statistics may tell us of significant associations between specific variables for large cohorts, the instruments used to measure these variables are often limited in their depth and scope (Babbie, 2010). On the other hand although it is difficult to make generalizable statements outside of the cohort studied, qualitative methods of research can allow investigators to explore a phenomena in-depth, in

context, and through the eyes of the participants (Babbie, 2010; Berg & Latin, 2008).

Further, when an investigation is novel, qualitative methods can allow the systematic

identification of relevant phenomena which can then be measured quantitatively on a

larger more representative cohort (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2010).

When both quantitative and qualitative approaches are used together, this can

lead to both greater depth, as with a detailed case study, and the generalisation to a

whole population. Depending on the specific design, either the qualitative and

quantitative components can have equal contribution to the final inferences or one

component of the research can dominate. As argued by Cresswell and Plano Clark

(2009), the approach in the design will often be a result of the research problem and the

orientation of the researcher.

Examples in research

Mixed methods designs have already found a place within the literature

concerning athlete development and dual careers. For example, Poczwardowski, Diehl,

O'Neil, Cote, and Haberl (2013) investigated the internal and external resources (of

athletes) that contributed to successful transitions into an Olympic training centre. They

recruited six athletes (4 males, 2 females, $M = 23.5$ years) for the study. Participants

completed a series of psychometric instruments that measured factors such as coping

skills, athlete identity, resilience, optimism, and grit in tandem with semi-structured

interviews that aimed to probe their experiences of the transition as well as the factors

both within themselves and the environment that they felt helped contribute to a

successful transition. The qualitative and quantitative strands of the project were

concurrent with the qualitative component being dominant in its contribution to the

final inferences. The psychometric component served to compliment the insight into the

athletes' internal resources. Thus the qualitative and quantitative data 'corroborated' the

importance of internal resources such as optimism, resilience, grit, adaptive coping, a sound but not excessive athlete identity, and the ability to seek and achieve a sport/life balance. The qualitative component extended the heuristic notions of their study by identifying aspects of the environment such as programmatic resources (e.g., sport psychology), social support, high quality physical resources, and the fit between athlete and environment as important factors towards the transition.

The Poczwardowski et al. (2013) study might be categorised as what Cresswell and Plano Clark (2010, p.69) called a "Convergent Parallel Design" where quantitative and qualitative data are collected concurrently, analysed separately (at first), and then compared/related during the interpretation of the results. As described by Cresswell and Plano Clark (2010), convergent designs are typically used when there is need for corroboration of data for a more complete understanding of a topic. Poczwardowski et al. (2013) gave more prominence to the qualitative component of the study as this was substantial and considered more important with respect to the aims of the study. The identification of a 'dominant component' in a mixed methods design is not uncommon. Several prominent authors (i.e., Bergman, 2008; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2010; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009) have recognised that existing typologies serve as guides with flexibility allowable in matching mixed methods designs to the purposes and parameters of a study.

Stambulova, Engström, Franck, Linnér, and Lindahl (2014) investigated Swedish elite adolescent athletes' experiences of transitioning into an elite environment and developing a dual career. The authors used a longitudinal mixed methods design where qualitative and quantitative components were used in both phases to compare data across two time points. Integration of the quantitative and qualitative data identified relationships between students' level of adjustment at the beginning of their

transition and at the end of their first six months. The quantitative analysis identified

that the students' social support at school, coping strategies in sport, and their personal

resources within their private life, predicted 45.6% of the variance in their total

adjustment. Such findings were enhanced by the qualitative interviews. These added

understanding to the coping strategies used with the participants describing approaches

such as planning their time, allowing for appropriate rest, and the seeking of support

from external resources (e.g., coaches, parents, etc.). The collection of these data across

two time points also added depth to the study. For example, data collected at the second

point revealed that personal resources in studies became a predictor of transition

adjustment. A comparison with personal reflections describing the difficulty of

balancing a dual career across the period added to the understanding of why

participants' personal resources in study became a predictor of transition adjustment.

This description of the Stambulova et al. (2014) study only draws upon some of

the data analysed in that study however it serves to reinforce the value of mixed

methods approaches and also their inherent flexibility. Although the study resembles

that of a convergent parallel design it also represents the authors' unique adaptations

(i.e., a parallel collection of qualitative and quantitative data across two phases with

differences in 'data dominance' when exploring various aspects of the research

problem). Considering that human adaptation to an elite environment is a dynamic

process that will change over time (Schlossberg, 1981), the dual data collection at both

time points allowed the authors to track the relevant issues across time and make

inferences concerning important predictors of adaptation during athletes' first year at an

elite sporting school. Thus it provides an example of the tailoring of a mixed methods

design to answer a specific research question/problem.

Sequential mixed design

A mixed methods type that appears particularly relevant to the current research problem is one which Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009) identified as a sequential mixed design. They described sequential mixed designs as first conducting a qualitative strand followed by a quantitative strand where the results of the first study contribute to methodological decisions and questions asked/hypotheses tested in the next. They described that typically the first phase of a sequential mixed design will be exploratory and the second phase will build upon the work of the first to either confirm, extend, or add further explanation to the findings from phase one. As identified in their design, the findings of both the qualitative and quantitative strands are then used to draw a "meta-inference" (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009, p.154) with respect to the overarching research problem under investigation.

In a similar vein to the sequential mixed design, Cresswell and Plano Clark (2010) identified what they call an exploratory sequential design. They described it as involving the initial collection of qualitative data in order to investigate a topic of interest. The initial phase can be used to both identify and clarify the phenomena to be measured and to identify or refine appropriate research questions for the following quantitative phase. The quantitative phase, which frequently involves the creation of a measurement instrument, then serves as an attempt to generalise the findings to a wider population. Both typologies however contain relevant ideas for the progression of this thesis. For example, Cresswell and Plano Clark (2010) put forward that sequential designs beginning with a qualitative phase are useful for projects where researchers are, (i) unsure of the most relevant variables to measure, (ii) there are not existing measures for relevant variables, (iii) the researcher and research problem have a greater

qualitative orientation, and (iv) where the inclusion of a quantitative component may enhance generalizability of the inferences.

The sequential mixed design used in this thesis

The first phase of the present study involves a detailed qualitative case study that will investigate an AFL club that has been recognised within the industry as supportive of players' participation in off-field activity and their development as 'whole people'. Figure 6 shows an overview of the research design adopted. As can be seen in the first qualitative phase, the conceptualisation of the case study will be informed by the literature review presented in chapter two. The particular case study methods, the exploratory integrative approach (Maaloe, 2009), and the steps for data analysis will be outlined in chapter four.

After the qualitative analysis the first stage of qualitative inferences are shown. These inferences will be revisited in order to contribute to the conceptualisation of the second quantitative strand. During the conceptualisation phase for the quantitative component, the initial aims and sub-aims outlined in chapter two will be revisited, specific variables identified/confirmed and appropriate instruments to measure them selected, with additional instruments that are contextually relevant to this investigation designed where necessary. The quantitative component then proceeds through the relevant execution of methods and analysis before inferences from this second phase can be drawn. Finally, the inferences of the first phase will be revisited as part of a process of identifying the meta-inferences in an integrated way.
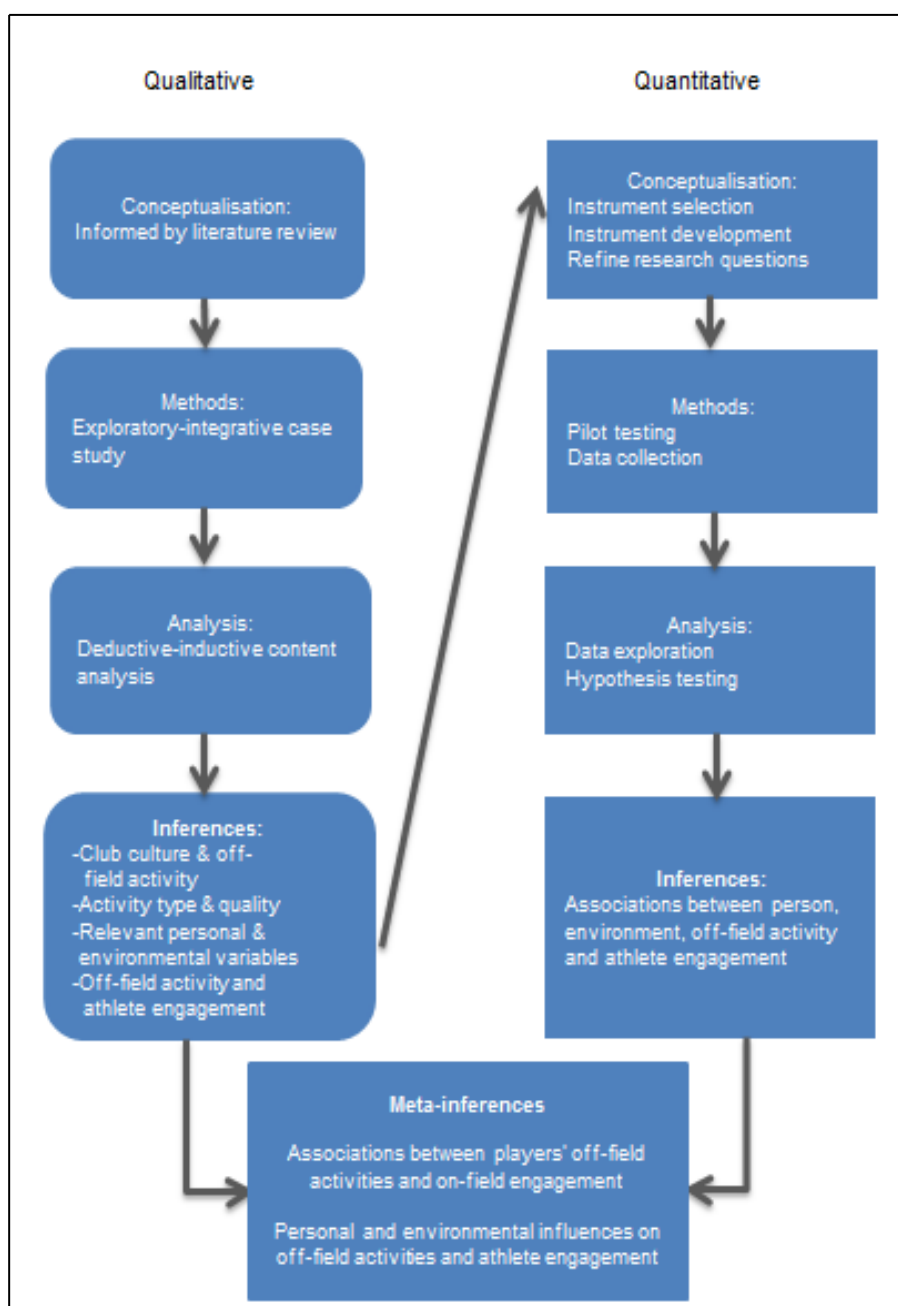
Figure 6. Sequential mixed design used in this thesis.

Judging the quality of mixed methods studies

Questions concerning the quality of a study and associated results/findings have

long been a focus in both qualitative and quantitative research. For example, in

quantitative work there are typically concerns over the validity and reliability of

instruments, the ability of the analysis to answer the questions asked, and the

elimination of alternative hypotheses (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2008). In qualitative research, there are typically concerns over what Guba and Lincoln (1989) described as the trustworthiness of the findings, as demonstrated by their credibility, dependability, and confirmability.

Within the present thesis, these specific quantitative and qualitative issues will be dealt with in the relevant chapters. However it is important to also consider the quality of the mixed methods design as a whole, and, the strength of the meta-inferences based upon the inherent strengths and weaknesses of the qualitative and quantitative designs themselves, their linking and contribution from one to the other, and also the cumulative state of the evidence surrounding the specific phenomena that they produce. In the following section, criteria for assessing both the design quality and interpretive rigour of a mixed method research project will be introduced for later use in the discussion chapter (chapter 8).

Integrity of the overall design

Tashakkori and Teddlie (2008) proposed that mixed methods research projects need their own framework for judging both the quality of the design and the inferences made. They suggested the avoidance of the term 'validity' due to its predominantly quantitative use. They further recognised that the term validity and its qualitative cousin credibility do not encompass all of the relevant issues with respect to judging the quality of what a mixed methods design can produce. As a result of this view Teddlie and Tashakkori (2008) have put forward an 'integrative framework' for judging the quality of mixed methods research. The integrative framework concerns undertaking an audit of the design quality for both the qualitative and quantitative strands, and the interpretive rigour of both strands. There is then an assessment of the meta-inferences with respect to its consistency with the level of evidence provided and the contribution

of the qualitative and quantitative phases. Finally, the meta-inferences themselves should be judged according to their consistency with the evidence provided and the initial aims of the thesis. An example of the integrative model can be seen in Table 3.

With respect to the design quality component, as can be seen in Table 3, the research criterion and indicators can be applied to both the qualitative and quantitative strands of a mixed methods project. Within the qualitative and quantitative strands, this is where their respective notions of rigour (such as reliability and validity for quantitative, trustworthiness and credibility for qualitative) reside. Each strand can be judged upon its design according to traditional conventions. There are then inferences that can be drawn from both strands of the study. The model then defines several criteria for assessing the quality of inferences made within the respective disciplines. Further, these criteria can be considered in light of the overarching meta-inferences. There then exists in the model the area of integrative efficacy which concerns the quality of the meta-inferences based upon the contribution of both the qualitative and quantitative strands. As described by Tashakkori and Teddlie (2008, p.115), "it addresses the degree to which a mixed methods researcher adequately integrates the findings, conclusions, and policy recommendations gleaned from each of the two strands". This involves considering the results/findings of both studies in producing any meta-inferences whilst recognising the limitations in each strand, and their limitations as a whole. The final product of the mixed methods study is then a product of how the design quality has influenced the meta-inferences and how the the meta-inferences are reflective of the study design and its quality.

Table 3

Integrative Model of Inference Quality in Mixed Methods Research

Aspects of inference quality	Research criterion	Indicator or audit
Design quality	1. Design suitability	Are the methods of study appropriate for answering research questions?
	2. Design adequacy	2a) Are the procedures implemented with quality and rigour?
		2b) Are the methods capable of capturing the meanings, effects, or relationships?
		2c) Are the components of the design (e.g., sampling, data collection procedures, data analysis procedures) implemented adequately?
	3. Within design consistency	Do the components of the design fit together in a seamless manner? Is there 'within design consistency' across all aspects of the study?
	4. Analytic Adequacy	Are the data analysis procedures/strategies appropriate and adequate to provide possible answers to research questions?
Interpretive rigour	5. Interpretive consistency	5a) Do the inferences closely follow the relevant findings in terms of type, scope, and intensity?
		5b) Are multiple inferences made on the basis of the same findings consistent with each other?

6. Theoretical consistency	Are the inferences consistent with theory and state of knowledge in the field?
7. Interpretive agreement	7a) Do other scholars reach the same conclusions on the basis of the same results (i.e., peer agreement)
	7b) Do the investigator's inferences match participants' constructions (i.e., is there researcher-participant agreement?)?
8. Interpretive distinctiveness	Is each inference distinctively more plausible than other possible conclusions that can be made on the basis of the same results?
9. Integrative Efficacy (mixed and multiple methods)	Does the meta-inference adequately incorporate the inferences made from qualitative and quantitative strands of the study

Reproduced from "Quality of Inferences in Mixed Methods Research: Calling for an Integrative Framework," by A. Tashakkori and C. Teddlie, 2008, in M. Bergman (Ed), *Advances in Mixed Methods Research*, p.113. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Methodology: Qualitative phase

As Grix (2002) stated "methodology is concerned with the logic of scientific inquiry" (p. 179) and should not be confused with the actual methods (e.g. the procedures) to collect and treat data. In this respect, a methodological approach must first be decided upon before designing and implementing procedures consistent with that methodology.

The review of literature in chapter two identified that aside from Hickey and Kelly's (2008) work and participatory statistics from the AFLPA (2011), the identification of AFL club culture relation to players' off-field development and associated activities remains largely absent from the extant literature. Although Hickey and Kelly's (2005, 2008) research described the tensions between off-field and on-field demands for some players, there has yet to be a detailed example of how a club environment might support off-field development and activities from an organisational psychology perspective. The guiding conceptual model for the present thesis requires a deeper understanding of a club environment and how it might be supportive of players' off-field development and activities from a cultural and logistical viewpoint. Further, there is the need to understand the players' experiences as AFL footballers, the way they perceive off-field development and activity, and how the individual characteristics of the players themselves might influence these perceptions.

The qualitative phase, as a starting point for the enquiry, will directly address two of the sub-aims identified in chapter two:

1. Investigate a club culture identified as supportive of player off-field activities and development and identify and confirm relevant personal and environmental variables to be sourced for the ongoing investigation

2. Identify the off-field activities AFL players participate in and the purpose of these activities

The research conducted in the qualitative phase will also contribute some heuristic value to developing early understandings that relate to sub-aims three and four prior to quantitative conceptualisation and testing:

3. Understand relationships between professional AFL players' athlete identities, their broader self-concepts and participation in off-field activities

4. Understand the influence of the club environment on off-field activity

The professional AFL football club case study

The positivist Karl Popper (1996) suggested that most science begins with some kind of observation (p.140). This is particularly applicable to novel investigations. Considering that the present investigation is a novel area within a relatively uncharted context (i.e., the AFL), it is therefore logical that the first step should be to observe, explore, and identify. A qualitative approach allows for the identification of some early rich understandings and emergence of meaningful variables for later hypothesis formulation and testing. In practical terms this means that the researcher becomes the 'instrument' of research providing a lens into the players' experiences and how they perceive their environment. As described within relevant literature (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Maaloe, 2009; Yin, 2003), case studies can allow a researcher to explore, interpret, and understand complex phenomena within its context. Yin (2003) proposed that case studies seek to answer 'how' and 'why' questions where it is perceived that the context is relevant to an explanation and understanding of the phenomenon under consideration. Given the theoretical perspectives outlined in chapter two concerning development and behaviour as the outcome of the interaction between the person and their environmental surroundings (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Lewin, 1951), a qualitative case study presented the most appropriate starting point for the present enquiry.

Baxter and Jack (2008) described a useful process for the design of qualitative case studies that includes determining and binding the case, selecting the type of case

study, propositions and a conceptual framework (if deemed appropriate), and the sources of data. As Yin (2003) suggested, failure to produce a logical research design or "blueprint" (p. 21) can lead to findings, recommendations, and conclusions that are limited and have not reached their potential with respect to depth and understanding. The process for the present case study is described below.

Determining and binding the case

Hancock and Algozzine (2006) described case study research as an intensive analysis of a unit or system defined by space and time. In essence, the research questions explored in this chapter have been determined by the literature review and the overarching conceptual framework of the thesis. The unit under investigation in the present study is that of a professional AFL club during a competitive season. Thus, the 'space' (i.e., the club) and time (i.e., during the competitive season) has been defined above.

Binding the case or as Swanborn (2010) calls it the "demarcation of the domain" (p. 47) involves determining what your case will and will not examine (i.e., where are the boundaries?). This represents an important step as the case, with its questions and scope needs to remain within the capacities of the research timeline, funding, and personnel (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Swanborn, 2010; Yin, 2003). Baxter and Jack (2008) summarised contemporary literature on case studies and suggested that a case can be bound by time, activity, place, definition, and context. The present case study has been bound by the club chosen, the period of data collection (June-mid season), the focus on club culture and players' participation in off-field activities, players' experiences as professional AFL footballers, and the logistical support provided to players by the club.

The wider socio-cultural context with respect to the AFL industry will be considered in the discussion of the results.

As suggested by Swanborn (2010), pragmatic criteria are often combined with substantive criteria to select a case/s. Although Yin (2003) discussed that multiple case studies provide more generalisable findings, a single club has been chosen as a means to bind the case, and also to focus on an industry example that might suggest a positive relationship between players' participation in off-field activity and their performance as footballers. It is conceded that to study multiple cases and perhaps contrasting cases would provide greater generalizability however the adoption of a sequential mixed design used in this thesis will enable corroboration of some of the findings of this single case study in a way that is more generalisable to the wider AFL. The club of focus in the present case presents a unique case (as described further below), and according to Yin (2003), uniqueness presents as a further rationale for the use of single case study research.

To summarise, the case has been determined according to time, place, definition, activity, and context as well as substantive criteria. A single case study has been chosen as meeting pragmatic criteria (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2010, p.60). It is argued through the work of Yin (2003) that the single case study is appropriate due to the theory building nature of the study and the uniqueness of the case. The testing of the generalisability of the findings will be dealt with in the quantitative strand within this thesis. Attention will now turn to selecting the type of case study beyond the mere selection of single or multiple sites.

Selecting the type of case study

Yin (2003) described that the use of theory in single case studies adds to the external validity (e.g., generalisability). He further argued that this is regardless of whether you are theory building or theory testing. Theory building approaches to case studies are inductive and approach the case (as much as possible) without any pre-conceived notions or biases in order to construct a theory from the ground up (e.g., grounded theory, Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Theory testing approaches to case studies have a pre-conceived theory and the data are compared to 'rigid' categories in order to accept or reject that theory. Henriksen (2010) used a third approach proposed by Maaloe (2009) in order to study athletic talent development environments. Maaloe (2009) outlined a composite model that he called "explorative integration" (p.3). This approach is described below.

Maaloe (2009) described explorative integration as "a cyclic approach of continuous dialogue between pre-chosen theories, generated data, our interpretation, feedback from our informants, which hopefully will lead us to more inclusive theory building or even understanding" (p. 3). Henriksen (2010) used this approach to contextualise a pre-conceived conceptual framework to youth athletic talent development environments (ATDEs) he studied. Such an approach moves beyond the theory testing or building dichotomy and allows researchers to be supported by theory whilst remaining open to data that may expand or even 'not match' pre-conceived frameworks. The exploratory integrative approach allows a deductive-inductive approach to analysis and this is where the use of a conceptual framework informed by theory is valuable.

Research questions and conceptual framework

The aims of the thesis identified in chapter two and the exploration of the conceptual framework is best operationalized as a series of research questions for the purposes of a qualitative case study. The research questions that guided the researcher's investigation and analysis are presented below.

Who are the players and how do they experience life as an AFL footballer?

How can we categorise the club's culture with respect to players' off-field development and activities?

How might off-field activities be related to the way players engage in their roles as professional footballers?

How might the club environment and characteristics of the players themselves be related to the participation in off-field activity?

How do the players define off-field activities and their significance?

The research questions above will be addressed and answered both within the presentation of the findings and the discussions within each chapter. The conceptual framework as outlined for the questions explored in chapter four and five is now presented in Figure 7, followed by a discussion of how the theory developed from the literature review has informed the exploration of each element in the framework.
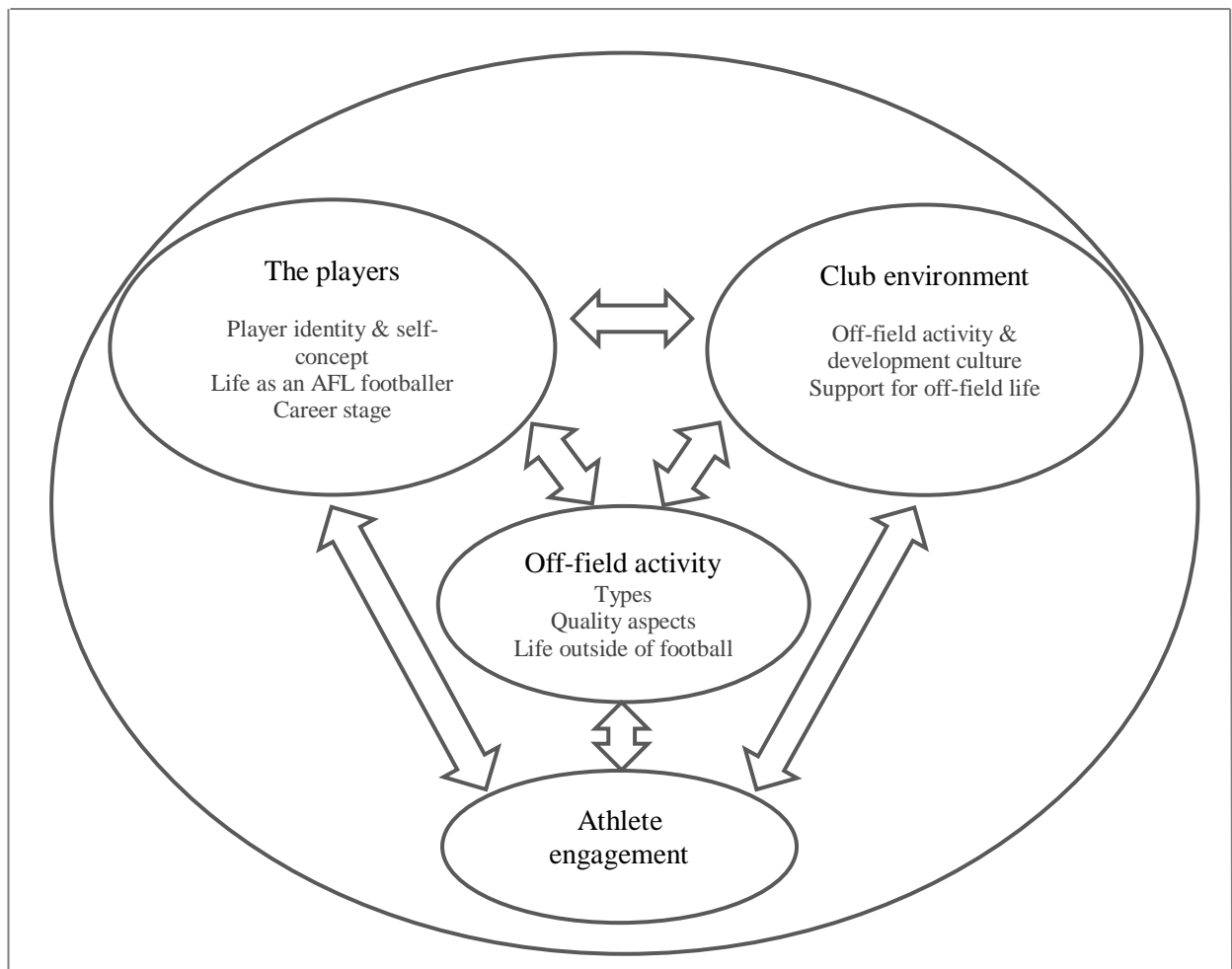
Figure 7. Conceptual framework for the qualitative phase

The players

This element concerns the players at the football club and is primarily concerned with their experiences as footballers and individuals. With respect to the players as people, there is a wealth of literature that has highlighted the concern with athlete identity and athletes' development away from their sport (Albion & Fogarty, 2005; Cecić Erpič et al., 2004). The consideration of 'career stage' appears in the framework as literature (Clarke & Salter, 2010; Hickey & Kelly, 2008) suggests that career stage influences the players' experiences as footballers. The explication of 'life outside of

football' appears in the framework as literature has suggested that within the athlete there are "multiple selves" that need to remain 'nourished' (Friesen & Orlick, 2010) and developmentally sound (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004) through immersion in a variety of sporting and non-sporting activities for the player to perform optimally in the athletic domain.

Club environment

This element in the conceptual framework refers to the football club environment and its culture, specifically as to how it supports players' participation in off-field activity and development. The off-field activity and development culture will be explored specifically with the aid of Schein's (1990, 2010) theory and levels of organisational culture, which presents as a useful way to conceptualise and explore the culture of a professional sporting club. Schein defined culture as,

> A pattern of basic assumptions, invented, discovered, or developed by a given group as it learns to cope with its problems of external adaptation and internal integration that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore is to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems (1990, p.111).

At the first level are the visible *artefacts* (e.g., the way members communicate, dress, the physical layout, and any directly observable phenomena that may give clues about the culture). Schein (1990, 2010), however described artefacts as quite superficial in nature and that it is not until the values behind these artefacts are understood that a researcher can begin to understand the 'why' behind organisational patterns of behaviour. At a deeper level of the culture are *espoused values*. Espoused values are those that members (e.g., employees, players, etc.) describe as guiding the behaviour of the organisation. It is at this level that a researcher is able to decipher what members

typically believe about the collective values that may or may not be consistent with surface manifestations of behaviour (Schein, 2010). Through analysing the 'deeper' aspects of the culture, consistencies (or indeed inconsistencies) between the values of an organisation and its cultural artefacts can best be understood by uncovering the *basic underlying assumptions* (herein referred to as basic assumptions). Schein (2010) described basic assumptions as the taken for granted (and usually unconscious) assumptions that give rise to members' interpretations of espoused values, organisational policies, and ultimately member behaviour. It is through these basic assumptions that an informed understanding of *how* and *why* espoused values influence behaviour the way they do can be obtained.

Schein's levels offer a framework to consider how an organisation's culture influences the cognitions, emotions, and behaviours of individuals immersed within the culture. As demonstrated by the work of Henriksen, Stambulova, and Roessler (2010a, 2010b, 2011) Schein's levels are effective in identifying environmental influences on behaviour in a micro-environment such as an athlete's sporting club. Such an understanding can be further enriched through considering the club culture as nested within a broader socio-cultural context (Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Henriksen et al., 2010b). Essentially, the culture and environment sphere in the framework is concerned with describing the football club environment and how individuals within the culture behave thus reflecting the basic assumptions within the culture.

Off-field activities

This element concerns the off-field activities that players are typically involved with and which are not a formal part of their roles as professional footballers. It is concerned with what the players do outside of playing and training. Of particular

interest will be the dual career activities of the players. This is given the reports that preparing for a dual career has become part of the professional identity of the modern AFL footballer (Kelly & Hickey, 2010). This can come with its own set of problems with the way players view the activities and also whether there is tension between on-field and off-field pursuits within the club itself.

The exploration of off-field activities also needs to be concerned with understanding the types of activities footballers pursue for social and recreational (or other) purposes and how these activities relate (if they do at all) to their jobs as footballers. Finally, it is also intended to explore how players assess whether an activity is worthwhile. Such criteria may differ according to the type of activity.

Conclusion

The aim of this chapter has been to provide an overview of both the conceptual framework that will guide investigation within this thesis and the overarching research design. Chapter four will deal with the procedure, data analysis, findings, and discussion of the qualitative strand within this thesis.

Chapter Four: Qualitative Phase

Methods

One of the advantages of a case study is the ability to incorporate multiple sources of data in order to enhance the completeness and credibility of the study (Yin, 2003). Baxter and Jack (2008) described how each source of data adds a piece to the "puzzle" (p. 554) with regard to understanding the case in context. The following paragraphs describe the club selected for the case study, the participants, collection of data via participant interviews with various club employees and observation of the club environment.

Procedure

Club selection

The club selected as the focus of this study had been independently identified by the AFLPA and a senior member of the Australian Football League Coaches' Association (AFLCA) as a successful example of the provision of support for player off-field development and associated activities. The club had a high proportion (approximately 85%) of players involved in some form of dual career development (not compulsory in the AFL) and was also considered as supportive of AFLPA programs and strategies. The club also had one of the more successful recent on-field records characterised by regular appearances in the finals/play-offs over the last ten years. This suggested at least anecdotally that the club has been able to reconcile its 'holistic' support of players with successful engagement with their football. Thus, the club represented an appropriate case, from a positive organisational psychology in sport (POPS) perspective (Wagstaff et al., 2011) for exploration of the relationship between the club environment, the players' off-field activity, and their professional engagement.

Observation

Observations made by the researcher provided "contextual sensitivity" (Henriksen et al., 2011, p.346) to the analysis through identifying the cultural artefacts within the club. Both the works of Bronfenbrenner (2005) and Lewin (1951) described the importance of observing behaviour 'in situ'. This is particularly important when considering the influence of cultural and environmental factors on behaviour. Throughout a two week period in June the researcher observed over 80 hours of the clubs' operations. According to Schein's (2010) recommendations, the focus was on observable artefacts within the environment. This included features of the physical environment such as office placements, symbols, and notices. Identification of artefacts also included observable behaviour, such as style of clothing, interactions between club members, and the style of language used (Schein, 2010). Particular attention was also paid to players' daily interactions with the Player Development Manager (PDM), their engagement in non-sport activities such as educational or social activities, and spontaneous comments from all participants within the club environment concerning life outside of football. Observations were written in narrative style and recorded in a daily journal for later analysis.

Participants

All members of the club were observed carrying out their daily activities during the researcher's immersion in the environment. Participation in the interviews was organised through consultation with the PDM and determined by the availability and willingness of club members. However a selection of players at various career stages was consciously sought as well as examples of players who did and did not engage in activities that were to prepare for 'life after football' (i.e., the development of a dual

career). This was in order to seek a degree of representativeness of the player list (An AFL team list typically has between 44-48 players). Four early career (i.e., 0-4 years), four middle career players (i.e., 4+ to 8 years), and three late career players (i.e., 8+ years) were recruited for interviews following Hickey and Kelly's (2008) typology. Of the early career players, only one was engaged in a dual career activity, three were engaged in the middle career stage and all three players in the late career stage. With respect to the 'non-playing' staff, the PDM, a member of the executive football staff, a development coach, and a team manager were available and willing to participate in interviews. In total, 15 participants were interviewed.

Interviews

The 'traveller approach' to interviewing was taken in that the participants were encouraged to tell the researcher about their experiences at the club and what it meant to them (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The idea of the traveller approach is that the researcher is a visitor to the world of the participants and the participants will help you explore their world. Although semi-structured question guides were produced, interviews were also allowed to naturally evolve as the player shared their experiences.

The semi-structured question guides for players and staff are presented in Tables 4 and 5. Exploration around these questions was facilitated by interviewer prompts and probes to ensure that the primary areas of interest were still addressed even though there was flexibility in the ordering of questions and where the interviews could go. The framing of the questions was adjusted for non-playing staff members consistent with the purpose of exploring their views of club values and initiatives concerning the practice and support of off-field development and activities.

Each interview began with thanking the interviewee for his attendance, explaining the purpose of the discussion, asserting that there were no right or wrong answers, and reminding them that what they expressed within the discussion would remain anonymous and would not impact on them as a member of the club. These steps are suggested as appropriate by Kvale and Brinkmann (2009), and Rubin and Rubin (2005). The first question was an introductory question, "How did you arrive at the football club?" This question was designed to be lighter in nature and encouraged the interviewee to speak as suggested by Krueger and Casey (2009). More focussed structured questions such as "What do you do outside of football?" followed.

After hearing the responses the researcher then asked prompting or probing questions such as "What was that like for you?" or "Can you tell me more about that?" as described by Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) and Rubin and Rubin (2005). Probing and second questions were asked around each of the structured questions from the interview guide. At the completion of each interview, the participant was thanked again for attending and asked if there was anything else that they wanted to share in relation to their experiences at the football club. Interviews lasted an average of 29 minutes.

Table 4

Semi-Structured Interview Guide: Players

Focus	Question
Introductory questions	How did you arrive at the football club?
	• *What year did you get drafted?*
	• *What is it like to be at your current career stage*
Life as a Footballer	
(football and non-football activities)	How do you spend your average day?
	• *What are the football related tasks?*
	What do you do outside of football?
	• *How does that fit in to your life?*
	Is there anything the club gets you to do outside of football?
	• *What is it like when you are doing that activity?*
	What influences the decisions you make in your off-field life?

Club culture	When I mention the words (withheld) football club, what comes to mind?
	• *How would you describe the football club to someone from another culture?*
	How would you describe the culture of (withheld) football club?
	• *What do you think the club believes in?*
	• *What do you believe the club believes with regards to off-field life?*

Table 5

Semi-Structured Interview Guide: Staff

Focus	Question
Introductory questions	How did you arrive at the football club
Club culture	When I mention the words (withheld) football club, what comes to mind?
	How would you describe the culture of the football club?
	• *What do you think the club believes in?*
	• *What do you believe the club believes with regards to off-field life?*

- *How easy do you think it is for players to enact on these beliefs?*

What are some examples of the club's values in action?

What do you think time away from football/work means to the club?

- *What are the reasons the club has this value?*

Players and off-field activities

What are the players encouraged to do outside of the club?

- *How do the players respond to this?*

- *Any differences in the way players approach off-field life?*

How do you think the players' off-field lives relate to the football club?

- *How might their off-field lives influence the club?*

- *What about the activities where they are learning professional skills?*

Data analysis

Data were analysed via a deductive-inductive approach as congruent with an explorative-integrative case study design (Maaloe, 2009). This allowed both the

guidance provided by the conceptual framework to be incorporated into the analysis and the emergence of themes specific to the present investigation. Interview transcripts (see Appendix A for an example) and observation records were imported into the NVivo 9 software for analysis. The deductive-inductive content analysis was initiated by constructing a node tree (similar to the steps described by Henriksen et al., 2010a) which contained the elements implicated in the conceptual framework (e.g., early, middle, and late career stage, 'life as an AFL footballer', etc.). Schein's (2010) levels of organisational culture were also incorporated into the node tree for the cultural element of the analysis.

Analysis of the players and off-field activity

Analysis of the players as individuals and their off-field activities occurred through a process of identifying meaning units within the interview transcripts. Meaning units as identified by Graneheim and Lundman (2004, p.106) were considered "constellations" of words that contained a central meaning or idea. Meaning units were then subject to meaning condensation (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009), a process that produced a concise description of the content. Meaning condensation reduces a meaning unit to a concise description of the "manifest content" (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004, p.106) in the memo function within NVivo 9 (labelled 'MC'). Where appropriate, an abstraction of the meaning unit that represented the 'latent content' (i.e., the researcher's interpretation of underlying meaning) was recorded (labelled 'LC'). As an example, the following segment of text from an interview with a late career stage player was identified as a meaning unit with the manifest content of participating in different dual career activities to discover a career interest for athletic retirement. This

meaning unit also contained latent content that developing a career for life after football

was secondary to the athlete's primary career choice (i.e., football),

> I think by trying to get involved in education or keep education going;
>
> programmes, certificates, hopefully a uni degree soon, done a couple lots
>
> of work placement to find out what I'm really interested in 'cause it's
>
> sort of hard to actually know what you want to do.
>
> -*(Late career, 10th season, dual career participant, senior side)*

Meaning units were then grouped together under the pre-existing nodes such as

those associated with the players and their activities (i.e., the deductive component). As

data analysis progressed, meaning units that contained similar concepts were grouped

together to form new themes and these themes were labelled according to what the

meaning units represented. This represented the inductive component of the analysis,

that is, the development of themes related to the players' experiences as footballers and

both the type and quality aspects of activities they engaged in outside of their roles as

professional footballers. As such new themes emerged, data that had been previously

coded were also checked for their potential contribution to the newly identified themes

as a means of confirming the support for both the early and later emerging themes. This

process resembled a form of qualitative content analysis as described by Graneheim and

Lundman (2004) and similarly advocated by both Kohlbacher (2006) and Yin (2003,

p.110).

Analysis of off-field development and activities club culture

The daily observation records were reviewed to identify observable *artefacts*

and relevant segments of text were coded as 'sub-nodes' under the parent artefacts node

in NVivo 9. *Espoused values* were extracted from the interview transcripts by the

identification of meaning units in the interview data. Meaning units were again subject to meaning condensation (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009) that recorded a concise description of the manifest and latent content. These notes were recorded so that the researcher could track the formation of the espoused values (Bazeley, 2007; Koch, 2006). As the data analysis progressed, meaning units that encapsulated similar ideas were grouped together via the node function in NVivo 9 and the espoused values they represented were identified and named. As new espoused values emerged, new nodes were created and identified similar to the process described by Henriksen et al. (2011). Data that had been previously coded were also checked for their potential contribution to the newly identified values.

The identification of *basic assumptions* was then undertaken through re-analysis of the identified artefacts and the espoused values. Through considering the themes and the data that supported them, a process of review and interrogation of the data was conducted until a series of interconnected basic assumptions that could effectively explain the club's culture as manifested at the levels of espoused values and observable artefacts were revealed. As suggested by Schein (2010), the identification of basic assumptions was driven by the researcher after having observed the cultural artefacts and discovering the espoused values via participant interviews. Summaries of how these assumptions were interlinked with the espoused values and artefacts within the club culture were then written.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness relates to the rigour of a qualitative research project as suggested by Koch (2006). Trustworthiness of analysis as proposed by Guba and Lincoln (1989) is said to be maintained when credibility, dependability, and

transferability of the findings have been displayed resulting in confirmability or trustworthiness of the results. Approaches used to address the elements of the trustworthiness criteria used in the present investigation are discussed in turn.

Credibility

Credibility or truth value refers to the integrity of the author's interpretations (Tuckett, 2005). Swanborn (2010, p.108) and Baxter and Jack (2008) advocate collecting multiple sources of data and using them to inform concepts within the case. In the present case, interview data were collected from multiple sources which included club members who were players and those in non-playing roles such as coaches, executive, and player welfare staff. This was so that a more balanced perspective of the case could be produced. Where relevant, the frequencies of meaning units that support each theme or espoused value have been reported for players and staff to show the contribution that each group of interviewees make to the theme. Secondly, the data analysis underwent a "peer examination" (Krefting, 1991, p.219) where a researcher experienced in qualitative research and independent of the study conducted a data audit in NVivo 9. The independent researcher analysed each of the nodes in the case study and flagged any that had questionable or unclear interpretations of the data. These instances were communicated back to the researcher for consideration. Finally, the findings of the study were communicated back to the club via a live presentation to confirm that themes present in the data and the analysis of the club culture provided an accurate reflection. With minor suggestions for improvement as a result of both these processes the analysis was confirmed as credible.

Dependability

Dependability refers to the consistency of the data analysis, explicit description of the steps undertaken, and the congruency of the analysis to both the research design and the findings produced (Koch, 2006; Tuckett, 2005). This means that in presenting the study, the reader should see the logic and consistency when considering the design, analysis, and findings. As Koch states, "readers may not share the author's interpretation but they should be able to follow the way in which the author came to it" (2006, p.92). Dependability has been achieved in two ways. Firstly, dependability was supported through the explicit description of the formulation of the case study and the data collection and analysis. Secondly, the use of salient quotes that represent each theme has been presented in the findings for the reader to see the how these themes were interpreted from the data. This is in addition to the use of frequency statistics (where relevant) confirming the prevalence of meaning units that supported these themes within the data set.

Transferability

Transferability of the findings means that they have meaning for the reader, and can be applied to other contexts outside of the research (Koch, 2006; Ryan-Nicholls & Will, 2009). In this sense as described by Koch (2006) much of transferability is decided by peer review and the reading public. It is suggested in the literature (Ryan-Nicholls & Will, 2009; Taylor, Kermode, & Roberts, 2006) that generalisability is difficult in case study research due to the context specific nature of the findings. Yin (2003) however describes a redeeming feature in case study as lying in the possibility for "analytical generalisation" (p. 32). Analytical generalisation involves the use of existing theory to explicate the findings. Thus, the use of theory such as Schein's levels

of culture, underlying 'holistic' views of development and behaviour, and concepts present in the existing literature (e.g., Hickey & Kelly, 2008) can enhance the generalizability of the findings to other contexts, especially if they have similar features. Transferability was enhanced in this study via the adoption of a conceptual framework as part of the explorative integrative approach. Transferability was also enhanced by comparing the findings to the extant literature (Kohlbacher, 2006). Finally, exploration of important themes and relationships identified in the present study are to be pursued quantitatively later in this thesis.

Confirmability

Confirmability is described as the product of credibility, dependability, and transferability (Koch, 2006). It can be described as the visibility of how a researcher comes to the findings and the congruency of the approach (dependability), how credibly the data are analysed, and, how generalisable the findings are (transferability). This is all a product of how rigorously the research is conducted and communicated. A key attribute of qualitative research is to make meaning of human experiences (Taylor et al., 2006). It is argued that in this case study, a clear audit trail of the research steps followed in the methodology, the findings, and the subsequent discussion provides meaning and insight into the human experience of life as an AFL footballer within the surrounding club culture and environment. The following findings and discussion sections describe that meaning and the insight developed.

Findings

Firstly, to orient the reader, a description of the club and the researcher's entry into the environment is presented.

Coming to the club

The first sight greeting the researcher when entering the car park was a large 'grandstand'. This stand reached up around four stories high and formed an impressive backdrop to the car park itself. A large team logo suspended on its wall clearly proclaimed which of the 18 AFL clubs resided there. Looking to the east, a merchandise store brimming with ornaments in the team's colours was evident. To its left was an entrance gate with a sign above it that honoured a past legend of the club. The PDM, a man with greying features and a craggy yet friendly face met the researcher outside of the club and extended a handshake. The PDM was a former player of the club and physically resembled many of the 'battle worn' former players who had made their way into the media at the conclusion of their playing careers. The researcher followed his host to the club headquarters underneath the grandstand, admission being gained via a security swipe card.

The main corridor appeared crowded with young, fit looking footballers dressed in club training gear walking down the corridor on their way to various appointments. It was a Tuesday, and members of the club were going about their daily business of recovering from and reviewing the previous week's game. They were also beginning to prepare physiologically, tactically, and psychologically for the upcoming game at the end of the week. Branching off the club's main corridor there were many offices and rooms dedicated to various functions such as recovery, massage, strength and conditioning, and football technology (i.e., the watching of game edits in order to

prepare for the next week's opposition). As the researcher is taken through the club, players could be seen scattered throughout these rooms watching edits, receiving massages, or completing their weights program. Members of 'non-playing staff' could be seen mixing with the players. Their dress reflected their role, training gear or a club polo (or jumper) if involved in strength and conditioning or massage, or smart casual business attire if in an administration or executive position. The first clear impression once inside the club was of a 'buzz' of activity where every member had a specific function to execute.

Continuing through the club the researcher noticed that in addition to several offices for coaches and football administration there were also dedicated player development offices situated at the centre of the club. The researcher was shown into one of the spare player development offices situated at the centre of the club. The PDM opened up all of the office doors. The facilities looked fresh and the décor was of modern design. A middle aged woman who worked in football administration was introduced to the researcher. With a friendly smile she shook the researcher's hand and said enthusiastically "welcome to the club". The researcher responded to her interest by stating that he wanted to learn about the support for players' off-field lives at the club. She replied that she used to do a lot of that work with the PDM and professed that she was proud of the club's support of its players. It became evident to the researcher that the PDM had asked her to come and make him feel welcome, while he had to 'duck off' and briefly deal with a player issue. The researcher was then taken on a more detailed tour of the club which included the match preparation area, a 25x15 metre room with nets at either end to catch stray footballs as the players prepared to go out on to the field. The tour culminated at the player lounge where lunch was being served and the researcher was offered something to eat.

Reflecting on two weeks of observations

During the two weeks that he was immersed in the club environment, the researcher noticed that during the week, the players would be seen either in training gear or casual street wear if not training. On match day, players would be seen in club uniform that consisted of slacks, polishable shoes, and club polo. The coaches were similarly dressed at this time. It was observed that communication between members of the club (whether staff or players) would typically be jovial in nature. There were however times when focussed and more formal discussion around football related issues could be observed. Regardless of whether the communication was jovial or focussed, it appeared always respectful with direct eye contact and open body language. Conversation both related and unrelated to football appeared to flow comfortably in the hallways. Over the course of a week the club would cycle through periods of being extremely busy, interspersed with quieter more subdued periods. Players would be routinely completing weights sessions, receiving massages, attending team meetings, training on the field outside the club, reviewing game edits, or attending 'in-house' courses.

When the players were engaged in weights sessions or on-field training, the club would be 'abuzz' with activity and loud contemporary rock and pop music could be heard reverberating in the hallway punctuated by the energetic voices of players and staff. Outside these training periods, the club was more subdued as the players were either absent from the club or attending quieter activities such as meetings. The intensity at the club would build over the course of the week, coming to a peak just prior to game day. Although players would remain light hearted and appearing to enjoy their work, close to game day there appeared to be intensifying focus on 'the game' or

the 'weekend'. This increase in intensity could particularly be felt in the player lounge at lunch the day prior to game day.

Access and earning trust

Early in the immersion, the PDM introduced the researcher to a group of players and announced that "how long he got to stay depended upon how he behaved". This was interpreted to be a none too subtle message to the researcher to be mindful not to be too disturbing to club functioning. Although the club made a visible effort to be welcoming, there was an initial wariness of the researcher as an outsider. Staff would often ask the PDM 'who's that guy?' or directly approach the researcher to find the answer to their question. The inquiries were never aggressive or defensive. An explanation of the study was usually enough for a club member to say 'sounds interesting' and to allay concerns about the newcomer in their midst. The trust of the players and staff however needed to be earned. This was primarily achieved through being courteous, respectful, flexible, and open with respect to the purposes of the investigation.

In the process of 'integrating' into the environment, the researcher also made an effort to adjust his clothing to blend in and be less imposing. On advice from the PDM, the researcher switched from relatively formal academic dress on the first day to jeans and a polo shirt in order to be more closely matched to the players as opposed to the more formal executive and administration staff. The researcher also made an effort to communicate in a way that matched the general vernacular within the club avoiding 'over intellectualising' in conversation. This approach also assisted in the interview process, allowing the interviewees to relax and talk more freely. Throughout the immersion the researcher was aware of gaining increasing access to the club, players and staff, and functions. There was a noticeable shift from being tagged as 'that

research guy' to being accepted on a first name basis, and then ultimately gaining a nickname, 'Pinky', which appeared to represent a level of achieved trust and familiarity.

The players

The interviews with the players identified both similarities and differences with respect to the players as individual people. One commonality was that they had each been drafted to the club from a talent development pathway that was either situated locally, regionally, or from interstate, and within days had entered the club environment as a young professional. For some, this had meant leaving their support networks and travelling to a new region or state while for others this simply meant beginning their career in the same location where they had played their junior football. With respect to the way players identified themselves, this also appeared to vary. For example, some players would describe themselves as a 'footy head' which meant that footy was their primary interest. For most players, being a footballer appeared to be a strong component of their identity and for some, as described by an early career player, being a footballer was pervasive in all that he did,

> I think about footy every day. Every time I do something I'm a footy
> player. If I'm going down for a coffee down the street I'm thinking
> about, 'I'm a footy player, people are going to look at me.' If I'm
> playing guitar I'm thinking about writing a song about being away from
> home or something. I'm thinking about making a rap, about being a star,
> something like that,
>
> -*(Early career, 4ᵗʰ season, non-dual career participant, member of*
> *senior side)*

Although players generally identified with the enjoyment of playing and watching football, many of the players interviewed would also reflect on their identity outside of football and that it was sometimes worthwhile to distance themselves from football and the football environment. The importance of this varied from player to player however. In comparison to the player quoted above there were examples of players who actively sought, as described by a middle-career player to be "seen not just as a footballer". An interesting aspect of the group was that even those players who appeared to strongly identify with being a footballer, were able to reflect on their life outside of football and the value that it could bring. Further to this, players reflected on various skills and abilities outside of football. For example, players often reflected on either being 'good with their hands' or oriented towards business or science when discussing dual career activities. Finally, players also reflected upon their individual interests outside of football. There were a variety of such interests, both personal and professional and this was well summarised by a staff member, "well they're really varied because like the rest of the population their interests differ, what they like and what turns them on differs from player to player".

In reflecting on the players' temperament and communication there were players who were conscientious, considered, and articulate in the way that they responded to questions and also those who were very matter of fact and tended to respond in a colloquial and often jovial way when discussing their experiences at the club. Within the interview transcripts, players could be heard referred to as 'funny guys', 'serious guys', 'old guys', 'young guys', 'guys that keep to themselves' and 'outgoing guys'. Nonetheless, the preference to involve in fun and humour within the club appeared to be pervasive which will be discussed as a cultural artefact further within the analysis.

Life as an AFL footballer

Through analysis of the data, a number of themes emerged which appeared to characterise the ways in which the players themselves saw their roles as footballers. These themes are now described below with salient comments and meaning unit statistics used to support these themes.

Appreciation of the role (MUs = Players, 15)

A common theme (across all career stages) was the players' positive appreciation of their role as a professional footballer. The players generally described that it was what they loved to do and that other careers they had tried were simply not as enjoyable as that of being a professional footballer. Several players described that forays into other careers had lacked enjoyment and this had given them further appreciation of their current profession. Although it was certainly acknowledged that being an AFL footballer had difficult moments, it was described as a far better option than a 'passionless' or unenjoyable job. As described by an early career player,

> Best job you could have. Before I moved to (the club), I did a few apprenticeship trials. I did a plumbing and a building trial and they were pretty tough jobs so it makes this seem a lot easier. I'd rather be here than digging trenches and digging holes. It's a good place to be every day. It's what you love doing and you're with your mates but in the meantime it's bloody hard. It's very, very tough. It's a lot harder than what you'd think. But yeah, it's a pretty good job and it's pretty full on. I remind myself, when it's tough I remind myself, I always say to myself I'd rather be here than in a hole digging.
>
> *-(Early career, 2nd season, non-dual career participant, recently debuted)*

This recognition that 'others' working outside of football potentially had it 'much worse' with respect to the stimulation and conditions provided was common across all the career stages. This seemed to reinforce a belief that although their job was hard work, at the very least it was something that they enjoyed. As described by a late career player,

> Like, I talk to mates and they've got colleagues that just sit there and
> watch the clock or they hand all their work over to them and it could be
> – it could do your head in and probably a tough adjustment for me to go
> into that work environment.
> -(Late career, 10th season, dual career participant, senior side)

With respect to their appreciation of being a professional footballer, players would also reflect on the camaraderie and togetherness they would feel as part of the playing group at the club. Through a clear and obvious shared goal they were united in improving their own and the team's performance. Despite the challenges, being part of a team was reflected upon warmly. For example, as a late career player commented, "so you're going through all these peaks and troughs together and then you sort of just, yeah, you don't feel like you're doing it alone by yourself". Through being together they were able to have fun while they pursued sporting excellence. As described by a late career player,

> I don't think there's too many work environments where everybody
> comes to work to get better….. but it's highly competitive, demands
> excellence and demands the best out of people I think at a football club,
> but it's also a lot of fun. Well, of course when you get 40 odd guys
> between 18 and 33, there's a lot of fun, a lot of banter and things are all
> taken in good humour and probably – it'd make probably HR cringe a bit

at any other work industry but everyone knows it's all in good humour

and there's an incredible amount of care for each other.

-(Late career, 10th season, dual career participant, senior side)

Sacrifices (MUs = Players, 7, Staff, 5)

Although players were generally positive about the vocation of a professional

footballer they would also be quick to make mention of the significant amount of hard

work that was involved and that working as a professional footballer required personal

sacrifices. These were predominantly social sacrifices in-season due to involvement in

playing and recovery sessions and also the need to adhere to strict diet and recovery

protocols. Working weekends meant that it was difficult for players to go out socially

and engage in typical activities with their non-football friends, such as staying out late

and enjoying a moderate consumption of alcohol. There was also the recognition that

some activities were frowned upon at any stage of the year, for example, extreme

sports. Engaging in these activities could lead to an injury that would become a liability

for the club. A middle-career player described that, although he had become 'used to it',

he still lamented the sacrifice of his weekends and that this was not like 'normal

people',

> We're obviously used to it (life as a footballer) now and I guess the
>
> biggest thing is you don't get your weekends as such. Like a normal
>
> person would be able to go away for a weekend or a night – we don't
>
> really have that opportunity. That's probably the biggest thing for me
>
> because I like to get away. I guess two of those days are only half days
>
> that we come in, so it's not as if you're here all day for six days.
>
> *-(Middle career, 7th season, dual career participant, senior side)*

The social sacrifices in particular were well articulated by another middle-career player, *"You know, there's times where there's rules and stuff like that and you miss out on good friends' twenty-firsts and stuff like that. And then you think, oh, why am I even doing this?"* This tension between maintaining the standards set by the club and the desire to have 'nights out' with 'regular mates' could also be heard in many of the early career players' discussions, for example, "I know when I go home, back to (name withheld), and the boys are always like, 'let's go out, let's have a big night', whatever else, you always second guess".

Being a role model (MUs = Players 12, staff, 2)

It was generally recognised that sacrifices were part of the 'trade off' for working in a profession that most players enjoyed, were paid well, and would rather do in comparison to other careers. In addition to the sacrifices made, players also reflected upon being seen as a role model. The common consensus was that being a role model was a responsibility and part of being an AFL footballer. Early and middle-career players described that they were surprised how people outside the club 'looked up to them' and listened to what they had to say. This also meant that their conduct outside the club and on the playing field was heavily scrutinised. One player described that being a role model was made easier by the club becoming part of your identity, hence the desire to represent the club in a positive manner. Remaining positive about being a role model became difficult when the public had a lack of sympathy when players made mistakes either on or off the field. The present segment of text from an interview with a late-career player is used to highlight the challenge of being a role model in the public spotlight. Although players would be held in high regard, they could just as quickly be criticised for their actions both on and off the field,

I don't know. It's something that people say, you're a role model whether you like it or not and that's fine and whatever you need (to do) you do. You have to be, you essentially lose your whole ownership of yourself and you become almost property of the footy club because part of you is actually, the footy club becomes part of you because you know your actions affect other people.

(Researcher, "do you feel 'owned' because of that?")

I don't think you feel 'owned', I think you feel like, I don't like the fact that you're fair game. I don't like the fact that you are open slather for anyone to say anything to you or have any, whether it's a right or wrong opinion to be honest with you. I think that A-Grade players are almost just out on show and if you do something good that's great, we'll pump you up for that. If you do something bad we'll come down on you like a ton of bricks and then, even playing a bad game.

-(Late career player, 12th season, dual career participant, senior side)

Players generally described how they had a responsibility to the community and also to the football club's brand. Linked with their role as a professional footballer was a level of public visibility that meant if they were to do anything that might be considered 'disagreeable' to the community or contrary to what an AFL player 'should be doing' within a competitive season, then this would be quickly broadcast via the media and the social media. Thus, this aspect of being a role model (i.e., being in the public spotlight) was linked with some of the social and dietary sacrifices expected of the footballers. In commenting on alcohol consumption, this was well encapsulated by a staff member,

They might not even have a beer; they might be at the table where someone else is having a beer. They might be in an establishment that

serves alcohol! The use of social media and the intensity around it these days, it just, it takes a little bit of fun out of that growing up aspect, I reckon, in a footy club, -*(Team manager)*

Pervasive in this commentary around their lives as AFL footballers was that it was 'no ordinary profession'. Although many of the players were passionate about their job it was also communicated as hard work, requiring personal sacrifices, and that they were scrutinised heavily both personally and privately.

Full time, but not a typical 'nine-to-five' (MUs = Players, 13, Staff, 2)

Players and staff described that being a professional footballer in the modern AFL was a full time appointment. Unlike the typical 'nine-to-five' worker however, their schedule included work on the weekends and also a scheduling during the week that meant both long and short days. This meant that it was difficult to describe a 'typical work day'. As described by a late career player,

> It's a bit hard with us 'cause an average day – gets so different, 'cause we don't quite have a 9-5. Some days we're here from 8 through to 4.30. Other days we're only here 9 o'clock to 1 o'clock and it can change a fair bit with any day.
>
> -*(Late career player, 13th season, dual career participant, senior side)*

Ultimately exactly when the players worked, and for how long, was dictated by the need to physiologically and tactically prepare for an upcoming game. In the case of the pre-season, the focus was on preparing for the upcoming season. Nonetheless, when all of the requirements were put together, players needed to give a full time commitment. This meant that preparing for life after football was in addition to a full

time workload. The variable schedule and working on weekends (with travel interstate every other week) meant that there were often times during the week when the players would have free time, but at a time when many other 'normal workers' were still engaged in their tasks. The PDM put this in perspective however, when reflecting on the work that players did over the weekend,

> So people see the players sitting around at 11 o'clock on a Tuesday morning and they go, 'have a look at them, what a great life'. But they've worked all weekend for everyone to come and watch them play and they don't think about that. -*(PDM)*

Within these notions of the role being full time and atypical with respect to the working schedule there appeared to be an underlying concern in the participants' comments that those in the public might think that working as a professional footballer was merely about playing a game, that it was fun whilst being paid large amounts of money to do so. As described by an early career player,

> People think how good would that be, just kicking the footy. It's not like that at all. They don't know how sore you are every day, backing up games, mentally tough it is, physically tough. It's a lot harder than what you'd think.
>
> -*(Early career, 2nd season, non-dual career participant, recently debuted)*

The themes that emerged from the interviews highlight that although players appreciated their roles as professional footballers and this allowed them to be involved in their career of choice, experience the camaraderie of a team based work environment, and receive both good pay and recognition within the community, all this did not come without costs and responsibilities. Players needed to make personal sacrifices in their social life; were highly visible role models in the community; worked variable hours

across a week, and; experienced regular physical and mental fatigue. It was more than simply a job that they loved to do.

Life outside of football (MUs = Players 18, Staff, 5)

Players endorsed the need to 'have a life' outside of football. Several players mentioned the importance of having some separation between their job and their personal life. This appeared to become more important as a player aged. In a player's first 1-2 years, both living with and spending much of your free time with other players was described as an important means to make social connections and adjust to the new environment (especially if the player had relocated from interstate). Players in all three career stages described this participation in or search for activities and interests outside of football that could help them achieve a 'break' from the football environment. This will be touched on in greater depth later in the findings. This need to escape and refresh from the high pressure environment was articulated well by a middle-career player when reflecting upon why he pursued other interests on his day off,

> Yeah, mine is probably mental rest. It's pretty demanding being here sometimes. It's good just to get away and freshen up, deal with some different people, deal with some different challenges and that sort of thing.
>
> *-(Middle career, 7th season, dual career participant, senior side)*

Players described that maintaining a 'life outside of football' could be achieved through participating in dual career activities, recreational pursuits, or conscious decisions not to 'take work home'. Although immersing in other activities would help, the ability to cognitively 'leave work at work' appeared to vary from player to player and was a skill that some had to develop over time. Players at various career stages recalled that they initially found it hard to 'switch off' from football but through

chatting to either a sport psychologist, a former player, and/or through the maturation process they learned to separate work life and home life. As articulated by a late career player,

> I'm better now, I used to be shocking, I was unapproachable after a game, if I either lost or played like crap, I was dwelling on it a bit and that was the same on the field as well, if I made a mistake I tended to dwell on it a bit too much. I think getting older and having, even the sports psychologists we've got here, them helping us on how to deal with that kind of stuff and move on from that.
>
> -(Late career, 12th season, dual career participant, senior side)

Conversely there were players who described that they rarely had any difficulty avoiding thoughts about work in their free time. Nonetheless, there was unanimous agreement of the importance of participating in activities that helped to refresh the players from the demands of the professional environment. For some players, achieving a break from their role as a professional footballer was assisted by consciously choosing not to live with other footballers. Aside from the value of living with other players in their first few seasons, living with non-footballers appeared to be of benefit. As articulated by an early career player in his third year on the list,

> I am a footy head so I like watching footy but at the same time you sort of need a break from it, you need something different, need to think about something different. I don't live with any footballers because I can go home and talk about different things instead of going home and what happened at training or what's going to happen on the weekend when we play. You can just go home and talk about what they're doing and just what happens on the news or anything.

-(Early career player, 3ʳᵈ season, dual career participant, not in senior side)

In essence, the players communicated a general consensus for a value in maintaining a life outside of football which could be achieved in a number of different ways.

Career stage

Through his immersion in the environment, it was visibly noticeable to the researcher that the players were at various lengths of tenure in their roles as professional footballers. There were players who appeared youthful with respect to their fashion and physical development and were identified in the club as part of the 'academy group'. These players had a program tailored specifically to their development as a professional footballer. An eagerness to 'do well' and also a general tendency to want to 'stick together' could be sensed when observing the behaviour of the young players. There were players on the other hand, who appeared to move more confidently and independently through the club. There were also players who would not be sighted as regularly in the club and appeared to be more physically mature and who would have the most familiar and extended conversations with non-playing staff.

The career stage typology suggested by Hickey and Kelly (2008) was included in the conceptual framework for analysis. This helped with the identification and confirmation of experiences of life as a professional footballer that were unique to players at different lengths of tenure in the role. These experiences are described relative to the three career stages listed below.

Early career (0 to 4 years)

Early career players typically described being nervous and in awe of the older players when they first arrived at the club, however this was not a rule. It was observed

that players who had been drafted but had not been a part of the elite under/18 systems or for whom football was not their number one priority did not find the environment as intimidating. This however this did not appear to be the usual player experience. A common explanation from the players was that they were eager to impress and were 'all of a sudden' working with players that they had until then looked up to. These feelings are well summed up in the following quote, "It was daunting, all the big name blokes that you watch on telly and that. It was – but at the same time, very exciting" To contrast this comment, an early career player who had been drafted via an alternative pathway described that he did not find entering the environment as intimidating because football was not his primary focus beforehand, "I wasn't in such awe as some of the boys were because they were their idols going through their late teens and that, whereas, I was sort of focused on a different sport". Players generally described that early in their career the more senior players and staff worked hard to make them comfortable and this was appreciated.

The players interviewed also described the shock of beginning a professional football program that left them feeling tired, sore, and unable to handle much else outside of football. First year players in particular spent much of their spare time resting and recovering. As described by an early career player,

> I think – they call it 'first year-itis'. You're always so tired because of so
> much workload physically that you've got. So I think in the first year –
> 'cause the first year you do your apprenticeship, but I don't think I could
> have done anything more because, as I said, you're sort of feeling your
> way, figuring out how to go as a footballer and at nights you just want to
> sleep. You want to go home and lay on the couch; you watch a bit of TV,
> have a feed and then go to bed.

> -(Early career player, 3rd season, dual career participant, not in senior
> side)

Those first year players who had moved to the professional environment either regionally or interstate also described feeling a loss of their support structures and that the club compensated for this by placing them with a host family. The host family was described as important because new players took some time to adjust to the rigours of elite football and suffered extreme fatigue as their bodies adjusted to the training load. As described by a late career player who was reflecting on his early days at the club,

> 'cause I moved interstate, I got put up with a family for my first year. So
> I guess that took the pressure off some of the things I could concentrate
> on; firstly moving over, trying to get a new – I didn't have any family
> and friends so I had to establish a new support network for myself. So
> maybe the club put that in place obviously took a lot of pressure off of
> that; your meals were cooked and your washing was done, just simple
> things like that where you could – you had more time to do what you
> needed to do and just made you help settle in.
> -(Late career player, 13th season, dual career participant, senior side)

Moving into the second year it was not uncommon for players to leave the host family and move into a home with other footballers. However some players took longer to adjust to their new environment and lifestyle and required a second year with the host family. Players generally described that after the first year, they began to adjust to the environment, 'play good football', and also begin to explore options outside of football such as dual career development and other hobbies and interests. This appeared to be a common path as an early career player in his second year whose season was ruined by injury, justified his lack of dual career exploration in this way,

Well the blokes that I walked into, into day one with the club, they didn't

do anything for their first year just because it was such a culture change,

such a new thing that they didn't want to have extra pressure on them

because they wanted just to play good football as well. I guess now that

I'm playing football, I guess this is just my first year, that I just want to

focus on playing football and learning as much as I can and then next

year after I've had that year, I'll focus on something outside of football.

-*(Early career, 2nd season, non-dual career participant, recently debuted)*

As players entered their third and fourth years on the list (if they had earned a second contract) they had adjusted to life as an AFL footballer and most had begun to earn some 'senior games' in the first grade team. Although they were still part of the 'academy group' they were now becoming established as a more experienced player at the club and beginning to form stronger social ties and lifestyles outside of the club.

Middle career (4+ to 8 years)

At this stage, the players now described how the environment had influenced their behaviour and that they had become a 'club person'. This enculturation of the players was described by one middle career player, "they get some players that might be from different places and they turn them into (Club name) people. I've turned into a (Club name) kid now". Another middle career player was asked whether he thought the environment had influenced him,

Yeah, definitely, I think from when I first came to the club I'm a

different person. I was young and obviously immature and a bit of a

hothead or whatever. But now I'm just quite laidback and I just get the

job done.

-(Early career, 4th season, dual career participant, member of senior side)

Although players had become 'people of the club', middle career appeared to be a period of either consolidation or capitulation as an AFL footballer. If a player's career was going well on the field, then they appeared to feel comfortable. However if they were not performing well, then this led to some serious thought about how to improve their output on the field and/or start to think about what might happen if they are removed from the player roster. As described by a middle career player,

> The last contract I signed was when I was going quite well and was sort of … as a team we were going well and I was forcing my way into the team. Since then, last year, I only played one game and this year I haven't played any. And I'm slowly getting back to enjoying footy now and playing some okay footy. But it is a bit of a scary phase, because personally I guess I have already started thinking a lot about life after footy and thinking that, one, maybe AFL footy is not for me and, two, I don't have that choice anyway and I might have to really look at what I'm going to do in my next career phase.

-(Middle career, 6th season, dual career participant, not in senior side)

Three out of four players in the middle career bracket were engaged in dual career development however the degree of urgency to complete this activity and make it the 'next career' appeared to be influenced by their performance in the present career. Similar to the early career players there were still players who, although engaging in dual career activities were not completely sure about which career they would like to

pursue after football had finished. Middle career players more commonly discussed aspects of life outside of football concerned with their financial well-being, for example buying a house and spending time with partners. This was in contrast to early career players who tended to describe working hard to 'make it as a footballer' and spending lots of time in close quarters with other players. Thus, although the football career appeared to be a central focus, middle career players provided evidence of a more established and diversified life outside of football.

Late career (8+ years)

Players in the late career stage realised that they were closer to the end than they were the beginning and this tended to spur them on to get the most possible out of their football. As described by one of the players,

> I think the reality sets in that obviously you've got less time in the game
> and it's – the end is a lot nearer than you want it to be. I think you've
> reached a certain point and it dawns upon you that time's passing by
> pretty quick. But I think then you value it a lot more, you try and make
> the most of it as much as you can.
> *-(Late career, 10th season, dual career participant, senior side)*

The thought of retirement appeared to influence players differently with some more concerned than others with regards to what they were going to do next. As one player stated,

> I do – I think about it but it doesn't actually worry me. I don't stress
> about it I guess. So I think about what I'm going to do and I actually get
> excited. 'cause it's unknown, I'm not sure, but I'm actually looking
> forward to something different as well. I love what I'm doing now but

after doing it for so long another challenge is something that I'm actually looking forward to.

-(Late career player, 13th season, dual career participant, senior side)

Each of the players interviewed were engaged in some kind of dual career development. Some of the late career players had found what they would like to do next while others were still searching for their next career. Whether this concerned them or not, appeared to be a reflection of their personal approach. Nonetheless, all were actively seeking to prepare by developing skills in other domains via their dual career activity. The players described less contact with the PDM as they were well established in life and as AFL footballers. The late career players described that they did not have as much to do with the PDM partly because the PDM role did not exist when they first arrived at the club and that it had developed in importance over the years. They expected that they would have more contact with the PDM as they get closer to the end of their careers and required assistance with transition. As described by a late career player,

I've had a little bit to do with them, probably not as much as younger guys, just because I think there's more that the younger players have to go through now 'cause 10 years ago there was *(sic)* no PDMs. It was the coaching staff. They'd ask you a few questions and keep on top of you and things like that, so we sort of learnt on our feet. We were thrown in and given pointers and tips from different staff members if something came up. But, yeah, I have a little bit to do with them and I probably will over the next few years as I do go into that phase of pushing on doing something else after football.

-(Late career, 10th season, dual career participant, senior side)

Finally, late career players described their growing awareness that non-footballers tended to get a head start in life when it came to career development whereas they essentially had to 'start again'. As finishing a comparatively longer than average AFL career drew closer, it was recognised that in any new career they were likely to start at a lower level and have to 'work their way up'. As a senior player described,

> It's a lot harder in my case to walk into a career that you want to do at 28. 'Cause people have got a 10 year head start on you. So I've just tried to upskill myself as much as possible.
>
> *-(Late career, 10th season, dual career participant, senior side)*

These late career players, although they had developed a successful career in football understood that the end was drawing nearer. For the players interviewed in this study, they described themselves as being reasonably well 'set up' outside of football, yet still had to find and/or develop a career for when their playing days were over. Although they were trying to get the most they could out of their remaining time in football, they were grateful for such a long career, as they had seen many finish much earlier than they would. Transition out of football and the challenges they would face were becoming much more real when compared to the comments of the early and middle career players who had a more superficial understanding that 'one day footy will finish'.

The club environment: off-field activities and development culture

The club culture with regard to dual career development and off-field activities is summarised in Figure 8. Schein's (1990, 2010) levels of organisational culture provided the framework to identify artefacts, espoused values, and basic assumptions of

the culture. An elaboration of each of these levels of culture follows. Artefacts are a

result of observations while immersed in the club environment. Espoused values are a

Artefacts

Player development infrastructure
- Dedicated player development areas
- Player development 'pin up' board
- Player lounge

Player-PDM communication
- Informal player-PDM communication in the club facilities
- Casual and formal appointments with the PDM

Provision for player non-sport time
- Player schedule allowing spare time
- Player development courses onsite

Espoused values

Support is for the whole person (MUs = Players, 9; Staff, 11)

A work/life balance is important (MUs = Players; 22; Staff, 15)
- A work/life balance ensures player well-being.
- Being happy outside of football improves performance.

Individual differences need to be recognised (MUs = Players, 41; Staff, 21)
- Players' interests outside football vary
- Players must be ready to engage in a dual career activity.
- Players are not forced to develop a dual career but are expected and encouraged to.
- First year players require a focus on adjusting to elite football.

Activities need to be viable (MUs = Players 40; Staff, 13)
- The quality of engagement is the most important aspect of off-field activity.
- It is important for players to sample different activities.
- It is important that dual career activity options are compatible with football demands.

Basic assumptions

- Balancing sport and off-field life ensures players' well-being and facilitates on-field performance.
- The club has an ethical responsibility to support player dual career development.
- Preparing for life after football is important however football comes first.
- Players should be encouraged to find personal meanings in their dual career activity.
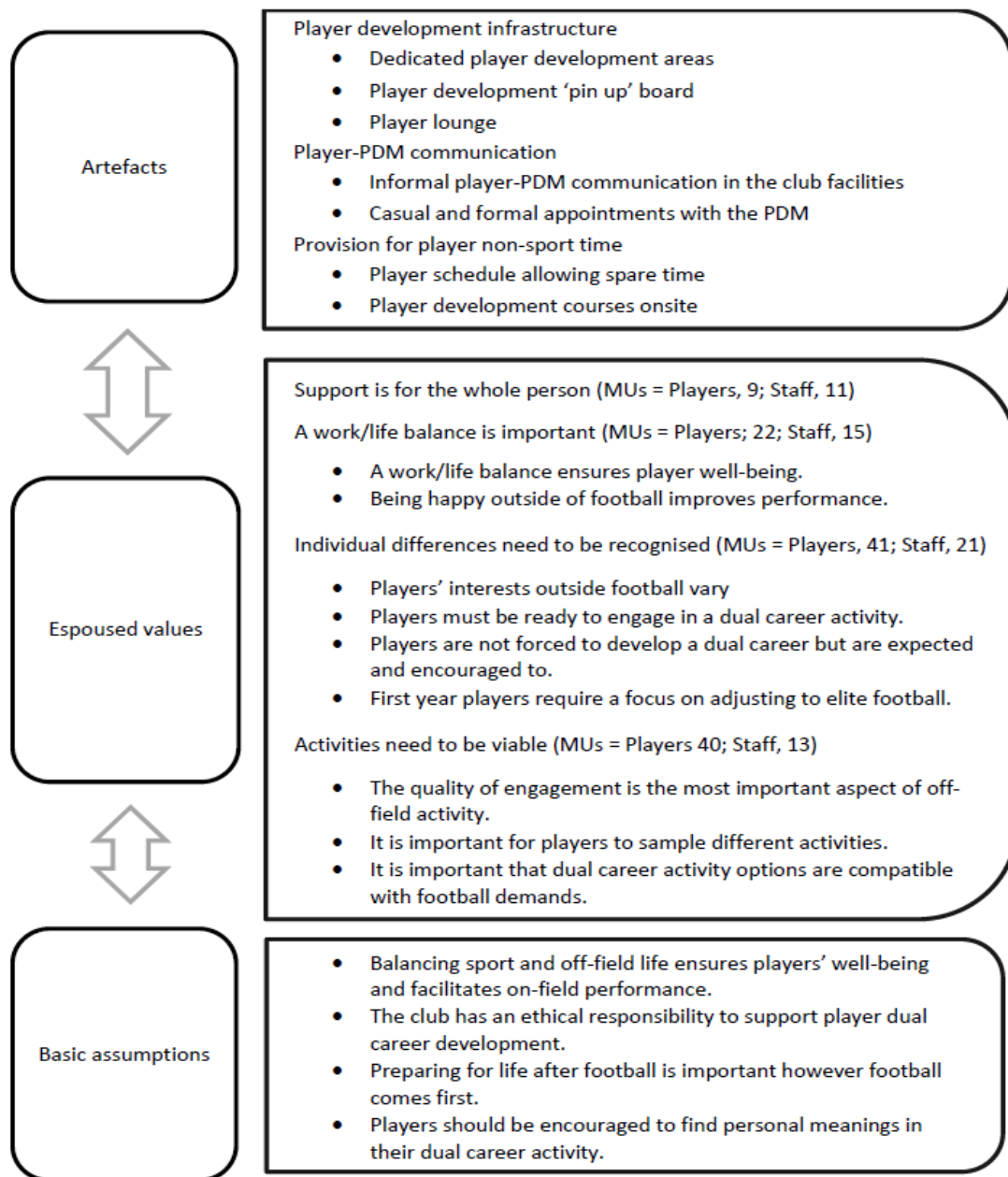
Figure 8. Artefacts, espoused values, and basic assumptions of the off-field activities

and development culture presented.

result of analysis of the interview transcripts with players and staff. The frequency of

meaning units identified in the data as supporting each of the higher order espoused

values are presented in brackets. Basic assumptions are the result of the researcher's deeper interrogation of the artefacts and espoused values. Salient comments are also used to illuminate the data throughout.

Artefacts

The following presents a summary of the most relevant observable artefacts under three broad headings. As identified by Schein (2010), the significance of these observable artefacts can only truly be understood in light of the espoused values and basic assumptions within the culture. The Artefacts however can provide a description of the relevant features of the club environment and the behaviours present within it.

Player development infrastructure

Upon entering the club, the investment in the player development infrastructure was seen reflected in the presence of dedicated player development areas. There were four spacious offices that were in the centre of the club facility, underneath one of the grandstands and near the player conditioning and rehabilitation areas. Two of the offices were occupied by player development and welfare staff and the remaining two were vacant. These offices were spaces where players could work on dual career and personal development activities in between training sessions and during free time. In addition to this dedicated player development area, there was also a boardroom style office which included a whiteboard and projector that was available for the conduct of player development courses as well as other purposes such as team meetings. Within the main corridor of the clubhouse a player development pin up board could be seen, where various career and enrichment opportunities were listed. Such opportunities included financial advice seminars, upcoming vocational and educational courses, responsible gambling information, and even the opportunity for players to improve their

golf swing. Finally, there was a dedicated player lounge where players could rest and take meals in between sessions. This room included couches, a TV, dining table, and a kitchen area. The player lounge also included 'honour boards' that reported the results of social player competitions such as 'fantasy football' or 'fantasy basketball' tipping competitions. The player lounge resembled that of a 'doctors' lounge' or well-equipped staff room in a contemporary work place.

Player-PDM communication

Regular and what could be described as 'warm' exchanges between the PDM and the players could be observed in the corridors of the club facility. These exchanges would typically be jovial, often invoking a characteristically 'dry' sense of Australian humour and there would be eye contact between the player and the PDM with what would be considered 'open' body language. Players would frequently be seen entering the PDM's office for consultation. Sometimes there would be an open door and on other occasions the door would be shut. The PDM could also be seen engaging in regular casual 'catch ups' with the players outside the club premises at local coffee shops. The researcher was able to attend several of these 'catch ups'. During these sessions the PDM and the player/s would discuss many topics such as travel overseas, girls, and occasionally dual career opportunities or other matters at the club. In casual conversation the PDM remarked to the researcher that contact with the players in their 'worlds' outside of 'footy' created a level of informality which made it easier to build a relationship with the player. The PDM considered the process of building a genuine relationship with the player essential in supporting the player's development outside of football.

Provision for player non-sport time

Throughout the researcher's immersion in the environment it was observed that although there were times of extreme activity, there were also times when the work intensity slowed down and players appeared to have spare time during what would, in contemporary workplaces, have been considered 'normal' working hours. During these times, players generally dressed in casual clothes within the club facilities. During time that was not dedicated to football focussed activities, 'in house' player development courses could be observed being conducted in the boardroom. One particular example that the researcher was able to attend was an AFLPA 'play well' session with early career players. This session covered aspects of stress management with respect to life as a footballer and the maintenance of each player's personal support networks, given that many players relocate from interstate. Players were attentive and respectful towards the facilitators of the session, even if there were aspects that did not particularly interest them. After the session, the researcher overheard the AFLPA staff comparing these players to those they had previously delivered the session to at another club - "There were a few restless boys down there at the (Withheld)". The other staff member responded that it was "due to the 'culture' of the club." As an observable artefact, this appeared to represent a cultural value within the organisation for supporting player well-being and development beyond their physiology and their tactical nous.

Such readily observable artefacts in the environment suggested that an 'infrastructure' for the support of player off-field development and well-being was in place and that this appeared to be taken seriously. Further, the PDM appeared to be respected by the player cohort. As described by Schein (2010) however, artefacts are quite superficial in nature and this level of the culture did not of itself reveal enough to

understand how the support for players' dual career and off-field activities actually operated and how they were viewed and received within the club environment.

Espoused values

The espoused values characterising the next level of culture within the club are reported here grouped under four 'higher order' values. Related lower order themes and salient comments from the interview transcripts that support these values are provided in illustration. The focus here is on providing a rich description of values held within the club environment.

Support is for the whole person (MUs = Players, 9; Staff, 11)

The key value with respect to player off-field development and activities was that it was necessary to support the 'whole person' and not just the footballer. It was believed that supporting the player as more than just a footballer assisted both their integration within the club environment and made for happier people within and beyond the football environment. This value could be seen in the assistance for the players in handling their off-field affairs (i.e., finances, living arrangements, etc.) as well as ensuring they were facilitated in pursuing their off-field interests. Players described that when the staff took an interest in their personal life and recognised them as more than a footballer they felt supported both on and off the field. As a middle career player asserted "they sort of do take time to recognise your life outside of football and not just drag you in and have it as their way is the right way and you've got to adjust to their way". Such a value was frequently espoused in the club, as one staff member stated "they've (the players) got other life goals and they're developing for life outside of footy. So that's something that we're really aware of here, it's really in the players and

the staff consciousness". Hence, supporting the whole person was an espoused value related to the management of players' dual career and off-field activities at the club.

A work/life balance is important (MUs = Players, 22; Staff, 15)

Both players and staff identified that a work/life balance was highly valued within the club. It was described as a value held from the CEO down through the organisation. All players and staff were encouraged to have a life outside of work, take the time to pursue other interests, and generally refresh away from the club. As a staff member described, this was a genuinely held value rather than popular 'management speak' within the present environment,

> I know work/life balance is a catchphrase that's thrown around pretty easy in a lot of work and corporate environments, but I know from (senior coach) down or from (CEO) down that people really see the need of the mental break about having something else in your life.
>
> *-(Development coach)*

This value of a work/life balance was in light of the recognition that the AFL was a high pressure industry which players and staff needed at times to seek separation from, in order to continually perform. Situations were described where staff members had told another member or player to go home if it was felt that they were spending too much time at the club. On occasions, the football schedule had also been adjusted to make sure that the players could get appropriate time away. This was in order to recover mentally. Players also described the importance of 'leaving work at work' whenever possible and believed that this was supported by the club. As an early career player described,

> I suppose they don't want you to really dwell on things, thinking about footy all the time. Just of late they've actually been trying to get us in,

train us and then get us out of the club so that we're not always here at the club. They just want us to get out and have a bit of a balanced life.

-(Early career player, 1ˢᵗ season, non-dual career participant, recently debuted)

Any off-field activity, including dual career development was expected to be congruent with an overall positive work/life balance. Further, it was also expressed that if players had a sense of work/life balance, they were more likely to be 'happy' as individuals and perform on the field. As a staff member quite clearly articulated,

Absolutely we think there's something to it (maintaining a work/life balance). What we're fortunate to have is a team of young coaches and then with the guys that run our football department too, they're very much into looking after the welfare of the players. So from the top down, everyone here understands and really believes that happy players play their best footy. *-(Development coach)*

Individual differences need to be recognised (MUs = Players, 41; Staff, 21)

Several of the values and strategies concerning player off-field activities and development were related to the recognition of the individual and the individual's personal situation. For example, players and staff described that there was an expectation and encouragement to develop a dual career. However players were not compelled to do so. Players who declined were respected in their decisions, providing they could justify their reasons. Such reasons might include: returning from injury and needing to focus on football; a lack of interest in the options available, or; needing some time to think about what they might like to do. The players also described that avoiding dual career involvement was considered 'OK' by the PDM and the club in the short-

term. However, there was an expectation that players will eventually do something to prepare for life after football. Players described that the PDM would regularly 'check in' with them concerning their thoughts on dual career involvement and to discuss options. An early career player described it in this way,

> They ask what am I thinking, they ask me if I want to do things and I'll be honest with them. I say 'I don't think I'm ready yet' and they respect that. They try and say, 'we've got something coming up, do you want to put in it?' and I say, 'I don't think I'm ready.' They definitely remind me that there are things available for me to do but they don't push me.
>
> *-(Early career, 2nd season, non-dual career participant, recently debuted)*

This encouragement to engage in dual career development paired with the autonomy to ultimately decide how and when, gave the players some personal agency in the decision making process around their engagement and this was linked in with another commonly espoused value that the player himself had to be ready to engage. Both the players and staff described that being pressured into engaging in dual career development can lead to a negative experience. Rather, it was necessary to 'educate' players on its importance and then let them come to their own understanding in their own time. As described by the PDM,

> So we've found it works a lot better when players actually understand why they're doing something and actually want to do it. Not too much different from the rest of us. If we see a good reason why something should happen we actually want to do it. *–(PDM)*

In response to the question whether this was perhaps a 'softer' approach to off-field development, a development coach replied that "it might seem like a softer approach,

it's certainly a managed approach. So there's method to it, it's not just *ad hoc* or make it up as we go".

Although individual players would come to embark on a dual career activity when they were ready, it was a generally accepted expectation within the club that in the first year on the list it was necessary to focus on the adjustment to elite football almost exclusively. Adjusting to the rigours of life as a professional footballer was seen as tough enough without being expected to actively pursue a dual career activity in addition. Players' recollections of being tired much of the time during the first year experience were noted. Staff and players identified the football apprenticeship program delivered by the AFLPA as providing a platform for first year players to develop skills needed to navigate life as a footballer and this was seen as valuable. Any extra 'non-contractual' activities on top of this (apart from the club providing cooking lessons) were perceived as too much for most first year players to handle. There were individual exceptions where players might have been capable of handling some university units from the outset, but as described by an executive staff member,

> I think for a while there we probably tried to push them a bit too hard and
> to some – the first year kids going into uni courses and that sort of stuff
> and we probably underestimated the impact of coming into a programme –
> a football programme that was actually quite tiring. And whilst they didn't
> complain, they complained with their feet, a lot of them said it was too
> hard. -*(Executive staff member)*

With respect to other off-field activities such as those associated with recreational hobbies/interests or the participation in community programs, the individuality of players was also recognised. Staff and players discussed that players would have different orientations towards off-field activities based upon their interests

and personalities and this, wherever possible, was supported by the player development department in assisting players to investigate a hobby or by connecting them with community organisations in line with their interests. This was in an effort to assist the players in developing an 'individually relevant' life outside of football. As described by the PDM in response to what he would do if a player came to him with an interest in 'dancing'.

> We try to help them source the appropriate help that they want. Because I've been in (Withheld) so long and have a lot of contacts if somebody comes and asks about something, I usually know someone who knows someone that can help them with it. So it's just having that contact point.
>
> *-(PDM)*

As another staff member described, "obviously in a football environment all the players are different, the different footballers, the different athletes and they've got different interests outside of the game as well." Thus, the need to recognise the players as individuals was recognised in this environment and this included their preferences for off-field activity and off-field life in general.

Activities need to be viable (MUs = Players, 40; Staff, 13)

There were several espoused values within the club culture that concerned the importance of off-field activities being workable and viable propositions for players. For example, it was perceived by players and staff at the club that the quality of engagement in a dual career activity was ultimately the most important aspect. Players were not expected to continue in an activity if it was not a positive experience. As described by a staff member, "one of the philosophies is if a player is engaged in a course of study or a type of work that they don't like, they're not interested in it, that's only going to be a waste of time". Having a negative experience in a dual career activity

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was considered a waste of time for both the player and the club. There were numerous examples within the interview transcripts of players withdrawing from dual career courses when the prospect of continuing was considered counterproductive to both their football performance in the present and their search for a career beyond football. As articulated by a late career player, "doing something you love is a good escape from footy, doing something you hate and then not enjoying can have a detrimental effect on your footy". This logic also extended to off-field activities that served to give the players a break from the rigours of AFL football. For example, players would often reflect on a hobby or interest that enabled them to such a break from the football environment. As a middle career player described,

> I like to play golf with the boys and sometimes get out on the body board
>
> on my own. It's just good. It … not fills in time but I guess it does but
>
> it's also just relaxing and just doing something else that no one else
>
> really does at the club and it sort of gets me away from everyone….I just
>
> really enjoy the mental release.
>
> -(Early career, 4th season, dual career participant, member of senior
>
> side)

In this sense, it was only the off-field activities where players enjoyed and valued their experiences were considered viable.

It was also described that many players did not know what they might like to do for a career after football has finished. As described by an early career player,

> And I don't think many of us do know what we want to do. I'll tell you
>
> now, I don't know what I'll be doing after my football career but, yeah,
>
> I'm just doing a Business Management course because it's quite a well-
>
> rounded degree.

-(Early career, 2nd season, dual career participant, yet to debut)

The general consensus among players and staff was consequently that trying different activities was an effective strategy, as this assisted players in finding out what they did and did not enjoy. Although there were financial incentives provided by the AFL and AFLPA to finish courses, the PDM in particular was more concerned with the players experiencing different activities in order to find options that suited them. In the words of another staff member,

> And from then on (after the first year), they're encouraged to branch out and it might, like I said before, it might take them 12 months to two years to find out exactly what it is they like, but they're encouraged from pretty early on to have a go at a few things and find out.
>
> *-(Development coach)*

Players also supported the value of this process of sampling. Players described that it was difficult to find an attractive alternative career, given that they were already in a career they were passionate about. As a late career player described, "we've wanted to play an elite sport, that's what you want to do and then okay, now I've got to think of a second or third or fourth option". Although many players were not sure about what they would do when they finished playing, they believed that through sampling activities they would find out.

Finally, for dual career and off-field activities to be viable, players needed to have opportunities that were compatible with the demands of being a professional footballer. The club, through the PDM worked hard to make opportunities viable and this occasionally meant making concessions to the individual player. As one late career player stated, this club was prepared to allow players to attend exams when they conflicted with training,

So the club encourages it (dual career development) and they make the

things available for you too, which is a great thing because they could

encourage you but then make it impossible for you to do. They do both.

So they understand guys that have got exams might have a conflict with

training, the club is all about going to your exams.

-*(Late career, 10th season, dual career participant, senior side)*

The provision of options that were viable appeared to be an ongoing process, as

players reflected on times when the flexibility of a course or traineeship had led to a

quality engagement, yet there were also examples in the past where the player had

experienced difficulty because of a lack of flexibility on the part of an external

institution. The PDM was seen as an ambassador for the flexibility of such dual career

activities. Activities that were for a recreational or social purpose also needed to be

viable. Activities that were flexible and were seen to help the athlete achieve a work/life

balance were considered viable. There were some activities that were never going to be

viable with a career as a professional footballer (at least during the season) and these

included social drinking and extreme sports (due to the risk of injury). As described by

an early career player,

Depends on your days you've had and things like that, your training load

and things. If you've had a real big day sometimes they just encourage

you to go home and put your feet up, have a cold drink and – not alcohol

but.

-*(Early career, 1st season, non-dual career participant, recently debuted)*

Thus, all off-field activities needed to be 'couched' within the expectations of

players preparing, recovering, and functioning as an elite footballer. There was some

allowance in the football schedule for dual career activities when it was considered

important (such as during exams). However, hobbies and recreational interests (over and above the time being allocated to engage in these activities) needed to be viable in the light of a career as a footballer.

The values identified above show that the club was not merely supportive of off-field activities and development. Rather, they illustrate that this support was coherent with the values held around the support of the whole person, the recognition of and inclusion of the player in the support of his off-field life, and also the quality of experiences the athletes should have in their off-field activities as part of a meaningful work/life balance.

Basic assumptions

Deeper basic assumptions identified within the club culture offered insight into the strength of the coherence between espoused values and observable artefacts within the club environment. The basic assumptions (identified by the researcher) offer an explanation at a fundamental level for the way the way the club actually supported their players' off-field activities and personal development.

Balancing sport and off-field life ensures players' well-being and facilitates on-field performance

Within the culture there was an assumption that player well-being was enhanced by living a balanced life which will in turn improve performance. Well-being involved maintaining a sense of balance between football and non-football activities (e.g., hobbies, social activities, and dual career) as well as having positive living arrangements and relationships outside the club. This assumption could be seen in the willingness to make adjustments to the training and preparation schedule when the club felt players needed a break. For example, during the researcher's immersion in the

environment it was planned that when the playing group were due to travel to an away game in a popular tourist destination, they would do so early in the week so the players could enjoy some 'down time' prior to resuming training for the following week's match.

With respect to dual career development, this assumption could explain the preference for activities where the player experienced a quality engagement that was both enjoyable and manageable in the context of the primacy of his football demands. The concern for player well-being was implicit in the PDM's entire conduct within the club. The PDM was primarily concerned with the players' overall welfare and discussions around off-field lifestyle and dual career development existed as subsidiary to this. This could be seen in his taking a genuine interest in the players as people beyond football (as through the 'casual catch ups' away from the club) and it was on this basis (i.e., a genuine interest in the person) that the development of the players as a 'whole person' was discussed rather than as a mere contractual obligation that needed to be adhered to.

The club has an ethical responsibility to support player holistic development and well-being

A clear assumption held within the club was that in addition to any external expectations placed upon it to support player work/life balance, dual career development, and well-being, it was also simply 'the right thing to do.' As described by a staff member, this was in light of what they ask professionally of the players,

> I suppose if you're purely practical you just teach them how to play
> footy and then say the rest of it, well they can work that out for
> themselves. But ethically, we feel as though we do – we take – even

though these kids put their hand up for the draft, we actually take them

out of whatever environment they were in and put them in this one and

you've got to buy into it pretty heavily.

-*(Executive staff member)*

This assumption of an ethical responsibility could also be seen in the genuine

respect awarded, position of inclusion provided, and attention paid to the player

development department in the overall club environment. Members of the club talked

about the personal development and well-being of players as the right thing to support

rather than it being sanctioned by external bodies. The general acceptance of an ethical

responsibility to support players in preparing for life after football was also seen as

consistent with this value of supporting the 'whole person'. As further described by the

executive staff member above, "they are only here for a short amount of time compared

with the rest of their lives. We take the responsibility to make sure that they've at least

had the opportunity to consider the next life."

Preparing for life after football is important however football comes first

Much of the concern regarding the off-field welfare of the players within the

club was with respect to their preparations for life after football. It was recognised that

all players' careers will eventually end and that they should prepare for this. However

this was secondary to the current demands of being a professional footballer. This

assumption could be heard in players and staff members' descriptions of development

activities away from football and the need to keep a 'wary eye' on whether these other

activities were potentially impeding their football output. Rather than viewing these

activities with suspicion, it was assumed they instead needed to be carefully monitored

in light of their viability with respect to football demands. This relationship between

dual career activities and the tasks of football was considered obvious, as described by a late career player,

> Obviously this is my job and this is what I'm really looking at to make
> sure I don't skip anything here, like recovery or anything like that to get
> to TAFE (Technical and Further Education Institute) or to outside work
> because at the end of the day this is my number one priority.
>
> *-(Late career, 12th season, dual career participant, senior side)*

The importance of players' dual career development and well-being in their off-field life was seen as a core concern within the club. As a senior player described the player welfare and development department, "it's not just some bit of fluff on the sides, it's genuinely part of how we work every week". Yet although it was a very genuine part of the organisation's operations and players described occasions where allowances had been made for their dual career activities, if there was any thought that an activity was detracting from the player's ability to produce at football, then it was the off-field activity that needed to be adjusted. This could be seen in the PDM's reflection upon instances when dual career activities in particular had not served to help the player with their football performance,

> We've had plenty of experience in the past where we've directed players
> into certain study units and certain things that we think are good for
> them and it's been a complete failure. It hasn't impacted their football in
> a positive way and it's actually interfered with how they cope and pursue
> life away from footy. It became a real stressor for them because they
> couldn't cope with the work, they couldn't get to tutes or they could get
> there but they didn't want to go there. They were worried that they
> weren't smart enough to be doing things. They stressed because they

didn't know if they actually wanted to do it, then they worried about letting me down. -*(PDM)*

Thus, if a dual career activity was seen to be disruptive to the player's sense of well-being and output at football (apart from missing the occasional session for an exam) then adjustments needed to be made.

Players should be encouraged to find personal meanings in their off-field activities

Rather than mandate that all players are to be involved in certain off-field or dual career activities, the PDM, with the endorsement of the club took a different approach to managing the off-field development and well-being of the players and one consistent with the basic assumptions of the organisational culture. Rather than enforce participation in off-field activities, players were supported in their decision making and exploration around them. As one player reflected on dual career activities, "(you) don't just go do it because someone told you to go do it". In a casual conversation with a retired player it was mentioned that early in his career players used to get 'lumped' into a dual career course because it was convenient and only two out of ten players actually wanted to be there. Although the impermanency of a football career was acknowledged by the players and staff, the issue of players' dual career development was grounded in an understanding that a player's engagement with any activity should be personally meaningful and fulfilling as opposed to merely satisfying the wishes of the club. For social and recreational activities, players were also encouraged to explore their interests. This was providing that participation in these activities were not contrary to the requirements of being an elite footballer.

Players' off-field activities

Off-field activities were generally interpreted by players and staff as all those involvements that were not directly related to football. Five broad categories of off-field activities were identified and these are presented below.

Alternative career development

Players and staff identified activities where the general aim was to prepare for life after football either through higher education, vocational training, work experience/internships, apprenticeships or business opportunities. As described by a development coach,

> So there's a number that study. We had a first year player last year that was working towards a university degree in Podiatry. Others that like to work towards apprenticeships, guys who go to trade school so all those things are supported. And some guys at 18 and 19 years of age know they want to do something but they're not sure yet, so they dip their toe into a few different puddles and test the waters. Which is also fine too. Then we've got older players that have done apprenticeships along the way. So they've got a qualification or they have worked off field and all those opportunities are there.-*(Development coach)*

In this club, these career development activities were undertaken at the player's own volition. Although there was some expectation that players would engage in these activities in order to prepare for life after football. It should be noted that the way the players described these activities were within a different context than might normally understood when using the term 'dual career' (i.e., developing a career outside of sport while concurrently developing as an athlete). The players and staff in the current context saw any career that they were developing outside of football as being an

alternative. The players were already doing a job that they enjoyed for which they were being remunerated well. In addition to the recognition that it was difficult to find an alternative career that could offer the same stimulation, this type of activity has been termed 'alternative career development'. Although players generally recognised they would need a new career once football had finished, for most, this was definitely an alternative rather than a concurrent focus. As described by a middle career player,

> I enjoy footy more and footy's number one but footy can end any day so it's good to have that connection outside of football to be able to go and complete a course or in my case an apprenticeship if I ever need it. Obviously one day I will be working.
>
> *-(Middle career, 7th season, dual career participant, senior side)*

As summarised by a late career player when reflecting on alternative career activities, "It's sort of hard to actually know what you want to do". In this respect, sampling different alternative career activities was seen as an appropriate means for players to find out what they did and did not enjoy career wise outside of football. Thus, activities where players could either sample different careers, or develop more generalisable non-sporting skills that might improve their employment prospects, as well as developing skills for a specific career outside of football can all be termed 'alternative career development activities'.

Recreation/hobbies

Recreation/hobbies were activities that were neither related to football tasks at the club, or preparation for post-football careers. These activities were of their essence voluntary, however they were described by club members as important for achieving a break from football. The actual activities undertaken by players varied according to

their interests. Some examples were golf, surfing, fishing, shooting, music, and pets. These activities/hobbies would often be spoken about when players reflected upon what they do 'outside of football'. They would often be paired with comments concerning the value of such activities. As an early career player described,

> I like my shooting and fishing, so I've got some properties out near (withheld) and out near (withheld) where I can escape, like, back in the farm. I find it sometimes a little bit claustrophobic in and around the city. So I love to get out and do that and, a few of the boys, I'm lucky that they enjoy it as well. So I go with them.
>
> *-(Early career, 2nd season, dual career participant, not in senior side)*

Generally these activities would not be related to football at all. However one participant identified how another one of his teammates volunteered with a local amateur football team as he had many friends there from his junior days (in this case, that player had been lucky enough to be drafted by a team in his home area). In this sense, although it was football, it was the opportunity to engage with friends that appeared to be his motivation for attending. It was noted that recreational activities in general were often closely associated with spending time with friends and friendship groups. There were however also examples of players who participated in interests outside of football that were of a solitary nature due to the sense of personal space this could provide.

Spending time with friends

Players described engaging with friends as a significant part of their off-field life. This could be either teammates or friends from outside the club. For early career players who had moved interstate, the majority of their off-field engagements with

friends were with teammates, as they had yet to establish outside friendship groups. As described by an early career player, "most people have moved from interstate or from other parts of (Withheld). So, really, our only mates are our footy mates at the moment. We haven't quite networked enough yet to build a good core friendship outside the footy club". Further, the importance of friendships appeared to be magnified by the fact that many of these young players' families were interstate or in a different region to their current place of employment. Having transitioned to a new environment, other teammates had become important with respect to their personal adjustment and social life. As a middle career player described when reflecting on his early experiences within the club,

> I guess the fact that you have other guys drafted with you at the same age is a big thing. And those guys remain my best mates now. Just because you have that experience together and not necessarily living together but you're just sort of going through the same, I guess, emotions. You just finished school together. You're on the same page with where you want your footy to go. So I think they were the biggest things that helped and I think the club recognised that and helped build those relationships.
>
> *-(Middle career, 6th season, dual career participant, not in senior side)*

As players progressed through their career it appeared more important to have friends outside the football club. This could be seen in the comments of a middle career player who reflected upon the importance of maintaining friendships with those 'back home',

I try and get home when I can to catch up with mates back home. I think that's really important because I guess once you're out of football, and we're always so busy and stuff, you can lose contact with people from the footy club pretty quickly. But I never want to lose contact with the mates I went to school with and played local football with. So I'm pretty close to them.

-*(Early career, 4ᵗʰ season, dual career participant, senior side)*

The importance of friendship groups outside the club could also be seen in some players' reflections upon eventually desiring to live with non-footballers. This was a means to achieve greater separation between work and home, as discussed previously.

Spending time with friends was generally associated with activities that were for social purposes. These often also included recreational activities that players engaged in, providing there were other people involved (i.e., there were some recreational activities that players engaged in alone). Some players also described a girlfriend, partner, or wife that they spent time with outside of the club. Players generally placed importance on spending time with friends. It was interesting to note that players rarely talked about spending time with either their nuclear or extended family. This was in some ways understandable given that many had relocated to play football and had also yet to start their own family unit through having children. Only one of the interviewees was about to become a father. When family were referred to, it was often in light of phone calls 'back home' or having left their family to come and play football. In this sense, for many players, if time was spent with extended family on a regular basis then it was to be over the phone or via some other form of media.

Developing life skills

Development of life skills refer to those activities that are focussed on the fostering and development of, or indeed requiring the development of general life skills. Examples of such activities included cooking classes for early career players and those skills outside of football that a player would need to develop as they matured such as managing their financial affairs, the running of a household, the maintenance of healthy relationships, and looking after personal health and well-being. The football apprenticeship, an AFLPA initiative, in the present club was compulsory for first year players and had a mix of both football related (e.g., media skills) and lifestyle related (e.g. financial management, managing stress, etc.) skills to help the players adjust to life as a professional footballer. This development of 'life skills' outside of football was identified as important in the present club. It received support through the AFLPA initiatives and other opportunities provided by the PDM. Developing these skills could be seen as important for the player to flourish in the present as well as ensuring that they were 'maturing' in preparation for their life after retirement. Players were expected to develop incrementally as their responsibilities outside of football increased. As described by a development coach,

> We don't want our players to walk in at 18 and have everything done for them and leave here at 30 years of age and still have the mentality of an 18 year old, 'cause that's not what we're trying to do. So it's a balance between providing things and supporting and (not) just giving. So I think, to me, that's what support is, it's giving them the structures and knowledge to them going to able to work independently in the world.
>
> -(Development coach)

This appeared to be achieved by providing a mix of structured support together with the freedom for players do discover things through experience. In the case of one footballer, this was illustrated in how he gained more control over his finances as discussed in the early career player comment below,

> When I first got drafted, my manager took all my money and he paid me weekly but he took care of all my bills and I didn't see where my money was going and I didn't know what bills were being paid and I just rang him and said, 'I appreciate you having my money but I think I need it because footy could be over very shortly and I'm going to walk out of the game and not know how to pay a bill. I'm not going to know how to go and pay a mortgage. I need to teach myself this'.

-(Early career, 2nd season, non-dual career participant, recently debuted)

The need to develop life skills emerges in different ways based upon differences such as personality and approach to off-field life. It is clearly important to consider opportunities to develop essential life skills outside of sport in the context of the elite/professional athlete lifestyle.

Appearances/community service

Appearances/community service could be either compulsory such as those activities that were within the players' professional contracts (i.e., visits to schools, appearances at sponsors' functions, or other community events) or found in voluntary player initiatives that were not sanctioned by the club (i.e., where the players' participated out of their own enthusiasm). Public appearances were accepted as 'part of the job' by the players. Given their public visibility as professional footballers and the

need for their employer's (i.e., the football club) 'brand' to be well received, attending

these activities simply 'needed' to be done. As described by a late career player,

> We obviously have to do appearances and stuff like that for the footy
>
> club, that's part of being an AFL footballer. We've got to go out there
>
> and have to promote the (Withheld) brand, which is a small price to pay
>
> really, if that's what you've got to do. So there are little things like that.
>
> And maybe there might be a couple of other little things that they ask
>
> you to do every now and then, but generally it's not too bad.
>
> -(Late career, 12th season, dual career participant, senior side)

With respect to genuine volunteerism, a number of players who participated in

community activities and events appeared to do so when there was a cause that they

resonated with. As described by a team manager when reflecting on players'

involvement in initiatives outside of contracted appearances,

> Our players do a hell of a lot in the community. A lot of them I know off
>
> their own bat help a lot of people. No one tells them they have to do that
>
> or they're not getting paid to do that. They do it because they want to
>
> help and they enjoy helping people. –(Team manager)

The same staff member lamented that this work was less likely to be on the front cover

of the newspaper than the more rarely occurring examples of player indiscretions.

Quality aspects of off-field activities

Through analysis of the dataset some common themes emerged with respect to

what motivated players towards involvement in a non-compulsory off-field activity and

what maintained their active participation. These themes seem to define the characteristics of quality off-field experiences for the players.

Enjoyment/interest (MUs = Players, 22, Staff, 4)

A common theme identified by the players and staff when reflecting on the quality of an off-field activity was the need for players to experience an interest in the activity and actually enjoy participating in it. Enjoyment and interest are included together here as players and staff would often talk about these aspects within the same breath. Further, players usually enjoyed and were interested in something they were 'good at' (e.g., football). For hobbies and recreational interests, this might seem an obvious requisite. The relationship was more complex in the case of alternative career activities given that many players were searching for a suitable alternative career. The importance of actually being interested and enjoying participation in an alternative career development activity was well summarised by a late career player when he reflected how he discovered carpentry as his preferred alternative career development activity,

> Yeah, that was an actual commerce degree and in that was all the business side of things and all that sort of stuff. And I thought well, I'm not, I didn't really enjoy doing that side of things…it just sort of petered off, I don't enjoy it so I'm not going to be any good at something I don't like doing. The carpentry thing, on the other hand, because I enjoy being outside, because I enjoy being around mates as well and like doing what I'm doing and going to work's actually fun.
>
> -(Late career, 12th season, dual career participant, senior side)

Distraction from football (MUs = Players, 23, Staff, 3)

The ability to become involved in a distraction from football and 'switch off' was another common theme related to the quality of an off-field activity. Players could achieve this in social, recreational, or alternative career development activities. Any activity that could help a player 'switch off' from football was seen as positive. Although players would engage in off-field activities to achieve a 'mental break' from football, some players found this harder than others and there were examples in the interview transcripts of players seeking support from a sport psychologist to help achieve this. In general, players felt that being solely focussed on football would be a negative for their performance and that immersion in off-field activities could provide a useful distraction. As a late career player stated when reflecting upon his alternative career development activity,

> Instead of finishing footy training, you've got five hours to kill you go and sit at home and all you do is dwell on stuff. I think for me that's a good thing as well, just to get out and be able to have that escape from footy and at the same time doing something that I really enjoy doing as well….I think the fact that I'm doing something gives me that something else that I can tune my brain into and not have to use it just to worry about footy edits and possession numbers and stuff like that. So I think that's a good mental break from footy
>
> -(Late career, 12th season, dual career participant, senior side)

Having enough time (MUs = Players, 15, Staff, 3)

Although players described off-field activities as assisting them in 'switching off' from football, it was recognised that they also needed to have adequate time to participate in the activities of their choosing. Otherwise, the experience they had in

these activities could take on a different character. Indeed, not having enough time was described as one of the primary barriers to a quality experience in off-field activities (particularly those related to alternative career activities). For recreational, social, and community pursuits, players in the club generally felt that they had enough time to participate in these and any barriers were more to do with restrictions related to their preparation and recovery as professional footballers. In the case of alternative career development activities, the club attempted to resolve the difficulty of competing schedules by offering flexible courses (in-house) and ensuring that trade schools had programmes where the players could 'pick up' where they had left off' at any time. 'In-house' courses were generally described positively as they were easy to get to and players felt supported while doing them with friends in a familiar environment. Completing a course with football colleagues however was not the choice of every player, especially if they intended to use this activity to escape from the football environment. For certain alternative career activities (e.g., university studies), the club's scheduling did provide a barrier to a quality experience. As a middle career player described,

> I'm very interested in it but I don't feel like a uni student at all and I find it really hard to be enthusiastic and motivated about subjects. All my lectures have to be quite late and my tutes have to be quite late. Quite often I just have to rush to get there, run in 15 minutes late. As soon as it's over I'm straight home because it's dinner time or whatever. I think the thing that the Players' Association have brought in about having a set day off (instead of a floating day off) will help.
>
> *-(Middle career, 6th season, dual career participant, not in senior side)*

The ability for activities to 'fit within' the schedule of the players' 'contracted' tasks as footballers was an important attribute of a quality off-field activity. In contrast to the player's comment above (who was studying onsite at university), another (late career) player commented on an apprenticeship that offered flexible learning which made it a viable proposition,

> We're doing a thing now, it's self-paced. So instead of having, 'this is your timetable, you've got to come in', they've got a folder on you and you can go in at any time there's a teacher or lecturer or whatever you want to call them, there. And you just walk into the room, sign in and they obviously there are some more people in there, they grab your folder, 'yeah, you're up to this, do this' and then at the end of the day tick you off.....So if you can find someone who's flexible enough like that, then that's good.
>
> *-(Late career, 12th season, dual career participant, senior side)*

For this player, the self-paced learning option meant that the flexibility with regards to when he could attend closely suited the variable schedule of an AFL footballer.

Recognising the purpose of the activity (MUs = Players, 8, Staff, 4)

A player's identification with the purpose of participating in any off-field activity appeared to influence the quality of their experience. For recreational and social activities there was a general recognition that these activities helped achieve a sense of balance in life and assisted in an escape from football. In this sense, the purpose of these activities was obvious and it was the other quality aspects (e.g., having enough time, its ability to distract, etc.) that were more important in determining their quality.

For alternative career development, a recognised need to participate in order to prepare for life after football appeared to be critical. However, players appeared to vary in the strength with which they identified with this need. There was a general recognition of 'career impermanency' in the club environment. However for some players this was stronger than others. For some, identification with the purpose of alternative career development activities appeared to be influenced by the experience of an injury. As an early career player described,

> I had an injury, I hurt my (withheld) around round (withheld) last year, round (withheld) and I had to – after the operation I got told I might not play again. So straight away I thought, what am I going to do if I can't play again? So I decided to look at things that interest me and what actually – instead of just doing pointless courses, actually do something that I will use after if this doesn't come good.
>
> -(Early career, 3rd season dual career participant, not in senior side)

For the early career player above it meant that alternative career development suddenly became more serious and purposeful. For some players, preparing for life after football was something that they regularly thought about and pursued. As described by a late career player,

> Yeah I'm a constant thinker of what I'm going to be doing next. I've always had that though when I started football; that football can end the next day. Probably 'cause I've seen some good friends involved in football go through career ending injuries that they're still dealing with in normal life, being unable to do what all of us can do just go for a run and things like that. So I've always had it as a perspective.

-(Late career, 10th season, dual career participant, senior side)

Yet, within the same environment there were players who although they appeared to

understand the rationale behind alternative career development, they did not feel the

same sense of urgency. Although there were other aspects of these activities, that

appeared to influence the quality of experience players had within alternative career

development activities, it was their sense of identification with the purpose of these

activities that appeared to drive their enthusiasm. This 'buying in', appeared to be

closely related to the player having found an alternative career path that they saw as

practical (i.e., one that they could reasonably see themselves doing when they finished

football).

Friends within the activity (MUs = Players, 9, Staff, 0)

When reflecting on their recreational and alternative career development

involvement, players would often mention spending time with 'mates', having fun,

and/or being supported by their 'mates' during these activities. Players in the present

study appeared to have a strong desire to spend time with friends in general. For

example, having friends within an alternative career activity provided the players with a

sense of comfort. For some, this meant that 'in-house' courses were preferable due to

the difficulty of forming friendships at externally delivered courses due to the 'in and

out' nature of their engagement. As described by an early career player,

> Yeah, and that's nice that a lot of the boys do it. A few of the boys tried
>
> doing uni just through (name withheld) or online. Well, I know (names
>
> withheld) both did it, being my housemates, and, yeah, they didn't enjoy
>
> it at all. So they excluded themselves from that course and took up this
>
> one because most people have moved from interstate or from other parts

of (withheld)…so you want to be around your mates when you're doing

it.

-(Early career, 2nd season, dual career participant, not in senior side)

Many players did not enjoy engaging in alternative career development

activities where they did not have a social connection. However, although a social

connection was identified as contributing to the quality of recreational activities, there

were clear examples of players who undertook recreational activities for the opportunity

to experience some solitude as discussed previously. Although having friends within an

off-field activity was regularly described as a quality aspect it was not always the rule.

Further, there would be some activities that were enhanced by having a social

connection (such as alternative career development) and examples of recreational

activities where players actively sought separation from the football environment and

other players. This reinforces the importance of remembering individual differences and

cautions against assuming that players 'must' have a social connection in an off-field

activity for it to be considered a quality experience.

Discussion

What was learned about the players and their lives as AFL footballers, their club environment, and the actual off-field activities of the players was formative for the next stage of the investigation, that is, the investigation of players' off-field activities and the way they engage in their football. This learning is now discussed further.

The players

The players as 'whole' people

The players' identities as footballers was prominent for those interviewed and this is consistent with previous literature that has reported on the salience of the athlete role for elite and professional athletes (Brewer & Cornelius, 2001; Poczwardowski et al., 2013; Stephan & Brewer, 2007). Preoccupation with their athlete identity (AI) is reinforced for players by the demands of the elite environment, the public status of being an athlete, and the intense focus required to be an elite athlete (Stephan & Brewer, 2007). So, given that in the present study being a footballer was the players' profession, confirmation that this identity as a footballer was a prominent component of who they were is not surprising.

Although players in this study quite readily identified as 'footy heads', they also discussed the importance of their lifestyle, identity, and relationships beyond the game. This finding supports the notion put forward by Fraser (2012) that elite level athletes can have salient athlete identities yet also value non-sporting aspects of their lives across physical, social, and intellectual domains. It is also consistent with the work of Horton and Mack (2000) who discovered that a 'high AI' group of marathon runners did not differ significantly in their valuing of non-athletic life roles when compared to a group of 'low AI' runners. These data could be interpreted as showing players

developing beyond the athlete role as suggested by the developmental model of

transitions faced by athletes (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004) and other contemporary

literature concerning athlete development (Bennie & O'Connor, 2010; Friesen & Orlick,

2010; Miller & Kerr, 2002).

Life as an AFL footballer

Working as an AFL footballer was what these players 'loved' to do. Of course,

in addition to working hard to make it onto an AFL list in the first place (Hickey &

Kelly, 2005), they were also being remunerated well in their current profession (Bowen

& Ryan, 2013). Although it was their career of choice there was regular discussion on

the sacrifices required to work as a footballer. Such sacrifices included restrictions on

player social activities, the need to adhere to strict diet and recovery protocols, unusual

working hours/working weekends, injury and fatigue, and increased public scrutiny

both on and off the field. This is consistent with Stephan, Bilard, Ninot, and Delignieres

(2003) discussion of the athlete's lifestyle as being sub-ordinated to the demands of

their sport. The elite athlete lifestyle is one where in addition to the substantial 'at work'

commitment, athletes must always ensure they are both returning to the arena in the

best possible physical condition and having also represented the values of their sporting

club/organisation during their free time (Kelly & Hickey, 2008; Stewart & Dickson,

2007).

In the present study, many of the decisions made by players around their 'off-

field life' were made in consideration of their athletic career. Interestingly, players and

staff communicated that they believed these sacrifices were poorly understood by the

regular public. They perceived that the surrounding public saw a career as a

professional footballer as an idyllic occupation without consideration of the hard work

and sacrifices required. This contrast of perspectives has been previously reported in Noblet and Gifford's (2002) investigation of the sources of stress amongst professional AFL footballers, where players discussed a lack of public understanding of the commitment required to be an AFL footballer. The way players and staff in the present study believed the general public saw their job (i.e., 'kicking the football and getting paid substantially to do so') served to intensify their expression of the hard work and sacrifices that went into a career as a professional footballer.

Kelly and Hickey (2010) wrote of how expectations regarding the AFL footballer professional identity extended beyond the field. Players were expected to be prudently preparing for life after football and achieving a sense of 'balance in life'. Given the demands of life as an AFL footballer however, these expectations created some tensions for players. An example of similar tensions could be seen in the present study where young players would miss external social events due to club expectations. However, it has been argued that the ability for young athletes to make these social sacrifices is an important contributor to their overall success (Holt & Dunn, 2004). The ability to make social sacrifices for the athletic career can be difficult for some athletes when considering the 'social drivers' implicit in Erikson's (1980) and Arnett's (2000) conceptualisations of young and emerging adulthood and its associated psychosocial development. In the present study, the valence of such sacrifices was highlighted by the player who when he missed friends twenty first birthday celebrations questioned, "why am I even doing this?" The reinforcement of the challenges of life as a professional footballer both on the field and beyond for players adds heuristic and explanatory value to the current investigation.

Life outside of football

Players embraced the need to actively participate in life outside of football. It included having some separation between their job and their personal life. This however appeared to become more important for middle and late career players. Players reflected on spending much of their time with other players during their early careers as many had relocated and had a lack of social contacts outside the club. In this sense, other players were an important point of social contact and support and this matches previous reports on the transitional experiences of rookie athletes (Bruner et al., 2008). This shift in the importance of life outside of football is likely to be reflective of a diversification of identity with age as is suggested in both the athlete identity literature (Lally, 2007; Martin et al., 2014) and literature concerning adult psycho-social development (Côté, 2006). This could also be reflective of what the middle and late career players had come to learn about effective player lifestyles throughout their careers (Douglas & Carless, 2006), the adjustment to their new environment, and the development of new relationships outside of the club.

The pressures of AFL football were regularly cited as the reason players needed to achieve a separation from work. This is consistent with reflections from athletes and coaches in other sports who have spoken of the benefits of non-sporting engagements (Aquilina, 2013; Bennie & O'Connor, 2010; Cresswell & Eklund, 2007; Douglas & Carless, 2006; Price et al., 2010). Players in the present study similarly discussed time with friends, hobbies/interest, and dual career activities as a means to achieve physical and psychological separation and allow for recreation from the pressures of the athletic environment. The benefit of achieving separation between work life and home life and to participate in stimulating 'non-work' activities is entirely consistent with literature from 'traditional' workplaces (Attridge, 2009; Beauregard & Henry, 2009; Grawitch et

al., 2006). This is not surprising given that work as an AFL footballer is a full time profession. As a senior player in the study responded to the prospect of spending more time at the club to enhance performance, "No, I don't think I'd want to spend any more time here, we're here enough".

Career stage

Players typically described that when they first arrived at the club they were nervous and in 'awe' of senior players (Bruner et al., 2008; Hickey & Kelly, 2005). Players also described their shock with respect to the demands of the football program and being constantly tired and sore during their first year at the club. This extreme fatigue has been described in Hickey and Kelly's (2005) work and appears to be reflective of a common first year/early career experience of professional AFL footballers. Players in the present study described themselves as not being ready to explore much outside of football until they felt they had 'adjusted' to the elite environment. This is similar to other reports of 'off-field activities' such as of education taking a 'back seat' during the early career (Bruner et al., 2008; Christensen & Sørensen, 2009; Holt & Dunn, 2004). It was observed that players would typically live with a host family in their first one to two years at the club when football was almost the exclusive focus. As players began to master life as an AFL footballer they were able to be more open to exploration of life outside of football.

Middle career players in this study had to some degree 'made it' as a footballer as they had been in the club for four or more years and had now signed several continuing contracts (Hickey & Kelly, 2008). In extending Hickey and Kelly's (2008) work, there were examples of players who were in the process of consolidating their career as an AFL footballer and those who also sensed an upcoming 'capitulation' due

to poor form, injury, or inability to maintain a place in the senior side. This suggests that although this cohort was generally established as AFL footballers there were some whose positions were more tenuous and they felt far less comfortable than those who were performing well in the senior side. Although football was still the priority for this cohort, they described a greater engagement in activities outside of football such as alternative career activities, hobbies/interests, and spending time with partners and friends.

Late career players felt fortunate to have been in the game for as long as they had and also recognised that their careers were nearing the end. This recognition of impending retirement has also been described in Lally's (2007; 2005) investigations of NCAA college athletes. Players in the present study were trying to make the most of their time left in the game yet were also actively seeking to explore career options outside of football. There was also an increasing awareness amongst the late career players that when they transitioned into a new career they would be starting at entry level again and this is consistent with previous reports of delayed career development in retiring athletes (Stephan et al., 2003; Wylleman et al., 2011).

Late career players described being reasonably well 'set up' for their current stage of life yet still recognised that most AFL players would need a new career. As a late career player described, "Well, I know I do and some guys who, like (withheld) on a million dollars a year they're probably not going to have to. But that's good for them, but I'm not one of them". Finally, late career players differed in their level of concern with respect to what would happen when football eventually finished, not solely because of relative financial security but perhaps also because of a characteristic range of differences in player personality traits, for example, conscientiousness as identified by Demulier, Le Scanff, and Stephan (2012).

Club environment

An understanding of how the club culture supported players' off-field activities
and their personal development was a key focus of this investigation. Such an
understanding provides a starting point to identify potentially important environmental
variables to account for in future investigations. Previous research on the off-field
development and career transitions of elite athletes has been largely focussed on the
individual challenges faced (Cosh & Tully, 2014; North & Lavallee, 2004; Stephan &
Brewer, 2007) or issues of program effectiveness (Fraser et al., 2010; Lavallee, 2005).
The present study considered the explanatory power of a sporting club's culture by
seeking to illuminate how organisational culture might be a part of the successful
implementation of off-field development and activity initiatives within the micro-
environment of a professional AFL club (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Henriksen et
al., 2010a).

Developing the athlete as a whole person

The analysis of the club culture presented in this chapter suggests that when a
professional sporting club truly values developing the athlete as a whole person, then
off-field development and associated activities are more likely to be adequately
supported. The athletic career transition literature (Cecić Erpič et al., 2004; Park et al.,
2012; Stambulova et al., 2009), has highlighted the importance of athletes developing in
non-athletic domains (e.g., psychological, psychosocial, & academic/vocational).
Implicit in the developmental model of career transitions faced by athletes (Wylleman
et al., 2013) is the need to take a whole person approach to supporting the athlete
through these transitions in both athletic and non-athletic domains. It was apparent in
the present club culture however that such support for players away from the field

needed to be coherent with the club's core business of winning games of football
(Hickey & Kelly, 2008).

In the club culture studied here, support for the development of the whole
person was believed to be positively linked to on-field performance rather than seen as
irrelevant to or even competing against it. This is consistent with the notion of the
reciprocal nature of athletic and non-athletic domains as put forward in Wylleman and
Lavallee's (2004) model. The development of an alternative career, for example, was
couched within this assumption and this clearly influenced the manner in which it was
supported. The athlete career transition literature has had a strong focus on the 'future
benefit' of dual career development and a heavy focus on athletic retirement
(Stambulova et al., 2009; Wylleman et al., 2004). Therfore, it is not surprising that at
times sporting environments (and those within it) have railed against what is on the
surface a seemingly unrelated and future oriented concern (Chambers et al., 2013; Cosh
& Tully, 2014; Henry, 2013; Hickey & Kelly, 2008; McLeod, 2013). The present
investigation however provided an example of an environment that has invested in
developing athletes beyond their athletic role alone with the belief that this can pay
performance dividends.

**Applying concepts of organisational and ecological psychology to
understand support for off-field activity**

The cultural analysis above has served as a response to the calls of Chambers et
al. (2013) and Stambulova and Ryba (2013) for more culturally based research on the
career development and transitions of athletes. It is also consistent with the study of
athletic environments from a positive organisational psychology perspective and the
identification of organisational/environmental success factors (Fletcher & Wagstaff,

2009; Henriksen et al., 2010b; Wagstaff et al., 2011). Positive examples of support for player off-field development and activities can be used by clubs and relevant practitioners (e.g., sport psychologists or player welfare managers) to reflect on their own organisation's practices and how they can support their players in a holistic and ethical manner whilst remaining coherent with the overarching goal of on-field success.

The consideration of macro-environmental influences (e.g., the AFL and AFLPA) provides some necessary context within which to interpret the unique influences of the individual club culture (Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Henriksen, 2010). The micro-environment of the club, much like the athletes themselves, did not exist in a 'vacuum' and much of its culture was a result of the way it has responded to the surrounding macro-environment (Schein, 1990).

The individual AFL clubs operate within a context where elements of the macro-environment (Henriksen et al., 2010a) create 'problems' of external adaptation and internal integration (Schein, 2010) for issues such as player off-field development and activities. There are two 'problems' that are of particular relevance to all AFL clubs. The first is they need to perform on the field, as success influences their profitability and viability (Pinnuck & Potter, 2006). Such an overarching priority can make it difficult for both the players and their clubs to focus on a more distal notion such as their players' well-being and also the preparation for retirement from the sport. Similar tensions between education/vocational development and sport have also been reported in Christensen and Sorensen's (2009) investigation of how young talented Danish footballers managed the demands placed upon them with respect to sport and education. Their study identified that when the competing demands and the conflicting cultural assumptions of the sporting and educational cultures collided, it was the players' educational development that was typically sacrificed. This was because on-

field performance had the most present psychological relevance to the players and their talent development environment. In 'lewinian' terms, the strength of the social, psychological, and physical valences towards the focus of sporting performance are typically greater than those that drive the athlete towards personal and holistic development (Chak, 2002; Christensen & Sørensen, 2009).

The second problem of external adaptation is that AFL clubs have a need to comply with the workplace conditions enshrined within the industry wide collective bargaining agreement and also to respond to the expectations of the AFLPA as champion for the welfare of their membership (Australian Football League Players' Association, 2011). The workplace agreement requires every AFL club to at least consider means by which to reconcile satisfying the performance imperative with the need to support players' off-field welfare and development. The basic assumptions identified in the club culture in this study were both internally harmonious and cumulatively conducive to the support of player off-field development and activities. As Schein (2010) suggested, this comes about as a result of how a culture has solved its 'problems' over time and is reflective of 'what works'. A prominent example of how the club reconciled the maintenance of on-field success with off-field player development, well-being, and associated activities was the way that it supported dual career development.

In this club, dual career development was seen as an ethical responsibility and important but within the light of a 'core' understanding that football came first. This is at one with many reports of the priority sporting performance takes in elite environments (Cosh & Tully, 2014; Hickey & Kelly, 2005; MacNamara, Button, & Collins, 2010; McLeod, 2013). Rather than challenge a deeply ingrained cultural assumption common to athletic talent development environments, the club culture has

developed in a way that has supported dual career development in a manner coherent with this assumption. Dual career development was recognised as a part of a balanced lifestyle and a contribution to player well-being in the present. In turn player well-being was assumed to contribute positively to on-field performance as in line with previous reports of the importance of sport/life balance (Douglas & Carless, 2006; Martindale, Collins, & Abraham, 2007; Poczwardowski et al., 2013; Price et al., 2010). These assumptions help explain the espoused values concerning the importance of the quality experienced by the players in their engagement in these activities, the benefits of sampling among a range of dual career activities, and the need for options that were compatible with the demands of football.

The assumption that balancing sport and off-field life was conducive to player well-being and performance and that any off-field activity should form a part of this balance was an important element of the club culture. It is consistent with holistic views of athletic development and performance (Douglas & Carless, 2006; Friesen & Orlick, 2010; Miller & Kerr, 2002; Price et al., 2010). For example, Friesen and Orlick, (2010) discussed the "multiple selves" (p.233) of the athlete and argued that if any non-athletic elements of the athlete's self are suffering then it is likely that their athletic self and consequently their performance will as well. This means that the true test of any off-field activity was whether it can contribute to an overall sense of well-being. Thus, there was a positive valence (Lewin, 1951) towards quality immersions in off-field activities due to the assumption of a performance benefit.

The present culture provides an important example for professional sporting organisations where notions of player 'work/life balance' and player dual career development have been viewed with suspicion by those outside the welfare departments, for example, in the areas of sport science and executive management

(Chambers et al., 2013; McLeod, 2013; Noblet & Gifford, 2002). Such suspicion has been reflective of the 'sports science arms race' and the belief that to be successful, a sports team must continue to find ways to 'work harder' than their competitors. The present culture however, sought to support the players' development and well-being as 'whole people' as a performance strategy. This meant that although there were heavy workplace demands placed upon them, they were also supported in their lifestyles, activities, and development away from the workplace as consistent with 'cutting edge' recommendations from contemporary workplace literature (Attridge, 2009; Grawitch et al., 2006). Their reputation as one of the more successful AFL clubs in recent history must be acknowledged was helpful in the acceptance of such a strategy.

The PDM's professional practice within the organisational culture

Also worthy of highlighting with the club culture were the practices of the PDM. The PDM, as an 'agent' in the proximal processes (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006) of players' off-field development and activities, adopted a 'humanistic' (Bennie & O'Connor, 2010; Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Deci & Ryan, 2000) approach to the players' support. Overall his behaviours and practices were firmly situated within a framework of autonomy supportive coaching behaviours, where players' feelings would be acknowledged, support provided for their own decision making, and they would be given reasonable rationales to develop in their life away from football (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003). This PDM appeared to first form a genuine relationship with the player before off-field development and activities would become part of an ongoing dialogue. These practices of forming authentic and trusting relationships (Becker, 2009), making use of informal settings for communication (Martindale et al., 2007), and showing genuine care and recognition of the whole person (Bennie & O'Connor, 2010;

McLeod, 2013) are supported in the coaching literature as a means to achieve favourable outcomes for athletes. It appears in this example that they were also useful in achieving outcomes for players 'off the field'. It was their congruence with the deeper cultural assumptions of the club that meant that the PDM could use such an autonomy supportive approach effectively.

The nature of off-field activity

The findings have provided a broad typology of AFL player off-field activity. The typology presented and discussed above is simple and straightforward. However some of these categories make for interesting insights. For example, although there were appearances/community activities that were part of the players' contracts, a professional expectation, and part of their professional identity (Kelly & Hickey, 2010), a number of players would also freely involve themselves in these activities. If this is a widely spread practice, it provides support for the notion that many professional athletes are genuinely aware of and care about broader issues beyond their own sport and career (Anderson, 2012; Fraser, 2012; Horton & Mack, 2000). This might serve as a counter the opinion of David Parkin, the former AFL coach that the AFL is starting to create some of Australia's most unbalanced young men (Collins, 2013). Although this may be true for some players, there were examples of players in the present study who volunteered their time in the community due to their own sense of the value of such contributions.

It was also interesting to hear discussion from players and staff about the need to develop 'life skills' outside of football and the importance of the environment supporting the need to do so. As previously discussed (Stephan et al., 2003; Vilanova & Puig, 2014), in some environments, athletes lifestyles are 'micromanaged' with their

schedules, diet, travel, game plans, and many of their personal affairs handled *for* them.

As described by an athlete in the Vilanova and Puig (2014) study, "You give 100% to

sport, to training. You sleep, you train and that's it. You don't need to worry about

anything else, because it's all arranged for you. All you have to do is train" (p.10). Such

an approach can cause problems for the players once they are no longer elite athletes

(Lavallee & Robinson, 2007; Park et al., 2012). Although Mayocchi and Hanrahan

(2000) suggested that there are many skills developed in a career as an elite or

professional athlete which are transferable to a post-athletic career, if athletes do not

have the opportunity to manage their own affairs, they are likely to struggle with life

once they are no longer part of an 'institutionalised' athletic environment. In the present

study, the club environment recognised that players needed to be empowered and have

the opportunity to manage their personal affairs outside of football.

Dual career or alternative career development?

Dual career (Aquilina, 2013; Stambulova & Ryba, 2013) has become the

popular nomenclature for vocational activities that the athlete concurrently participates

in alongside their career as an elite or professional athlete. Typically, their purpose is to

provide them with options for employment when they retire from their sport. There are

however some issues with the adoption of this term for professional athletes. The term

'dual career' can give the impression that both activities (i.e., competing as an athlete

and developing an additional career) are of equal importance to the players and their

sporting environs, when the career transition literature clearly suggests that they are not

(Cosh & Tully, 2014; Hickey & Kelly, 2005). Professional athletes are generally

working in their number one career choice. For athletes in this study, the second career

was an alternative, a lower priority, and it was often difficult to even find a 'second

interest' they believed they would enjoy if they were deprived of the opportunity to continue in their sporting career. It is argued here that 'alternative career development' is a more suitable term than dual career activities for professional athletes and will be retained for use in the quantitative phase of the enquiry.

Quality aspects of off-field activity

Being interested in the activity, enjoying the activity, and identifying with its purpose were identified as elements of a quality experience in off-field activity. Closely tied to enjoyment and interest were players sense of 'being good at' the activity. Further, many players described that a social connection in their off-field activities also added to a positive experience. Deci and Ryan's (2000, 2008) self-determination theory (SDT, and its sub-theories) help explain why these aspects emerged from this dataset. The essence of these elements lie in the importance of players' motivations for participating in any off-field activity. At the core of SDT is that if the human being experiences a sense of volition towards an activity, a sense of competence, and also a sense of relatedness to people associated with that activity (and/or a sense of identification with the activity itself), then they will experience advanced forms of motivation to participate (and continue to participate) in that activity.

As described in the present study, the opposite of an optimal experience in off-field activity is one where a player participates because of an external regulation and where they hold little intrinsic or internalised value for the activity (Deci & Ryan, 2000). For recreational/hobbies and social activities, an understanding of the need for players to participate for intrinsic/identified (Deci & Ryan, 2000) reasons is obvious. However for alternative career development it was a little more complex due to the influence of the AFL industry and the AFLPA, the lower priority of these activities, and

the difficulties of encouraging players to genuinely develop an alternative career pathway (Australian Football League Players' Association, 2012; Clarke & Salter, 2010; Hickey & Kelly, 2008). The use of autonomy supportive approaches (Amorose & Anderson-Butcher, 2007; Mageau & Vallerand, 2003) via the player development manager presents as an effective way to support these activities.

It was also revealed that actually having enough time to engage in an off-field activity was an important attribute related to the player achieving a quality experience. This theme was relevant to all off-field activities but particularly relevant to alternative career development. Career development activities with flexible options were preferred (Henriksen et al., 2010a). The need for flexible career development options in the light of the demands of the athletic career has been clearly identified in the athlete career transition literature (Aquilina, 2013; Burden, Tremayne, & Marsh, 2004). If a player felt like they had to 'rush' an activity or struggled to fit it in, then this would harm the quality of experience in that activity. It must be recognised that the athlete lifestyle is busy. A certain amount of 'having enough time' may come down to the athletes own time management skills as identified by Fraser, Fogarty, and Albion (2010) and Anderson (2012). Nonetheless, whether an activity can reasonably fit into the weekly schedule of a professional AFL player appears to influence the quality of players' experience in that activity.

Finally, the ability for an activity to provide a distraction from football thus inducing a 'mental release' also emerged as a quality aspect of any off-field activity. Members of the club in this study described the importance of 'switching off' from football and off-field activity could be an effective way to do this. The importance of achieving a mental break from elite level sport has been communicated in numerous studies (Douglas & Carless, 2006; Poczwardowski et al., 2013; Price et al., 2010) and is

once more supported here. These activities would generally be unrelated to football in order to achieve the release that was desired. Engaging in off-field activities as part of a balanced life created the opportunity to shift the focus away from football. This is of course as long as the activity is not so demanding that it returns the athlete to the club fatigued or feeling stale.

Conclusion

Although players in the present study had prominent athletic identities they were also able to reflect upon whom they were outside of football. These non-football components of their identity were important despite the primacy that football had in their lives. Further, analysis of the player data suggested that they were not a homogenous group of 'jocks'. Rather, there were variations in personality and interests away from the club. These findings suggest that players in general are likely to value their lives outside of football irrespective of the prominence of their athletic identities.

Players' descriptions of life as an AFL footballer were typified by descriptions of sacrifices in the light of their love for their chosen profession, a full-time atypical working commitment, and a need to achieve a sense of a 'life outside football' in order to cope with the demands of the game. Finally, as part of recognising the individual characteristics of players, the present investigation offered confirmation of Hickey and Kelly's (2008) early, middle, and late career stages as important variables in the analysis. Variations in the experiences characteristic of each of these career stages suggested that a consideration of the player's position on the career pathway needs to be a part of any interpretation.

The case study has provided an example of a culture that was supportive of player off-field development and activities. The analysis of the club culture according to its deeply held assumptions, espoused values, and observable artefacts has provided 'identifiers' of support that will be developed in the next phase of the enquiry. An understanding of the broad types of activities players participated in, and the characteristics of a quality experience have also provided guidance for moving into the next stage of the enquiry.

Chapter Five: Quantitative Conceptualisation

The aim of this chapter is to demonstrate the linkages between the qualitative and quantitative phases of the sequential mixed design (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009), the rationale for the continuing conceptualisation of the study, and the development of the questionnaire for the survey of a representative AFL player cohort.

Research questions to be addressed in this phase of the enquiry:

What relationship do players' personal characteristics and their perceptions of their club environment have with their participation in off-field activities?

What relationship does players' participation in off-field activities have with their athlete engagement?

Inferences from the case study

In the following section, the major conclusions based on the findings of the qualitative phase are re-iterated with respect to their implications for the study's overarching conceptual framework.

The players

Players commonly described being drafted in to their AFL careers via a talent development pathway. As a part of this process, some players had to relocate regionally or interstate in order to begin their career as a professional footballer. As a member of the club, players either lived with a 'host family' (if in their first or second year), with other footballers, with non-footballers, their own family, or a romantic partner. Although their role as 'athlete' appeared to be a prominent component of each of the footballers' personal identities, they also appeared to value aspects of their lives

outside of football such as their other hobbies/interests, and their relationships with others outside the club (such as friends and family). The findings also highlighted how players identified differing challenges and experiences during each of the three career stages defined by Hickey and Kelly (2008). This strongly suggested that career stage was an important variable to consider when investigating players' participation in off-field activities. Finally, with respect to alternative career development, it appeared that players were exploring career paths according to their varying talents such as those who were academically/intellectually based or more practical and hands on. This suggested that there may be some variance in the players' self-concept domains which might be associated with the way in which they pursued alternative career development.

Club environment

There were several themes in the club environment that had emerged as potential influences on the way players participated in off-field activity. These themes (as opposed to specific cultural assumptions or values) have therefore been brought forward from the case study to be further investigated on a league wide scale during the quantitative phase. The measurement of themes related to the club environment (as opposed to each individual culture) is in recognition of Schein's (1990, p.110) assertion that an organisation's culture cannot adequately be measured by a pen and paper questionnaire and instead needs extended immersion and study. This also recognises that each club will have varying cultural values, basic assumptions, and deliver their support for player off-field development and activities in different ways. The general club environment themes that were considered likely to be relevant in the context of all individual club environments, regardless of their specific cultural nuances are summarised briefly below.

Support of a work/life balance

Players appeared more likely to experience adequate participation in their off-field activities with respect to time and quality, if the club was supportive of a work/life balance. It was believed that players were also more likely to be engaged in their core roles as footballers (and perform) if this was the case.

Autonomy supportive relationship with the PDM

The relationship players had with the PDM and his adoption of an autonomy supportive style with regards to decision making about participation in off-field activities (particularly alternative career development) was identified as an important contributor to the players feeling supported in their off-field life. A general recognition of the individual needs of each player and that those players should have some empowerment with respect to their off-field lives and the pursuit of activity was an important element of the culture in the club studied. This was mainly achieved through the practices of the PDM and player welfare department.

Player development a respected department within the club

The player development department was clearly respected within the club that was studied and this meant that the support provided to the players by this department was taken seriously by both the players themselves and staff. Although it is mandated that AFL clubs have a player development and welfare department and a suitably qualified PDM, whether the department is actually taken seriously by the club presented is a potentially important aspect of its capacity to support players.

The club's care and recognition of the whole person

The club under study had clearly showed care for the player as a whole person and not just as a footballer. This was implicit in the way the club supported players'

development and well-being through taking a genuine interest in the players' lives outside of football. The players reflected on this aspect of their club environment fondly and expressed that it improved the quality of their experience in their workplace.

Off-field activities

Type

The initial investigation produced a broad typology of off-field activities. Some of the activities were part of the players' contracted roles as an AFL footballer while others were undertaken at the initiative of the player (and in some cases, as with alternative career development with the encouragement of the club). There were also examples of activities, such as appearances/community that could either be sanctioned by the club or undertaken by the player voluntarily. The decision was made to focus on three main types of non-compulsory off-field activities: alternative career development; recreational activities/hobbies, and; social life/going out. This was because they were readily understood by players as non-football activities whereas appearances/community was more ambiguous.

Quality

For players who participated in alternative career development, several aspects of their experiences in these activities were identified that may be important in understanding associations between their participation in these activities and the experience of athlete engagement. These included: whether an activity was seen as a positive distraction from football; having 'enough time' for the activity; identifying with the purpose of the activity; experiencing enjoyment/interest; and having a social connection or 'friends' at the activity. Elements from the 'quality aspects' of off-field activity identified in chapter five that appear particularly relevant to the general

experience of free time (i.e., achieving a 'mental break' from football and the adequacy

of free time) will be considered. Players' experience of their free time and whether they

believed they achieved a sense of work/life balance, had ample opportunity to

participate in social activities, and in their interests outside of football were also

identified as important.

Development of the questionnaire

The selection of items and related variables needed to consider the overall

length of the survey and avoid the potential problem of "response burden" (i.e., the size

of the survey leading to poor or unmotivated responses on the part of the participants;

Fowler, 2001). The selection and 'importation' of existing instruments as well as the

creation of new question items specific to the survey reflects the inferences identified

above. The description of the variables is organised under headings of, 'the players',

'club environment', 'off-field activity', and 'athlete engagement' reflecting the

elements of the conceptual framework.

The players

Demographics

Basic demographical questions included in the drafting of the survey were age,

living arrangements, senior games played, years on AFL list, and whether they have

relocated to play football.

Athlete identity

The Athlete Identity Seven (AIMS-7) was chosen for this study in order to

measure the degree to which individual players identified with the athletic role. Brewer

and Cornelius (2001) reported this to be psychometrically superior to the original 10

item version (AIMS-10). They analysed a decade of studies and 2856 respondents to the

AIMS-10 and reported that three items were poor performers and thus shortened the original to the seven item version. They confirmed the structure of the three sub-scales as subordinate to the overarching measure of athlete identity and its internal consistency with a Cronbach's alpha of .81. The three sub-scales are social identity which contains items such as "most of my friends are athletes", exclusivity containing items such as "I spend more time thinking about sport than anything else" and negative affectivity containing items such as "I feel bad about myself when I do poorly in sport". Visek, Hurst, Maxwell, and Watson (2008) reported that the AIMS-7 was a psychometrically sound measure for American males competing in collision sports (such as football) and also for an English speaking Chinese sample competing in similar sports. The Aims-7 is also more convenient due to its brief nature, reducing the response burden of the overall questionnaire package on the participants.

Self-concept

The summary items of the self-description questionnaire III (SDQ-III-SI; Marsh & O'Neil, 1984) provides a shortened 12 item version of the larger 136 item questionnaire. The SDQ-III-SI asks participants to declare their level of agreement with personal statements about, broadly, their physical, social, moral, and intellectual self-concepts (Hardy & Moriarty, 2006). The original SDQ-III also contains a general esteem dimension however, in light of the need to minimise the length of the survey, this was deemed irrelevant to the broader scope of the present investigation. For each of the 12 items, participants give a rating both as to the accuracy of the statement and then the importance of that statement with respect to their overall self-concept.

The SDQ-III single item summaries of each aspect of self-concept have been shown to have modest reliability and validity when compared with the 136 item

questionnaire (Marsh, 1986) with test-retest correlations at $r = .70$ for the accuracy

ratings and $r = .57$ for the importance ratings on a sample of 930 student participants.

Where Marsh (1986) used 'significant other raters' (i.e., people who knew the

participants well) to consider validity, the single 'accuracy' items had a correlation with

the participants' ratings of $r = .40$ suggesting modest validity. The 'importance' single

items appeared to have lower validity ($r = .26$) when compared with the significant

others however it was proposed that significant others have greater difficulty judging

the importance of dimensions of self-concept when compared to the individual

concerned. Marsh (1986) argued that where issues such as survey length and response

burden exist, it would still be better to use the summary items as opposed to a uni-

dimensional measure of self-concept. Thus, the SDQ-III-SI serves as a pragmatic

measure of athletes' broader self-concept. The summary items have previously been

used to understand relationships with athlete identity amongst National Athlete Career

Education (NACE) athletes (Fraser, 2012). Table 6 summarises each of twelve domains

and the single item that is purported to measure them.

The club environment

Eleven statements were developed from the findings presented in the case study

concerning players' perceptions of the support they received from the club as a 'whole

person' in their lives away from football and their experience of free time. Players were

asked to respond on a seven point Likert scale anchored by very strongly disagree (1)

and very strongly agree (7). It has been suggested in the literature that the use of (at a

minimum) at least four to seven Likert rating categories is important as it creates a

greater opportunity for respondents to demonstrate and discriminate their views (Foddy,

1994; Rust & Golombok, 2009). These items were derived from the qualitative

findings. Table 7 shows these items.

Table 6

Self-Description Questionnaire III Summary Items

Item	Domain
I am good at sports and physical activities (A, I)	Physical ability
I have good verbal skills/reasoning ability (A, I)	Verbal ability
I have good mathematical skills/reasoning ability (A, I)	Maths ability
I am good in most academic subjects (A, I)	Academic ability
I am good at problem solving/creative thinking (A, I)	Problem solving
I have good interactions/relationships with members of the same sex (A, I)	Same sex peer relations
I have good interactions/relationships with members of the opposite sex (A, I)	Opposite sex peer relations
I have good interactions with my parents (A, I)	Parent relations
I am an emotionally stable person (A, I)	Emotional stability
I am a spiritual/religious person (A, I)	Spiritual values/religion
I am an honest/reliable/trustworthy person (A, I)	Honesty/trustworthiness
I am physically attractive/good looking (A, I)	Physical appearance

Note: A = inclusion of an accuracy rating, I = inclusion of an importance rating

Table 7

Items Developed Concerning Perceived Supportiveness of the Club Environment

Item	Link with qualitative findings
The player development/welfare department is respected by other departments at the club	Player development a respected department
The club is interested in me as a person as well as a player	Care and recognition of the whole person
The club makes it easy to keep a balanced life	Support of a work/life balance
I am free to make decisions about my off-field life	Recognition of the individual and their autonomy
I feel comfortable to be honest with the player development/welfare manager about my off-field activities	Autonomy supportive practices of the PDM
I feel that the club makes it difficult to keep a balanced life	Support of a work/life balance
There is enough space for me to have interests outside of football	Quality aspect of free time
I have enough free time each week outside of work	Having enough time
I am able to spend enough time with my friends/family	Quality aspect of free time
I am able to switch off from being a footballer in my free time	Distraction from football
I am too tired to do much else except rest in my free time	Quality aspect of free time

Off-field Activity

Players were asked to estimate the time that they spent per typical week in social

activities/going out, recreational activities/hobbies, and alternative career development

activities. Players estimated the time spent in each of these activities by circling the appropriate scale point (e.g., 0-2 hours, 2-4 hours, etc).

Alternative career development activities

For players who participated in an alternative career development activity (ACD), information was collected on the type of activity (e.g., certificate III, work experience etc.) in addition to hours spent engaging in the activity each week. Further, with additional feedback gained from participants during the piloting phase, 12 statements were developed with respect to how players experienced ACD activities. Players were asked to respond with their level of agreement on a seven point Likert scale anchored by very strongly disagree (1) and very strongly agree (7). Table 8 shows these items.

Athlete engagement

The 16 item Athlete Engagement Questionnaire (AEQ; Lonsdale, Hodge, & Jackson, 2007) was used to measure the players' experience of engagement in their football during the 2013 season. The AEQ contains sub-dimensions of confidence, dedication, vigour, and enthusiasm and has previously been shown to be a valid and reliable measure of athlete engagement (Cronbach alphas ranging from .84 to .89). For the 16 items, the term 'sport' was replaced with the term 'football' to make it more relevant to this sample. Participants were asked to mark their agreement with the AEQ statements on a five point Likert scale anchored by 1 (almost never) and 5 (almost always) and to respond with respect to their experiences across the current season. The 16 items can be seen in Table 9.

Table 8

Questionnaire Items Developed Concerning Player Experiences of Alternative Career

Development Activities

Item	Link with qualitative findings
I find this activity interesting	Enjoyment/interest
I am doing this activity for my own personal development	Identifying with the purpose
I enjoy participating in this activity	Enjoyment/interest
I see the point in getting involved in this activity	Identifying with the purpose
This activity helps take my mind off my job as a professional footballer	Distraction from football
I do well in this activity	Enjoyment/interest
I mainly do this activity to keep the club happy*	Identifying with the purpose
I am doing this activity to get ready for employment after football	Identifying with the purpose
I rarely have enough time to do the activity properly*	Having enough time
I am doing this activity to try something new	Identifying with the purpose
I have enough time to do as well as I would like in this activity	Having enough time
I have friends at this activity	Friends within the activity

* Negative item

Pilot testing the questionnaire

Three AFL clubs were involved in the pilot testing of the questionnaire. These

three were located in different cities to the club that participated in the initial case study.

This strategy was adopted in case the piloting of the questionnaire in different club and

geographical contexts revealed poor transferability of the general themes that emerged

from the qualitative phase. One of the clubs finished in the top eight (i.e., made the

finals that season) while the other two teams finished in the middle section of the 18

Table 9

Athlete Engagement Items

Item	Dimension
I believe I am capable of accomplishing my goals in football	Confidence
I feel energized when I participate in football	Vigour
I am dedicated to achieving my goals in football	Dedication
I feel excited about football	Enthusiasm
I feel capable of success in football	Confidence
I feel energetic when I participate in football	Vigour
I am determined to achieve my goals in football	Dedication
I am enthusiastic about football	Enthusiasm
I believe I have the skills/technique to be successful in football	Confidence
I really feel alive when I participate in football	Vigour
I am devoted to my football	Dedication
I enjoy my football	Enthusiasm
I am confident in my abilities	Confidence
I feel mentally alert when I participate in football	Vigour
I want to work hard to achieve my goals in football	Dedication
I have fun at football	Enthusiasm

team table. Five participants from each career stage (i.e., early, middle, and late) were selected from each club (except for club two which could only provide four players from the late career stage) meaning that there were 44 participants in total. Similar to the methods of Oumiet, Bunnage, Carini, Kuh, and Kennedy (2004) and according to the recommendations of Fowler (2001, p. 104-116) the researcher piloted the instruments by instructing the participants to complete the questionnaires in front of them and put an asterix next to any question that they felt needed discussion. This was so that the participants would become familiar with the items and enable a richer discussion.

The completion of the questionnaire was followed by a group discussion on whether the instructions and items were clear. The participants were given an opportunity to discuss any questions that they thought were ambiguous or where they were unsure of the factors they should consider when deciding upon their responses (cf Ouimet et al., 2004). Essentially the researcher discussed with the group the four questions/criteria provided by Fowler (2001, p.105).

1. Are questions consistently understood?

2. Do respondents have the information needed to answer the questions?

3. Do answers accurately describe what the respondents have to say?

4. Do the answers provide valid measures of what the question is designed to measure?

The researcher facilitated the discussion and took notes on ambiguities, understanding of and appropriateness of questions and any changes suggested by the players. After the group discussion any redrafts of questions were emailed to the players with a seven day window of opportunity to respond if they felt the rewordings were inappropriate. There were no player responses. After the first pilot testing session at

club one, suggested changes were amended prior to the piloting in club two and subsequently again prior to the club three visit. After the third piloting session a 'final draft' of the survey was produced and sent to all the participating players through email via the relevant player development manager. Again, a seven day window was provided for any players to respond to issues concerning the redraft of the questions. However no responses from players were received.

Changes to the initial draft questionnaire

There were several valuable changes suggested by the participants. For example, the draft piloted at the first club included questions intent on asking players to declare and answer questions about a 'regular recreational activity'. However several participants described that they did not have one particular and regular activity that they participated in. These players described that rather than having one regular activity, there was a variety of social and recreational activities that they participated in from week to week. Several players suggested that it would also be a good idea to ask them to estimate the amount of time they spent in recreational and social activity more generally. In summary, for players who did not have a 'regular recreational activity' this aspect of the questionnaire was confusing. After revisiting the findings in the case study, in addition to the work of Price, Morrison and Arnold (2010) and Stinson (1999), a list of general 'non-work' activities was added to the questionnaire and organised under the headings of 'committed time' and 'free time'.

During the piloting at club one and club two, players reported that they found it difficult to estimate the amount of time spent in off-field activities when asked to report a 'raw' number. Through consulting the work of Stinson (1999) who suggested the use of visual aids to assist the estimation of time, an incremental 'time scale' was added to

each question concerning time spent in off-field activity. Feedback from players in club three suggested that this made the task of estimating time easier in comparison to simply estimating a number.

Throughout the piloting process minor changes to the wording of questions/statements were suggested and these were incorporated into subsequent drafts. In the questions about alternative career development activity, some players found the item "this activity helps me switch off from football" confusing because their ACD activity was a football coaching course to prepare for transition in to coaching upon retirement. It became apparent that there was a need to differentiate between thoughts about their role as a professional footballer and the game of football itself. Consequently, the item was adjusted to "this activity helps take my mind off my job as a professional footballer".

During the piloting session at club two, players described that there could be several motivations for doing an ACD activity that enabled them to positively identify with its purpose. For example, players described that they could be participating to develop a career for after their retirement from football, for their own personal development, to try something new, or a combination of these. Consequently, extra question items were added to better capture what motivated the players to participate beyond merely identifying with the purpose of the activity and whether they were 'doing it' to satisfy the wishes of the club.

Feedback from the third club generally served as confirmation with respect to the clarity, relevance and comprehensibility of the questionnaire in light of the changes made following the trialling in clubs one and two. At the third piloting session, questionnaires that were to be 'imported' into the study (e.g., the AIMS-7, SDQ-III-SI, etc.) were also completed by the players and they also found these aspects of the

questionnaire easy to understand and complete. At this stage of the piloting it was concluded that the questionnaire would be both understood by and relevant to the entire cohort.

With respect to the length of the questionnaire, Fowler (2001,p.76-103) described that researchers should consider the limits of respondents' willingness to answer questions. After seeking advice from AFL industry contacts it was suggested that the total administration of the questionnaire to the players should not exceed 30 minutes from administration to collection. The draft of the survey administered to club three took players on average 15 minutes to complete leaving 15 minutes for administration and collection.

Conclusion

The revised conceptual framework with relevant themes and measures situated within the elements is now presented in Figure 9. This shows the development of the enquiry at the completion of the initial qualitative phase and prior to the beginning of the quantitative phase.
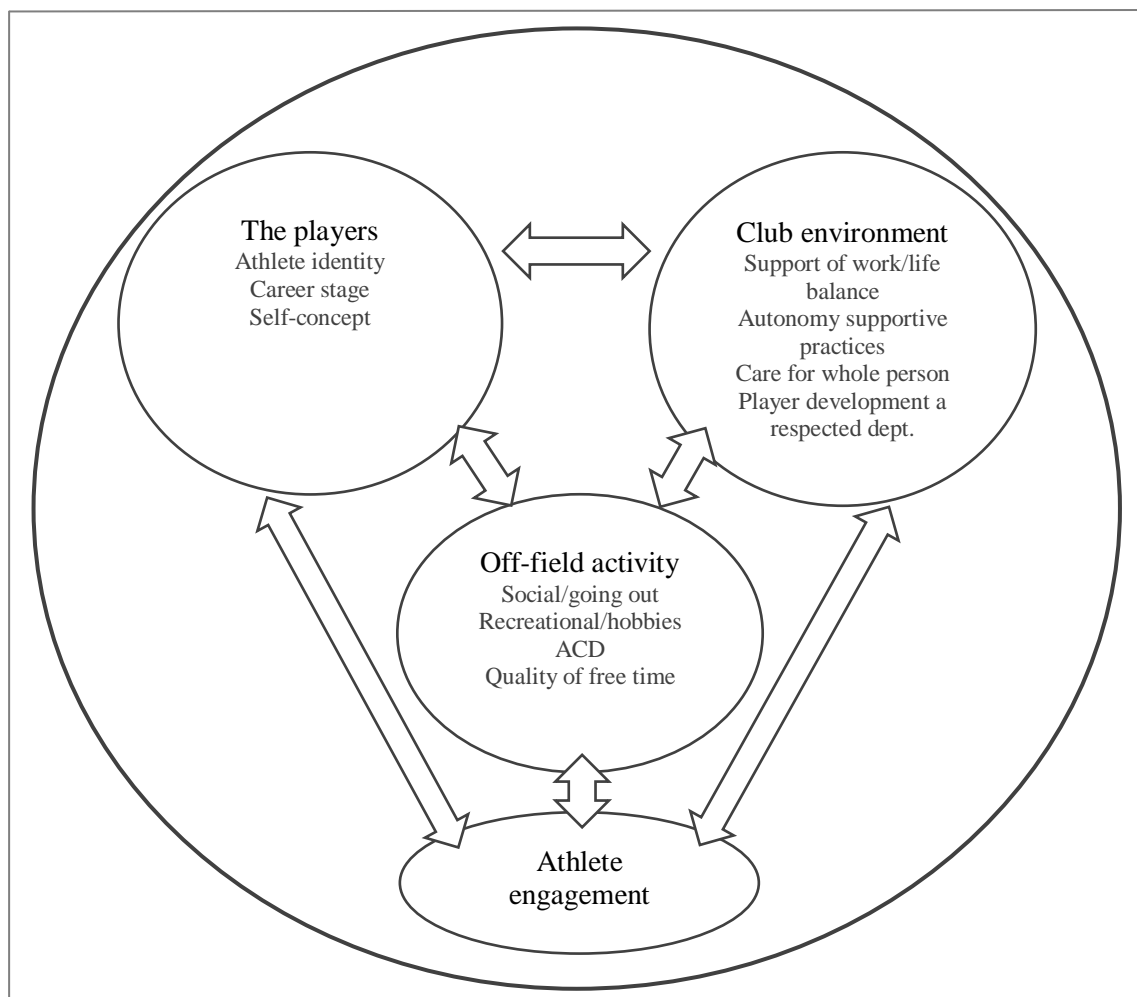
Figure 9. An expanded conceptual framework for the relationship between players' off-field activities and athlete engagement.

Chapter Six: Player Characteristics, Club Environment, and Off-field Activity

Procedure

Ethical approval was sought and obtained from the Australian Catholic University Human Research Ethics Committee (Appendix F). AFL clubs were approached via the player development managers of each club to whom the purpose of the study was explained and an invitation to participate issued. Fourteen of the clubs (78%) in the national competition agreed to participate in the study.

The final version of the questionnaire was printed and delivered by the researcher to the players at each of the clubs participating in the study. Instructions for the respondents were given verbally and in written form according to the recommendations of Rust and Golombok (2009). Players were given specific instructions on how to answer question items. These instructions included requests for honesty in their responses and a brief overview of each of the sections of the questionnaire and the order they should progress through when completing it. It was also communicated to the players in verbal and written form that their confidentiality would be maintained and that only the researcher would be privy to their individual data. The questionnaire on average took 15 minutes to complete. Apart from the occasional question from a player seeking minor clarification (e.g., the accuracy and importance ratings of the SDQ-III-SI), they completed the survey with relative ease. When participants handed in their completed questionnaire, the researcher thanked them for involvement in the research.

Data treatment

Data were entered, screened, cleaned, and analysed using SPSS 19.0 for windows. Missing values analyses revealed that all but two variables had less than 2%

missing values. For two variables from the SDQ-III-SI (i.e., 'I have good interactions with my parents' accuracy and importance ratings) there was a typographical error in the printed surveys at one club and this led to 10% missing data for these two variables. Little's Missing Completely at Random (MCAR) test revealed that missing data overall were not MCAR (Chi-Square = 3349.062, $df = 2994$, $p = < 0.00$). Through visual inspection of the missing value pattern matrix it was identified that the missing values in this dataset were at random (Osborne, 2012). Thus, it was concluded that there was no systematic reason for missing data that had the potential to compromise the data set. For the descriptive variables (e.g., alternative career development activity type), these cases were excluded from a given statistical analysis via listwise deletion. This was deemed appropriate given the large sample size and comparatively small number of missing cases. For psychometric variables, the expected maximisation function in SPSS was used to substitute for these missing values given that they were missing at random and were small in number (Institute for Health and Care Research, 2012).

Purpose generated variables

The items that had been constructed to measure the players' experiences of off-field life and activity were subjected to exploratory factor analyses (Henson & Roberts, 2006; Neill, 2008; Osborne & Costello, 2005) in order to identify any underlying factor structures. This was to avoid the pitfalls of modelling too many single-item independent variables within a statistical model and increasing the chances of a type I error (Field, 2007a, 2007c). It was expected that the created items would group together on logical factor structures given their grounding in the qualitative data and the subsequent piloting. Though, given the exploratory nature of the qualitative enquiry, and the unique nature of the investigation, there was uncertainty with respect to the presence of

underlying factor structures. For this reason, an exploratory factor analysis was undertaken with the relevant individual items (Henson & Roberts, 2006).

Perceptions of the club environment

The eleven items developed to identify the supportiveness of the club environment with respect to off-field life satisfied the basic criteria for an exploratory factor analysis as the Cronbach's alpha for the reliability for all 11 items was .810. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy was .86, above the recommended value of .6, and Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant (i.e., $\chi2$ (55) = 1832.69, p < .01; Field, 2007a; Neill, 2008). The subject to item ratio was 39:1, well above the upper recommendation of 20:1 described by Williams, Brown, and Onsman (2012). Finally, 10 out of the 11 items correlated with at least one other item at r = .3 or above which suggested appropriate factorability and the anti-image correlation matrix had values above .5 on each of the diagonals suggesting that each item could be retained in the initial analysis (Field, 2007a). The correlation matrix with all 11 items had a determinant value of 0.013 suggesting that there were not any problems with multicollinearity (Field, 2007a). No items correlated at .9 or above which would have suggested a redundancy of items. The correlation matrix for the initial pool of items is reported in Appendix B.

A principal axis factoring with direct oblimin rotation was used to extract the factors. This approach was used because many of the individual items in their own right were not normally distributed and principal axis factoring has been suggested as more effective with non-normal data (Osborne & Costello, 2005). An oblique method of rotation was used because it was of the expectation that there would be correlations between items across any individual identified factors (Osborne & Costello, 2005).

The initial run of the factor analysis suggested a three factor solution as can be seen in the scree plot in Figure 10 which shows three Eigen values above 1.0 and before the 'break' in the bend (Field, 2007a; Osborne & Costello, 2005; Williams et al., 2012). The communalities for all but two of the items were all above .3 which suggested that the items shared some common variance with each other. The item, 'I am too tired to do much else except rest in my free time' was dropped from further analysis as this did not load above .3 on any factor and had a particularly low communality (.07). Another item, 'I am able to switch off from being a footballer in my free time', although having a communality of only .25 was retained due to its strong initial loading (.44) on one of the factors. This item also did not load on any other factor above .32 (Osborne & Costello, 2005). Hence, although the communality was marginally below recommendations, it had a strong conceptual link and a strong factor loading with one of the retained factors and added to the strength of the factor overall.
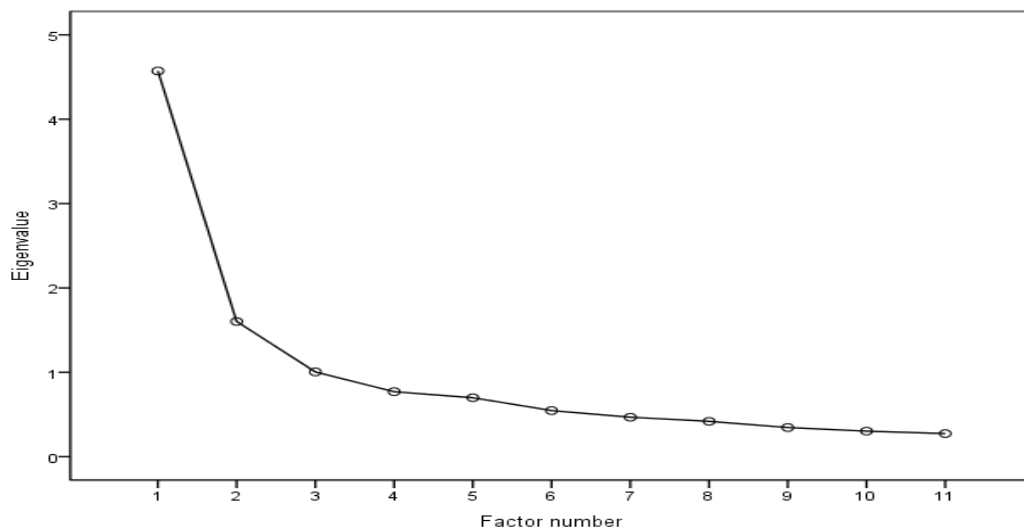
Figure 10. Scree plot of initial exploratory factor analysis with items relating to perceptions of the club environment.

Note: The scree plot shows three factors with eigenvalues above one and before the 'break' of the bend.

With respect to the number of factors retained, the third factor only contained two items (i.e., 'the club makes it difficult to keep a balanced life' & 'the club makes it easy for me to keep a balanced life'). Both questions dealt with the clubs' influence on keeping a balanced life yet were effectively the same item reversed (i.e. one positive and one negative). It was therefore decided to adopt a two factor solution, as the third factor only contained two items which were the reverse of each other. As Osborne and Costello (2005) described, factors with fewer than three items are often unstable and it is preferable to have several items that load above .5. The third factor was in any case only marginally acceptable with an eigenvalue of 1.006 and only explaining 2.89% of additional variance after factors one and two. The first two factors contained the bulk of the initial items and were plausible, stable, related, yet also distinct factors. A principal axis factoring exploratory factor analysis with direct oblimin rotation was then run with the remaining nine items requesting a two factor solution.

The final analysis produced a 'clean' two factor solution where factors one and two explained 40.69% and 12.57% of the variance among player scores respectively. All items had strong primary loadings above .5 (except for one item on factor two which was still above the minimum of .32 at .48). One item cross-loaded above .32 (i.e., 'the club makes it easy to keep a balanced life' at .33), however it had a strong primary loading on factor one at .57. The factor pattern matrix can be seen in Table 10. Factor one has been named 'club support for off-field life' and factor two has been named 'quality of free time'.

Running head: AFL PLAYER OFF-FIELD ACTIVITY AND ATHLETE ENGAGEMENT

Table 10

Factor Loadings Based on Principal Axis Factoring with Direct Oblimin Rotation of

Nine items Developed to Investigate Perceptions of the Club Environment ($N = 427$)

	Club support (off-field life)	Quality of free time
The player development/welfare department is respected by other departments at the club	**.83**	.06
The club is interested in me as a person as well as a player	**.69**	-.11
The club makes it easy to keep a balanced life	**.57**	**-.33**
I feel comfortable to be honest with the player development/welfare manager about my off-field activities	**.73**	.14
I am free to make decisions about my off-field life	**.55**	-.13
There is enough space for me to have interests outside of football	.00	**-.82**
I have enough free time each week outside of work	.05	**-.79**
I am able to spend enough time with my friends/family	-.05	**-.77**
I am able to switch off from being a footballer in my free time	.02	**-.49**
Eigenvalues	3.66	1.13
% of variance	40.69	12.57

Note. Factor loadings > .32 appear in bold.

Alternative career development activity

Twelve questions were created that aimed to measure the players' experiences

in alternative career development (ACD) activities. A similar process was taken to

analysing these data to that taken with the question items concerning perceptions of the

club environment. Principal axis factor analysis with direct oblimin rotation was used to

identify underlying factor structures as the raw data were not normally distributed and it was expected that the item pool would correlate with each other due to their focus on the ACD activity. The factor analysis was run on the responses of those 324 players in the sample who participated in ACD activities.

The data satisfied basic criteria for an exploratory factor analysis. The original Cronbach's alpha or reliability for all 12 items was .98, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy was .86 (above the recommended value of .6), and Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant ($\chi2$ (66) = 1972.67, $p < .01$). The subject to item ratio was 27:1 which was above the upper recommendation of 20:1. Finally, the anti-image correlation matrix had values above .5 on each of the diagonals suggesting their retention in the analysis. The correlation matrix with all 12 items had a determinant value of 0.002 suggesting that there weren't any problems with multicollinearity (Field, 2007a). No individual items were correlated at .9 or above to suggest redundancy of items. The correlation matrix for the items can be viewed in Appendix C.

The factor analysis identified a two factor solution with Eigen values above 1.0 and also appearing before the 'break in the bend' as can be seen in the scree plot in Figure 11. These two factors explained 49.94% of the variance in the dataset. One item, 'I am doing this activity to try something new' performed poorly and did not load onto any factor. On inspection of these factors, the items that constituted the second factor did not make theoretical sense due to the combination of items (Henson & Roberts, 2006). The second factor combined two items concerning whether the players had enough time to complete the activities grouped together with the item 'I have friends at this activity'. A further item, (i.e., 'I am doing this activity to get ready for employment after football') cross-loaded on the first factor. Given that factor one already had

strongly loaded items, this item was excluded from further analysis (Osborne & Costello, 2005). A one factor solution was then sought from a subsequent factor analysis.
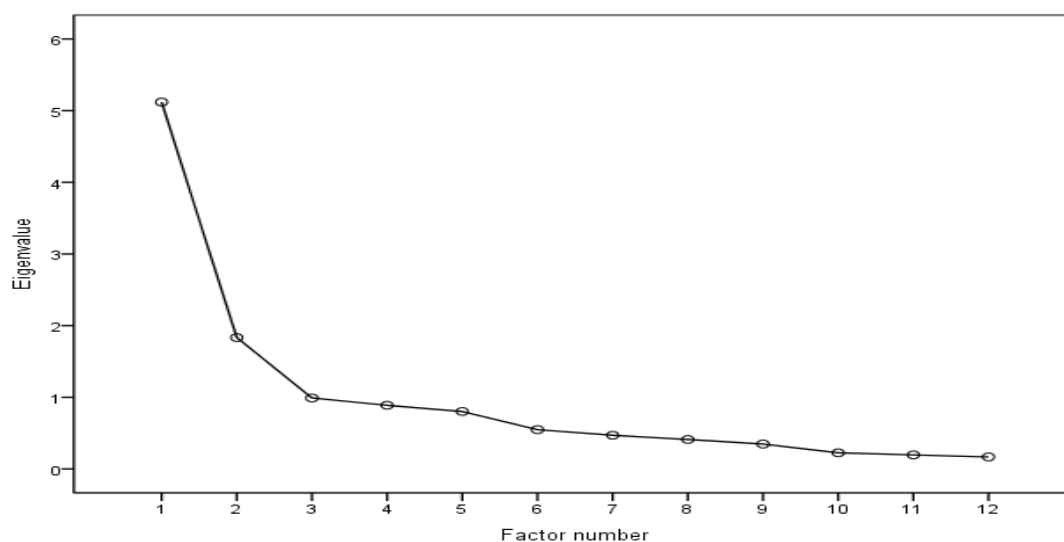
Figure 11. Scree plot of factors for alternative career activity items.

Note: The scree plot shows two factors with eigenvalues above one and before the 'break' of the bend.

The subsequent one factor solution explained 37.36% if the variance in these data and all items had strong loadings >.70. Inspection of the items showed that they were primarily focussed on 'positive experiences' in ACD activity and also identifying with the purpose of that activity. Subsequently the factor was named 'ACD activity value' to represent the content of the items. The factor loadings for the items contributing to this factor can be seen in Table 11 and the descriptive statistics for the newly created factor can be seen in Table 21.

Table 11

Factor Loadings Based on Principal Axis Factoring for Seven Items Developed to

Investigate AFL Players' Alternative Career Activities (N = 324)

Item	ACD activity value
I find this activity interesting	.82
I am doing this activity for my own personal development	.81
I enjoy participating in this activity	.76
I see the point in getting involved in this activity	.73
This activity helps take my mind of my job as a professional footballer	.72
I do well in this activity	.71
I mainly do this activity to keep the club happy*	.66
Eigenvalue	4.571
% Variance	37.36

Note: Negative item.

Summary

The factor analyses presented above have produced three factors (i.e., 'club

support for off-field life', 'quality of free time', and 'ACD activity value') to represent

concepts identified in the initial case study. No external validity beyond this AFL player

population is claimed for these measures, yet they are highly relevant for the ongoing

investigation within the sequential mixed design of the enquiry and consistent with the

pragmatic orientation of mixed methods research (Bergman, 2008; Johnson et al., 2007;

Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). Their utility will be assessed in the following analyses.

Results

Sample characteristics

Four hundred and thirty professional Australian Rules Footballers (Mean age = 22.93 years, SD = 3.35) listed at AFL clubs for the 2013 season participated in the study. Fourteen of the eighteen clubs in the national league agreed to make their players available for the study. Clubs from all five states participating in the national league were included. The average number of senior games played by the players in the sample was 54.44. Both the average age and number of games played by members of this sample were very similar to the figures reported for the entire professional AFL player population (23.52 years & 56 games respectively; Australian Football League, 2013). The average number of participating players from each club was 31. The majority of players in the sample (49%) were in their early career stage (0-4 years). Thirty-four per cent were in the middle career stage (>4 - 8 years), and 17 per cent were in their late career stage (8+ years) as reported in Table 12.

Table 12

Summary of Sample Profile

Career stage	N	Age		Senior Games	
		M	SD	M	SD
Early	211	20.62	2.02	12.20	15.61
Middle	145	23.69	1.58	57.96	34.22
Late	74	28.03	2.51	168.11	59.69

Player relocation

Table 13

Player Relocation Experiences

Relocation Type	*Freq.*	*%*
No relocation	77	17.9
Country/regional to metropolitan	85	19.8
Interstate	261	60.7
Overseas	4	.9
Total	427	99.3

Note: Three players did not declare relocation type.

Table 13 shows the extent of the relocations experienced by the members of this sample. These figures show that 81.4 % of the sample needed to relocate to play AFL football with the majority (60.7%) involving a move interstate. It should be noted however that this statistic may be slightly inflated for this sample because of the presence of a higher proportion of clubs from outside Victoria (which houses ten of the eighteen professional AFL clubs). The researcher was unable to locate statistics for the relocation of AFL players, other than those reported in this thesis.

Living arrangements

Table 14 shows the frequencies of various player living arrangements. A total of 47.9% of the sample was in a share house living arrangement of some kind with the majority of these being with players living exclusively with other AFL players. Living with a partner/spouse (34.9%) was the most common type of non-share house living

arrangement reported. For those participants who declared 'other' (17), common

descriptions were either living by themselves or with a sibling.

Table 14

Frequencies of Current Living Arrangements amongst the Player Sample

Arrangements	Frequency	%
Host family	28	6.5
Share house with AFL players	127	29.5
Share house with AFL & non-AFL players	36	8.4
Share house with non-AFL players	43	10.0
Living with parents	28	6.5
Living with Partner/spouse	150	34.9
Other	17	4.0
Total	429	99.8

Note [a] One player did not declare his living arrangements.

The players

Athlete identity

Table 15 reports the means and standard deviations for the AIMS-7.

Table 15

Descriptive Statistics for Athlete Identity

Career stage	N	Range	Mean	Std. Deviation
Early	211	27	38.62	4.59
Middle	145	30	37.28	5.21
Late	74	34	37.14	6.46
Total	430	34	37.92	5.19

The mean total athlete identity (AI) score for this sample of AFL footballers was 37.92. This corresponds to the 45th percentile of the norm scores provided for male NCAA college athletes ($M = 35.92$) by Brewer and Cornelius (2001). This suggests that on average, the AFL players in the present study had comparable AI scores to male college athletes in the US. The minimum score for the present sample was 15 which was in the bottom 5 % of the US norm scores and the maximum score was 49 which was at the 100th percentile and equated to the maximum possible score. This showed the players as representing a similar range of responses. Further, the mean for the sample was similar to that of a US mixed gender sample of amateur Olympic athletes in a recent study ($M = 37.00$, SD = 4.98; Poczwardowski et al., 2013).

Finally, Table 15 shows that mean AI scores were slightly lower in the middle and late career stage and there was greater variance around the mean in the late career stage compared to middle, and middle compared to early. This suggests that AI appears to decrease slightly as AFL players advance in career stage and that there will be greater variance in scores among an older cohort and this is consistent with previous literature (Martin et al., 2014).

Self-concept

Figure 12 shows the means of the ratings of accuracy (i.e., their perceptions of ability) and importance for the sample with respect to domains of the SDQ-III-SI.
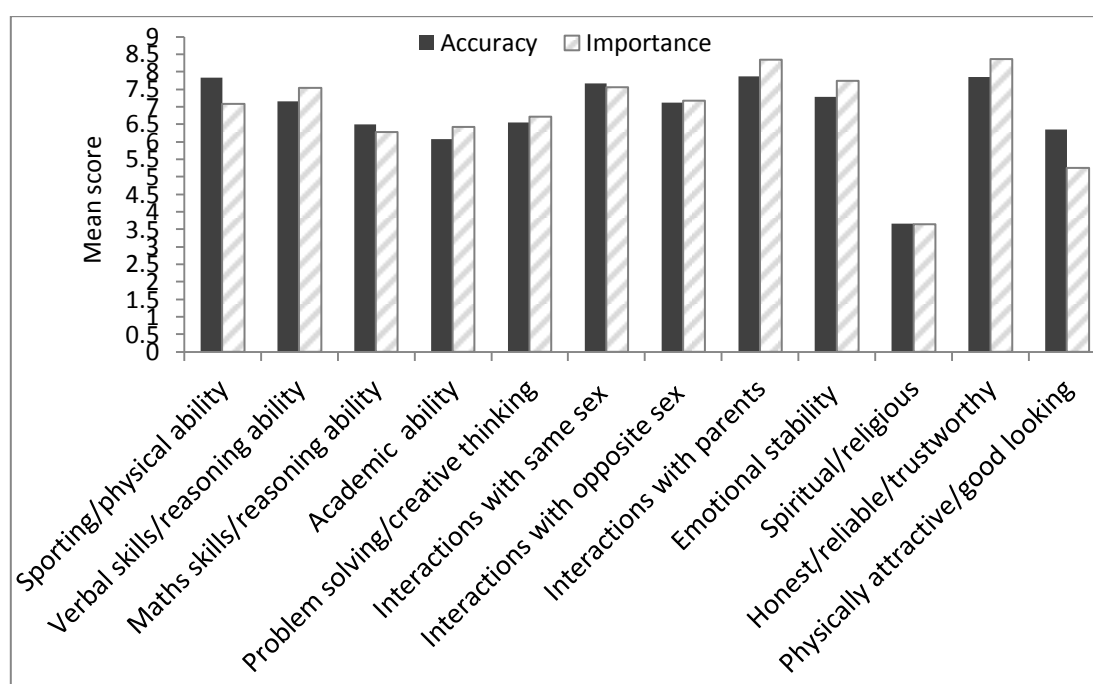
Figure 12. Ratings of accuracy and importance of self-concept in twelve different domains.

The most highly rated domains were the player interactions with parents, honesty/reliability/trustworthiness, and sporting/physical ability in that order. They rated their verbal skills/reasoning ability, interactions/relationships with the same and

opposite sex, as well as emotional stability highly, scoring an average of higher than seven out of a possible top rating of nine. At the other end of the scale, their self-perceptions as spiritual/religious persons was the lowest ranked behind perceptions of their academic abilities. Together with physical attractiveness, mathematics skills/reasoning ability, and problem solving/creativity, these domains were seen as less important and less reflective of this group in general. The mean scores for 11 of 12 self-concept domains were above the mid-point of the scale (i.e., 4.5) suggesting that players on average reported a relatively strong self-concept across all identified physical, social, intellectual, and moral domains.

On the question of the importance of each of these domains for how they saw themselves, the players' relationships with their parents and their honesty/reliability/trusworthiness stood out as being the most important to them. Following these, their emotional stability, interactions/relationships with the same sex, and verbal skills/reasoning ability stood out as the next most important cluster. Interactions/relationships with the opposite sex, and sporting/physical ability followed closely still rating above seven out of a possible top rating of nine. Academic ability and maths skills/reasoning ability came next and were still rated above six on the scale. Finally, there was a quite noticeable fall off in the ratings of the importance of the dimensions of physical attractiveness and spirituality/religiosity.

Similar to Hardy and Moriarty (2006), the present study used a cross-product of the SDQ-III-SI items in the analysis. These cross products provide a cumulative weighting of both the players' perceived abilities (i.e., the accuracy ratings) and the importance they attribute to these abilities. The means for the cross-products in each of the 12 domains can be seen in Figure 13.
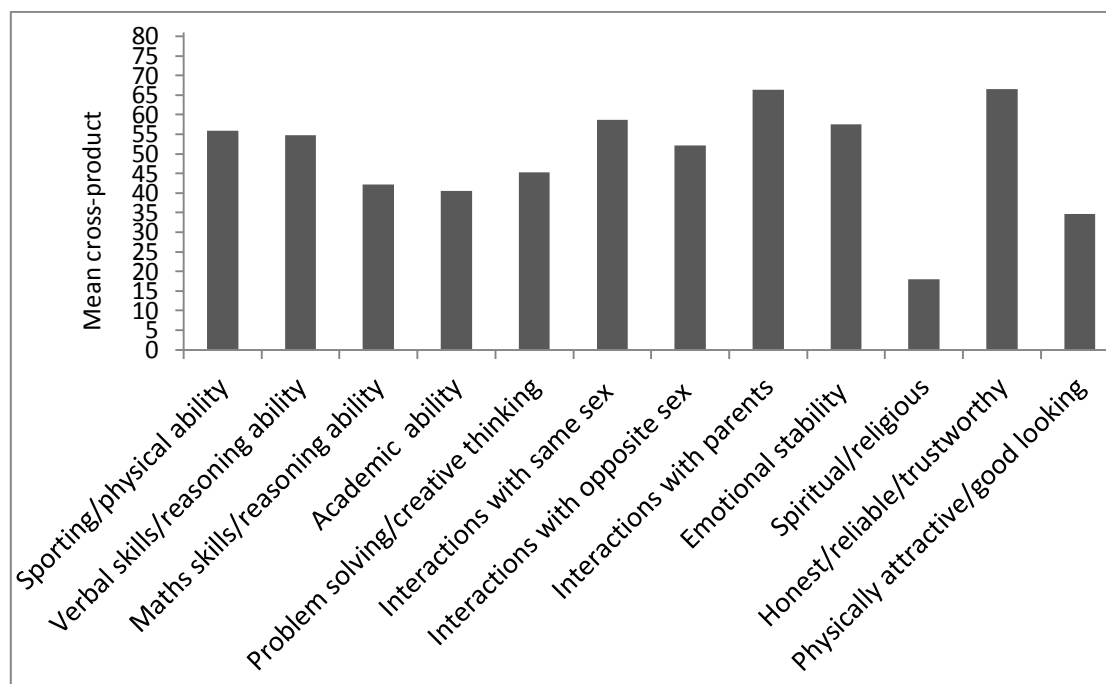
Figure 13. SDQ-III-SI cross-products.

To compare each of the SDQ-III-SI cross products with athlete identity scores in order to provide a descriptive understanding of how AI associates with broader self-concept, the cross products are correlated with AI in Table 16.

The correlations in Table 16 show that there is a general relationship between a strong AI and self-concept in sporting and physical ability. This is logical as the elite athlete status of the sample is likely to confirm their belief in their physical abilities and also their importance as this represents their livelihoods. The next strongest relationship shown for AI is with the dimension of perceiving oneself as an honest, reliable, trustworthy person. This may reflect the fact that these are common attributes deemed important by athletes and the stronger the AI the more likely they will both endorse these attributes as accurate reflections of themselves.

Table 16

The Relationships between Self-concept Dimensions and Athlete Identity (N = 430)

SDQ-III-SI Cross product	*AI*
Sporting/physical ability	.361[**]
Physically attractive/good looking	.146[**]
Interactions/relationships with same sex	.188[**]
Interactions/relationships with opposite sex	.087
Interactions with parents	.044
Emotional stability	.141[**]
Verbal skills/reasoning ability	.117[*]
Academic ability	.069
Maths skills/reasoning ability	.053
Problem solving/creative thinking	.065
Honest/reliability/trustworthiness	.214[**]
Spirituality/religiosity	.032

[**] $P < 0.01$, [*] $P < 0.05$

Small associations can also be observed between AI, and self-perceptions of being physically attractive, having good interactions with the same sex, being emotionally stable and having good verbal skills/reasoning ability. However, small

statistically significant positive associations such as these could be simply associated with a more general self-efficacy or global self-esteem which was not measured in the present study. These correlations overall suggest that the AI construct is largely independent of the players' broader self-concepts (Fraser, 2012).

Perceptions of the club environment

Table 17 shows that the factor measuring club support for off-field life factor is approximately normally distributed (according to the skewness and kurtosis values, Ghasemi & Zahediasl, 2012) and has appropriate reliability with Cronbach's alphas above .70 (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011).

Table 17

Descriptive Statistics for the Factor- Club Support for Off-field Life

	No. of items	*M (SD)*	*Cronbach's α*
Club support (for off-field life)	5	25.42 (5.11)	.832

The mean for the club support factor was above the middle score of 17.5 suggesting that players generally had favourable perceptions of club support. There was some variance in the composite score for the factor however with a minimum of eight and a maximum of 35. Table 18 shows the means and standard deviations for this measure by career stage.

Table 18

Means and Standard Deviations of Club Environment by Career Stage

		'Club support'	
Career stage	*N*	*M*	*SD*
Early	211	25.70	4.81
Middle	145	24.56	5.66
Late	74	26.28	4.59

Activity

Time spent in off-field activity

Table 19 shows the descriptive statistics for the key off-field activity variables of interest in the ongoing investigation (i.e., social life/going out, recreational, and alternative career development). There was substantial variability in the data as can be seen by the large standard deviations in proportion to the means.

Table 19

Means and Standard Deviations for Time Spent in Weekly Off-Field Activity by Career Stage (N = 430; ACD N = 321)

	Social life/going out		Recreational		ACD	
Career stage	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Early	4.96	3.87	4.83	3.82	3.92	2.64
Middle	5.17	3.55	4.48	3.23	4.60	2.75
Late	4.69	3.76	4.54	4.27	5.11	2.82
Total	4.98	3.74	4.66	3.71	4.40	2.75

Perceptions of the quality of free time

Table 20 shows that the factor measuring quality of free time is approximately normally distributed according to the skewness and kurtosis values (Ghasemi & Zahediasl, 2012) and has appropriate reliability with Cronbach's alphas above .70 (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). The mean score was above the possible middle score of 14. There was however variance in the scores with a minimum of four and a maximum of 28. This factor was also correlated with the club support for off-field life measure at .45 which meant that they had 20% overlapping/shared variance suggesting that the two factors, although somewhat distinct, had a moderate to large association.

Table 20

Descriptive Statistics for the Quality of Free Time Factor

	No. of items	*M (SD)*	*Cronbach's α*
Quality of free time	4	16.10 (4.89)	.797

Alternative career development

The majority (74.8%) of players in the sample reported that they were committed to an ACD activity that was to assist in preparing for work after their football career. Twenty five percent of the sample however were not involved in these activities. The players who participated were asked to estimate the number of hours they spent in that activity each week. The average hours spent in an ACD activity each week for those who participated was close to the four hours per week that clubs must make available to players as part of the 2012 collective bargaining agreement (Macgugan, 2011). The players were also asked to categorise the type of activity that they were involved with. Figure 14 shows the breakdown of involvement according to

types of ACD activities. It should be noted that the AFLPA certificate level programs such as the 'football apprenticeship' (certificate III) were not included in these data as activities of this sort are sanctioned by the majority of the AFL clubs and are included as part of the standard training program for young AFL players at these clubs. As such the football apprenticeship is rather designed to assist young players in their primary career as footballers as opposed to an alternative to be taken up upon retirement.
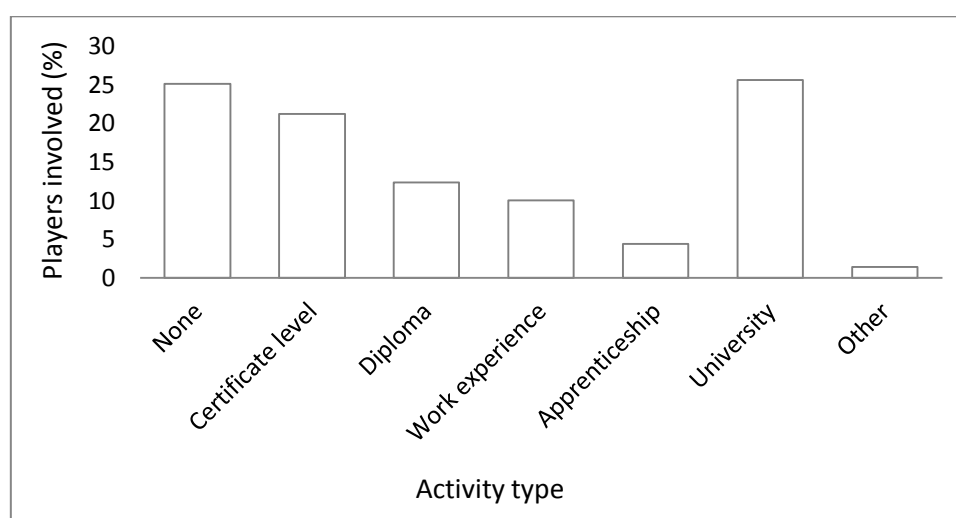
Figure 14. Percentage of involvement in different types of alternative career development activity.

University study was the most common type of alternative career development activity pursued, with 25.6% of the sample engaging in this. This was followed by Certificate IV level courses (15.1%), Diploma level (12.3%), and work experience (10%). With respect to the category 'other', the most common response involved a failure to specify the name of the activity. However it should be noted that 25% of the sample were prepared to indicate that they were not involved in any type of alternative career development as opposed to stating that they were engaged yet unable to state the name of the activity.

Alternative career development activity value

The information presented in Table 21 shows that the factor measuring ACD activity value is a reliable construct with a Cronbach's alpha above .70 (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). However skewness and kurtosis values show that these data were negatively skewed and platykurtic beyond acceptable levels to be considered 'approximately' normally distributed (Ghasemi & Zahediasl, 2012). Nonetheless, using the measure as an independent variable with robust estimators (e.g., *f, t,* ANOVA, and correlation), was judged as acceptable, though using it as a dependent variable may require some data transformation (Coolican, 2013b; Field, 2005b).

Table 21

Descriptive Statistics for the ACD Activity Value Factor

	No. of items	*M (SD)*	*α*
ACD activity value	7	36.74 (7.36)	.88

The mean for the measure was above the middle score of 24.5 suggesting that those players who participated in an ACD activity generally had favourable experiences. There was considerable variance in the composite score for the factor however with a minimum of seven and a maximum of 49. Table 22 shows the means and standard deviations for this measure by career stage.

Table 22

Descriptive Statistics for ACD Activity Value by Career Stage

Career stage	N	Mean	SD
Early	145	34.97	8.73
Middle	117	37.06	6.36
Late	61	39.15	7.65

Athlete engagement

Athlete engagement (Lonsdale, Hodge, & Jackson, 2007) was the dependent variable of primary interest in this thesis. Global Athlete Engagement (AE) represents the overarching cognitive-affective experience of athlete engagement (i.e., the level of confidence, dedication, enthusiasm, and vigour one experiences with respect to one's sport). Global AE was calculated by adding the scores for the four sub-scales together to produce a total Global AE score. Table 23 show the means and standard deviations for Global AE for the total sample and also for each of the early, middle, and late career stage groups. Generally, it can be said that most of the sample could be considered as experiencing high levels of engagement in their football given that the mean score for the total sample was 66.27 ($SD = 8.54$) of a possible maximum score of 80. The mean score for athlete engagement for the total sample reported here is similar to that reported for the 673 New Zealand Academy of Sport athletes that participated in the Lonsdale et al. (2007) investigation into burnout and engagement among athletes. There was however a wide range of variance in the present data with a minimum score of 38 and a maximum score of 80.

Table 23

Descriptive Statistics for Athlete Engagement Questionnaire

Career stage	N	Range	Mean	SD
Early	211	35	67.89	7.50
Middle	145	42	64.17	8.54
Late	74	43	65.78	10.32
Total Sample	430	35	66.27	8.54

Research question

What relationship do players' personal characteristics and their perceptions of their club environment have with their participation in off-field activities?

Based upon the literature review, and the findings of the case study, a series of general hypotheses were developed with respect to testing the influence of selected player characteristics and the club environment on players' off-field activity. Given that there were several off-field activities of interest in this thesis (i.e., social activities/going out, recreational, and alternative career development activities), and also player characteristics (i.e., athlete identity self-concept, and career stage) the broad research question was addressed through a number of general and specific hypotheses. The influence of player career stage was also considered via the testing of interaction effects. These hypotheses are now presented.

General hypothesis one (H_{g1}):

H_{g1} Player identity, self-concept, and career stage will have an influence on time spent in off-field activities. This will vary at different stages of the player career.

> H_{1a} Those with a strong athlete identity will participate less in social, recreational, and alternative career development activities.

> H_{1b} Those with a strong social self-concept will have higher participation in social activities.

> H_{1c} Those with a strong intellectual self-concept will spend more time in alternative career development activities.

General hypothesis two (H_{g2}):

H_{g2} Players' perceptions of the supportiveness of their club environment will be a source of difference regarding time spent in off-field activity. This will vary at different stages of the player career.

> H_{2a} Players who perceive higher levels of club support for their off-field life will spend more time in social, recreational, and alternative career development activities.

General hypothesis three (H_{g3}):

H_{g3} Those who perceive higher levels of club support for off-field life will experience a greater sense of quality in their alternative career development activity. This will vary at different stages of the player career.

Data preparation

The data were checked before all ANOVA procedures in the following way. Any substantial outliers were excluded from the analysis (Coolican, 2013b; Field, 2005a). The outlier labelling rule (Hoaglin, Iglewicz, & Tukey, 1986) was applied to the dependent variable in order to identify and remove outliers beyond the identified upper and lower limits of the distribution in each of the ANOVA cells. Then, the skewness and kurtosis values in each of the ANOVA 'cells' were checked for approximate normal distribution according to the criteria of Z scores being within $\pm$ 2.58 as the two-way ANOVA procedure is generally robust to mild departures from normality (Ghasemi & Zahediasl, 2012). Finally, when each ANOVA was run, homogeneity of the variances were checked via Levene's test (Coolican, 2013b; Field, 2005b). In the case of heterogeneity of variances or strongly non-normal data, a square root, log10, or reflect and inverse transformation was performed on the data to bring them in line with the assumptions of ANOVA (Field, 2005b).

For any test where a transformation was made, the original means and standard deviations are reported below to aid understanding of the results. In such cases the alpha levels of the transformed tests were checked against the original tests to see if there were any changes to the significance levels. Where there were no discernible differences it was deemed appropriate to report the original means and standard deviations. Studentized residuals were checked via a QQ plot to ascertain approximate normal distribution of these residuals in each cell of each test. These QQ plots can be seen in Appendix D. Table 24 summarises the application of these processes. Finally, where simple main effects were run due to a statistically significant interaction, Bonferroni adjustments were applied to the *P* values (as selected in SPSS) to guard against Type I errors due to multiple comparisons (Field, 2007b).

Table 24

Summary of Data Preparation Undertaken for Each Analysis

Test	Outliers removed	Transformation Yes/No	Transformation type	Residuals normal yes/no
H_{1a} AI and Social life/going out	12	Yes	SQRT	Yes
H_{1a} AI and Recreational	14	No	*	Yes
H_{1a} AI and ACD	19	Yes	SQRT	Yes
H_{1b} SSC and social life/going out	12	No	*	Yes
H_{1c} ISC and ACD	11	Yes	LOG10	Yes
H_{2a} Club support and social	11	Yes	SQRT	Yes
H_{2a} Club support and recreational	20	No	*	Yes
H_{2a} Club support and ACD	18	Yes	LOG10	Yes
H_{g3} Club support and ACD Quality	8	Yes	SQRT	Yes

Note: * = No transformation required.

General hypothesis one (H_{g1}):

H_{1a} Those with stronger athlete identities will participate less in i) social, ii)

recreational, and iii) alternative career development activities.

i) Social activities/going out

A two-way analysis of variance tested the time spent in social activities each

week for high and low AI player groups (as identified by a median split procedure) at

early, middle, and late career stages. The ANOVA showed a significant main effect for

AI status, ($F(1,412) = 9.14$, $p = .003$, $\eta^2 = .022$) only. There was however a statistically

significant interaction ($F(2,412) = 5.03$, $p = .007$, $\eta^2 = .024$), only for players in the late

career stage did those in the high AI group spend significantly less time ($M = 2.80$

hours per week) in social activities than those in the low AI group ($M = 5.42$ hours per

week), $F(1,412) = 5.41$, $p = .0001$, η^2, $= .032$). In practical terms, the mean difference

equated to 2 hours and 37 minutes per week.

There were no statistically significant differences in time spent in social

activities between high and low AI player groups in the early, $F(1,412) = .958$, $p =$

.328, $\eta^2 = .002$, and middle career stages $F(1,412) = .033$, $p = .855$, $\eta^2 = <.000$. Career

stage had a statistically significant effect on time spent in social activities for High AI

players (but not low AI players), $F(2,412) = 5.35$, $p = .005$, $\eta^2 = .025$, where late career

and high AI players ($M = 2.80$ hours per week) spent significantly less time in social

activities than middle career high AI players ($M = 4.90$ hours per week), and early

career high AI players ($M = 4.41$ hours per week). The differences between the groups

can be seen graphically via the clustered bar chart in Figure 15.

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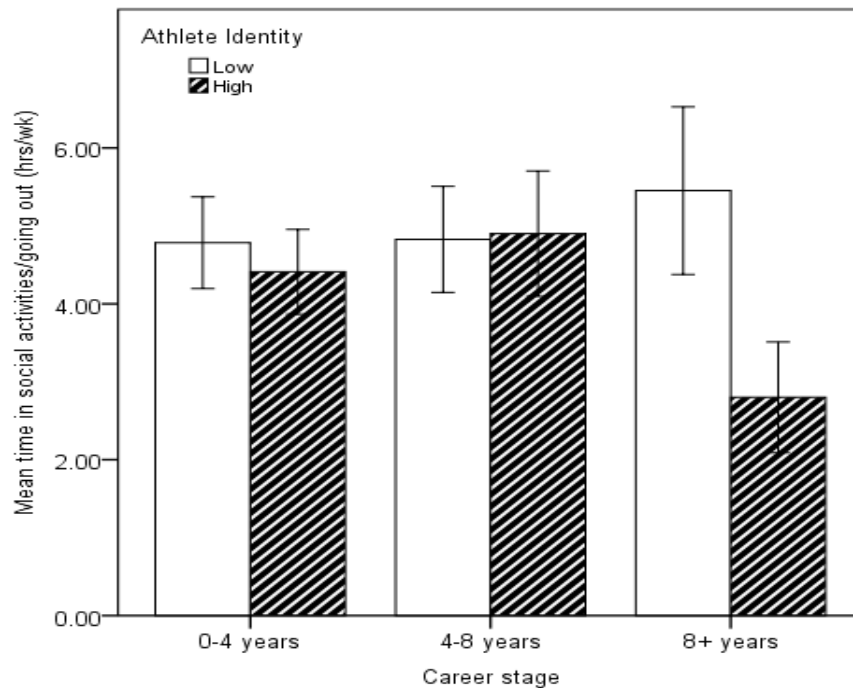
Figure 15. Mean amount of weekly time spent in social activities/going out for high and low AI groups by career stage.

Based upon the results, the alternative hypothesis (H_{1a}) can be partially accepted given that those with a higher athlete identity in the late career stage will spend significantly less time in social activities. This suggests that those in the late career stage with a strong athlete identity may be more singularly focussed on the athlete role to the detriment of social activities/going out. The effect sizes for these results however were small (i.e., $\eta 2$ values less than .059, Cohen, 1988).

ii) Recreational activities

A two-way analysis of variance compared the time spent in recreational activities each week for high and low AI player groups at early, middle, and late career stages. The ANOVA showed there were no significant main effects for AI status, ($F(1,409) = 1.42$, $p = .652$, $\eta^2 < .000$) or career stage, ($F(2,409) = 4.50$, $p = .724$, $\eta^2 = .002$). There was however a statistically significant interaction effect between high/low

AI and career stage ($F(2,409) = 4.13$, $p = .017$, $\eta^2 = .020$). For players in the early

career stage, those in the high AI group spent significantly more time ($M = 4.66$ hours

per week) in recreational activities than those in the low AI group ($M = 3.76$ hours per

week), $F(1,409) = 5.74$, $p = .017$, $\eta^2, = .014$). In practical terms, the mean difference

equated to an estimated 54 minutes per week. There were no statistically significant

differences in the time spent in recreational
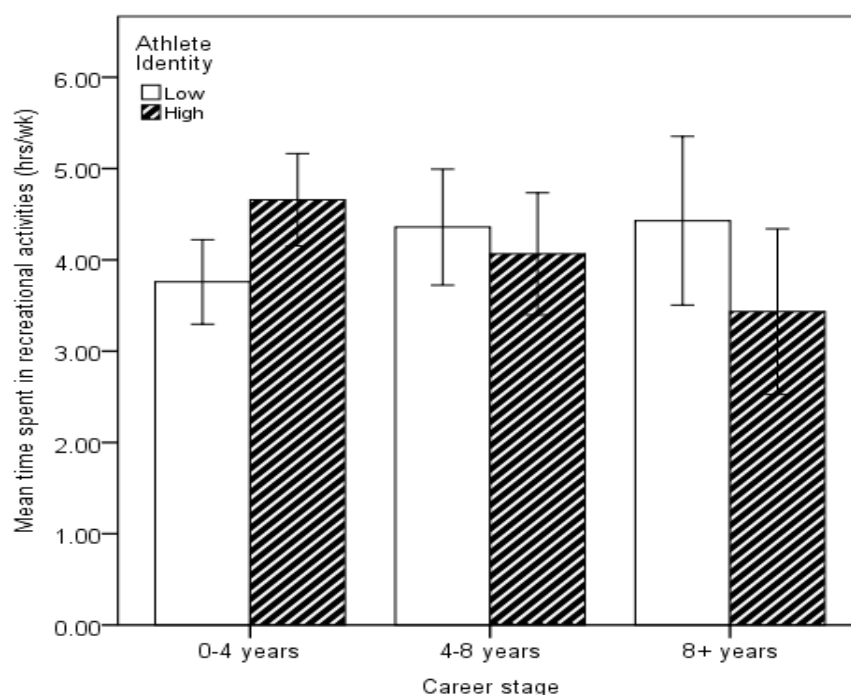
Figure 16. Mean amount of time spent in weekly recreational activities for high and

low AI groups by career stage.

activities between high and low AI player groups in the middle, $F(1,409) = .428$, $p =$

$.513$, $\eta^2 = .001$, and late career stages $F(1,409) = 2.49$, $p = .115$, $\eta^2 = .006$. Figure 16

shows that late career high AI players spent an average one hour per week less in

recreational activities then their peers, however this was non-significant.

This analysis of time spent in recreational activities shows an unexpected result

(for early career players) with respect to the stated hypothesis (H_{1a}) given that those

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with a higher AI in the early career stage that spent significantly more time in social activities. A possible suggestion may be that having a salient AI in the early career stage may make players more comfortable to spend time in recreational activities. The effect size of this result however was small according to Cohen's conventions (1988).

iii) Alternative career development activities

A two-way analysis of variance compared the time spent in alternative career development activities each week for high and low AI player groups at early, middle, and late career stages. There was a significant main effect found for career stage. Further analysis revealed that early career players ($M = 3.51$) spent significantly less time in ACD activities than both middle career player ($M = 4.42$), and late ($M = 5.11$) career players ($F(2,296) = 8.22$, $p = < .001$, $\eta^2 = .053$). This effect was close to
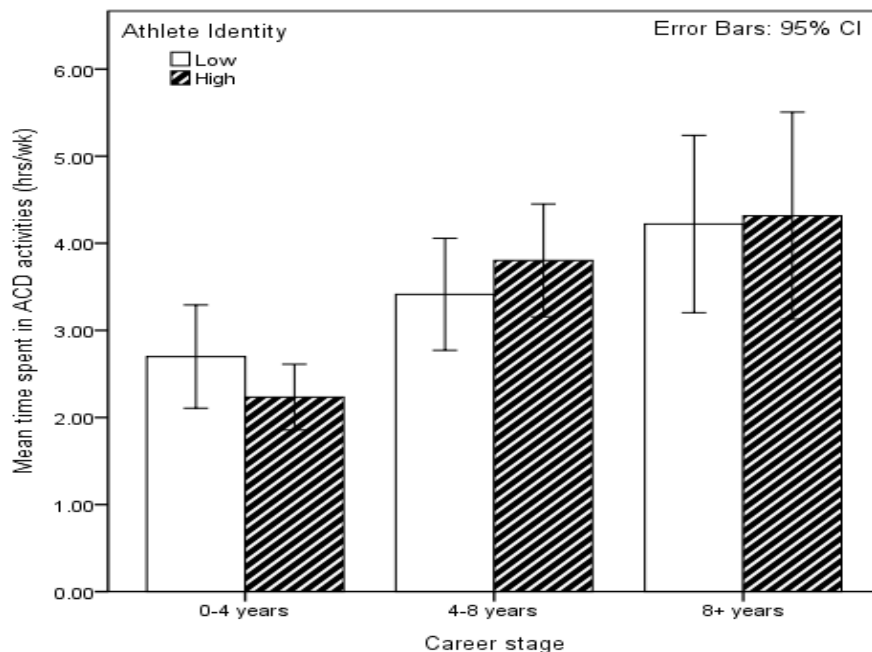
Figure 17. Means for amount of weekly time spent in alternative career development activities for high and low athlete identity groups by career stage.

moderate in size according to Cohen's conventions (1988). There was no significant main effect for AI status on time spent in ACD activities. There was also an absence of

a statistically significant interaction effect ($F(2,296) = 1.65$, $p = .195$, $\eta^2 = .011$). The differences between the groups can be seen graphically via the clustered bar chart in Figure 17.

Summary: H_{1a}

The results above provide at best mixed support for H_{1a} that those with a strong athlete identity will participate less in social, recreational, and ACD activities. In support of the hypothesis there was a significant finding that at the late career stage, players in the high AI group participated significantly less in social activities/going out. These high AI and late career players also spent significantly less time in social activities than early and middle career high AI players. Yet, contrary to the general direction of the hypothesis was the finding that early career players in the high athlete identity group spent significantly more time in recreational activities than those with low athlete identity status. The only other finding of interest was that early career players spent significantly less time in ACD activities than middle and late career players regardless of AI status.

H_{1b} Those with a strong social self-concept will have higher participation in social activities.

A two-way analysis of variance compared the time spent in social activities each week by high and low social self-concept player groups at early, middle, and late career stages. The construction of the Independent Variable (IV) involved combining the *'I have good interactions/relationships with members of the opposite sex'* and *'I have good interactions/relationships with members of the same sex'* SDQ-III-SI cross-products together. There were no significant main effects for either high/low social self-concept ($F(1,411) = .586$, $p = .444$, $\eta^2 = .001$) or career stage ($F(2,411) = 1.10$, $p = .332$,

$\eta^2 = .005$) with respect to weekly time spent in social activities. No interaction effects were found ($F(2,411) = .272$, $p = .762$, $\eta^2 = .001$). The comparisons of the groups can be seen graphically via the clustered bar chart in Figure 18.

Summary: H$_{1b}$

Based upon these results, the hypothesis H$_{1b}$ can be rejected. Rather, the null hypothesis can be accepted that social self-concept appears to have little effect on time spent in social activities.
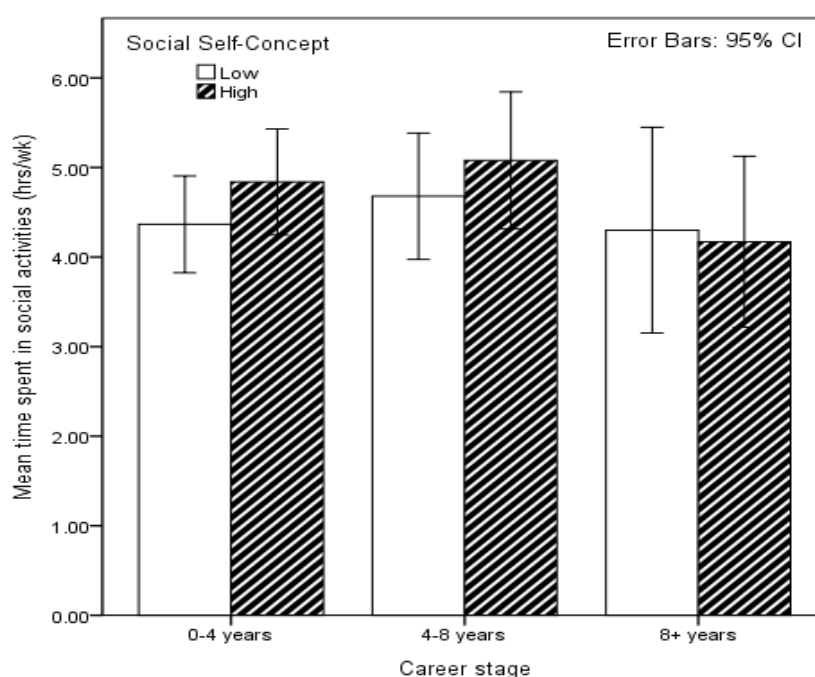
Figure 18. Means for amount of time spent in weekly social activities/going out for high and low social self-concept groups by career stage.

H$_{1c}$Those with a strong intellectual self-concept will spend more time in
alternative career development activities.

A two-way analysis of variance tested the time spent in ACD activities each week for high and low intellectual self-concept (ISC) player groups at early, middle, and late career stages. ISC was calculated for each participant by adding the academic ability, verbal ability, creativity problem solving, and mathematical ability SDQ-III-SI

cross products together. The ANOVA showed a significant main effect for ISC status, $(F(1,296) = 20.71, p < .0001, \eta^2 = .065)$ and for career stage, $(F(2,296) = 7.344, p = .047, \eta^2 = .047)$. There was also a statistically significant interaction between the two $(F(2,296) = 3.41, p = .034, \eta^2 = 0.23)$.

In the early career stage, those players in the high ISC group spent significantly more time ($M = 4.24$ hours per week) in ACD activities than those in the low ISC group ($M = 3.12$ hours per week), $F(1,296) = 12.37, p = .001, \eta^2, = .040)$. In practical terms, the mean difference equated to one hour and seven minutes per week). In the middle
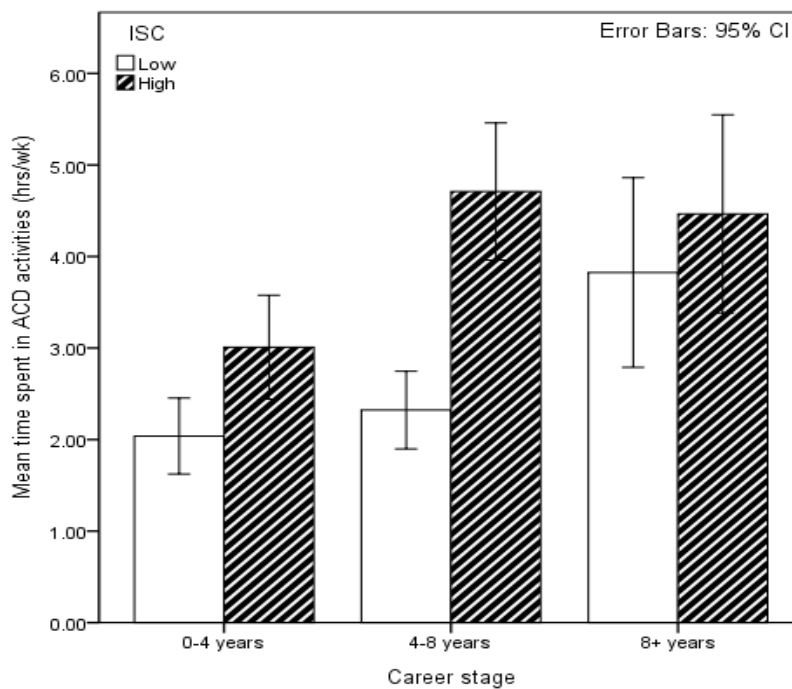
Figure 19. Means of weekly time spent in alternative career development by career stage and low/high intellectual self-concept groups.

career stage, those in the high ISC group spent significantly more time ($M = 5.41$ hours per week) in ACD activities than those in the middle career and low ISC group ($M = 3.15$ hours per week), $F(1,296) = 25.24, p = < .000, \eta^2, = .079)$. In practical terms, the mean difference equated to two hours and 16 minutes per week. There were no

differences in time spent in ACD activities between high and low ISC player groups in the late career stage, $F(1,296) = .179, p = .672, \eta^2 = .001$. The differences between the groups are presented graphically in Figure 19.

Summary H_{1c}

The results provide some support for the influence of intellectual self-concept on participation in ACD activities. In the early and middle (but not late) career stages, those with a higher intellectual self-concept spent significantly more time in ACD activities. However, it should be noted that the effect sizes were moderate for the differences amongst middle career players and small for the differences among early career players.

General hypothesis two (H_{g2})

H_{2a} Players who perceive higher levels of club support for off-field life will spend more time in i) social, ii) recreational, and iii) alternative career development activities

i) Social life/going out

A two-way analysis of variance compared the time spent in social life/going out each week for players who perceived high and low levels of club support for off-field life (as identified by median split procedure) at early, middle, and late career stages. The ANOVA showed no significant main effects for either perceptions of club support for off-field life (high/low), ($F(1,412) = 2.77, p = .097, \eta^2 = .007$) or career stage, ($F(2,412) = 1.89, p = .153, \eta^2 = .009$). There was however a significant interaction between club support (low vs. high) and career stage ($F(2,412) = 3.70, p = .026, \eta^2 = .018$). Subsequent analysis revealed that for players in the early career stage, those in the high club support group spent significantly more time ($M = 5.18$ hours per week) in

social activities than those in the low club support group (M = 3.85 hours per week),

$F(1,412)$ = 7.95, p = .005, η^2, = .019). In practical terms, the mean difference equated to

one hour and 20 minutes per week. For players in the middle career stage, those in the

high perception of club support group spent significantly more time (M = 5.82 hours per

week) than those is in the low perceptions of club support group (M = 4.41 hours per

week), $F(1,412)$ = 6.43, p = .012, η^2, = .015). In practical terms, the mean difference
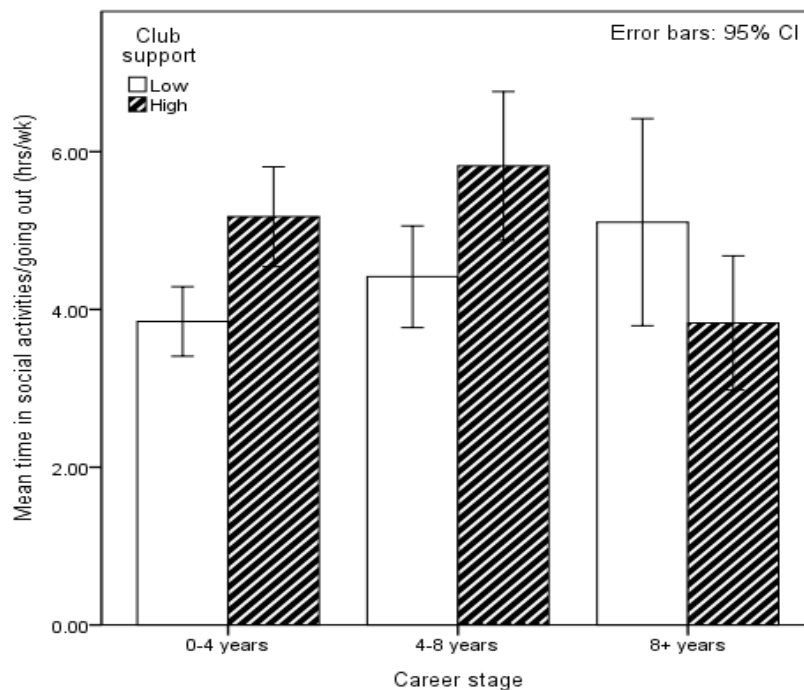
Figure 20. Means of weekly time spent in social activities/going out for low and high

club support groups by career stage.

equated to one hour and 25 minutes per week. There was no significant difference in

time spent in social activities between those with high and low perceptions of club

support in the late career stage, $F(1,412)$ = 1.544, p = .215, η^2 = .004. These differences

can be seen graphically in Figure 20.

Based upon these results, the alternative hypothesis (H_{2a}) can be partially accepted given that those with higher perceptions of club support in the early and middle stages of their careers will spend more time in social activities.

ii) Recreational activities

A two-way analysis of variance tested the difference in time spent in recreational activities each week by those with perceptions of high and low levels of club support at early, middle, and late stages of their career. There were no main effects for either perceptions of club support ($F(1,403) = .082$, $p = .774$, $\eta^2 < .001$) or career
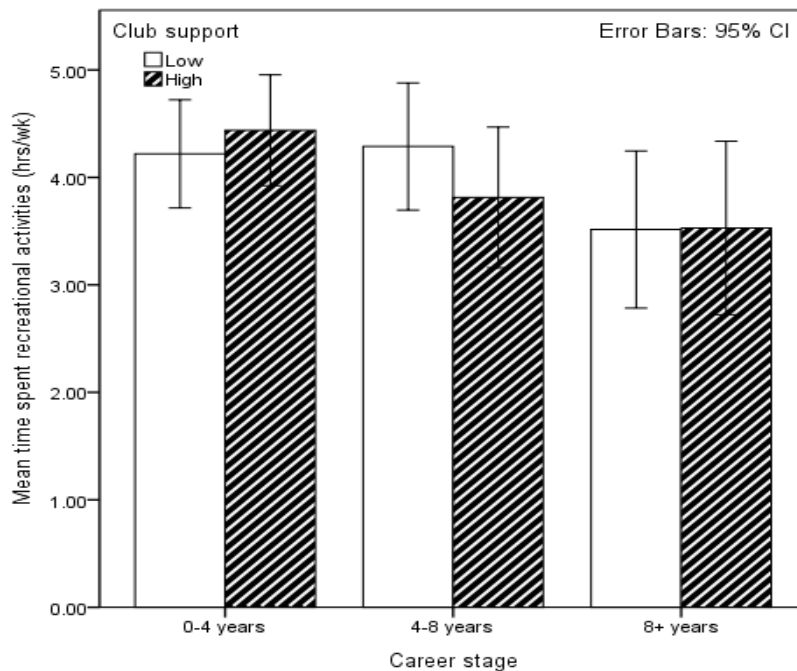
Figure 21. Means of weekly time spent in recreational activities for low and high club support groups by career stage.

stage ($F(2,403) = 2.56$, $p = .076$, $\eta^2 = .013$). There were no significant interactions observed ($F(2,403) = .768$, $p = .007$, $\eta^2 = .004$). The comparisons between the groups is reported graphically in Figure 21. Based upon these results, the hypothesis (H_{2a}) can be

partially rejected in the case of the relationship between perceptions of club support for off-field life and time spent in recreational activities.

Alternative career development activities

A two-way analysis of variance compared the time spent in ACD activities each week by those with perceptions of high or low levels of club support for off-field life at early, middle, and late career stages. The ANOVA showed a significant main effect for
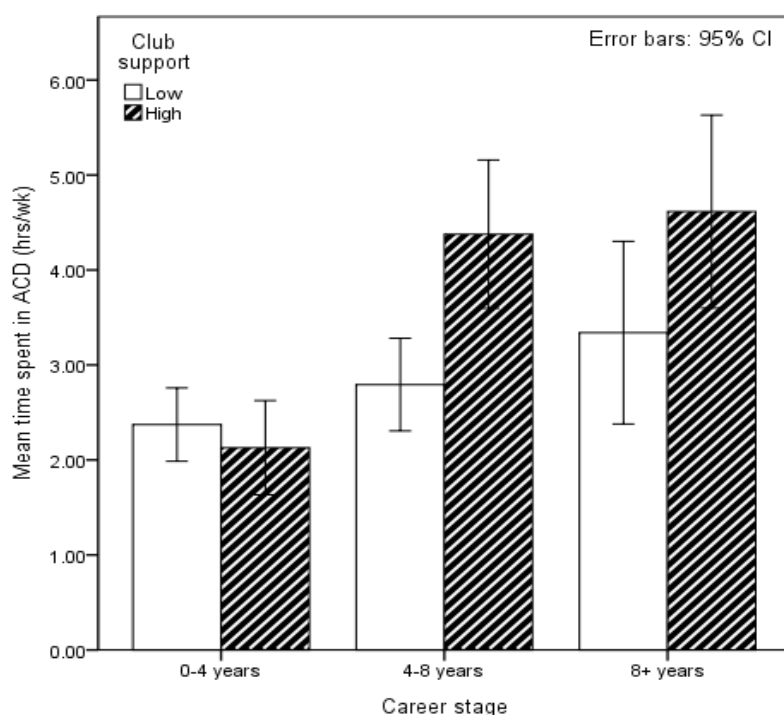
Figure 22. Means of time spent in weekly alternative career development activities for low and high club support groups by career stage.

Both perceptions of club support for off-field life, $(F(1,289) = 7.75, p = .006, \eta^2 = .026)$ and career stage, $(F(2,289) = 9.72, p < .001, \eta^2 = .063)$. There was also a significant interaction found between perceived level of club support (high/low) and career stage on time spent in ACD activities $(F(2,289) = 3.141, p = .045, \eta^2 = 0.21)$. For players in the middle career stage, those with perceptions of higher levels of club support spent significantly more time ($M = 5.24$ hours per week) in ACD activities than those who

perceived low levels of club support group (M = 3.60 hours per week), $F(1,289)$ = 11.095, p = .001, η^2, = .037). In practical terms, the mean difference equated to 1 hours and 38 minutes per week. There were no significant differences in time spent in ACD activities between the groups in the early, $F(1,289)$ = .006, p = .941, η^2 = .000, and late career stages $F(1,289)$ = 2.482, p = .116, η^2 = <.009. These differences can be seen graphically in Figure 22.

Based upon these results, the hypothesis (H_{2a}) can be accepted only in the case of players in the middle stages of their careers. In addition, early career players will spend less time in ACD than middle and late career players. These results should be treated with caution however given the small effect sizes for each of the significant results (i.e., η^2 values less than .059, Cohen, 1988).

Summary: General hypothesis two (H_{g2})

Partial support for hypothesis H_{g2} could be found in the analysis of the data as those in the high club support groups in the early and middle career stages spent significantly more time in social activities/going out than their low club support counterparts in the same career stage bracket. Similarly, those in the middle career stage and high club support group spent significantly more time in ACD activities than the middle career and low club support players. There was however an absence of significant differences in the other club support by career stage on activity comparisons, hence only partial support for hypothesis H_{g2}. These results suggest that club support for off-field life has the greatest influence on player off-field activity during the early and middle career stages.

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General hypothesis three (H$_{g3}$)

A two-way analysis of variance compared the perceptions of ACD activity value for players with perceptions of high or low club support for off-field life (as identified by median split procedure) at early, middle, and late career stages. There was a significant main effect found for both perceptions of club support ($F(1,309) = 13.80$, $p = <.000$, $\eta^2 = .043$) and career stage ($F(2,309) = 6.72$, $p = .001$, $\eta^2 = .042$). Players
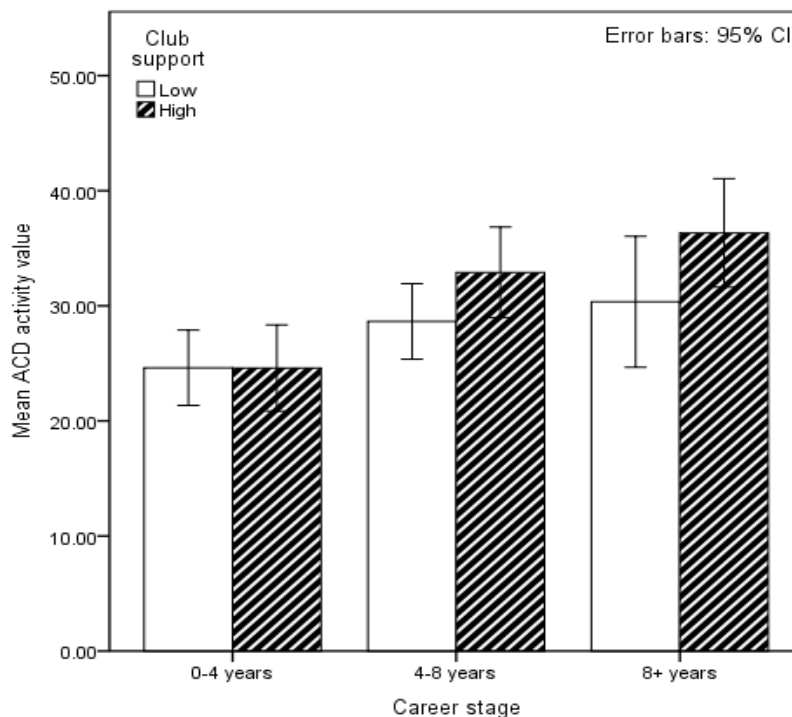
Figure 23. Means of perceived ACD activity quality for low and high club support groups by career stage.

Who perceived higher levels of club support perceived a significantly higher level of value in their ACD activity ($M = 38.82$) than those in the 'low' club support group ($M = 35.62$). Late career players ($M = 39.77$) perceived significantly higher value in their ACD activities than middle career ($M = 37.54$) and early career ($M = 35.89$) players. There was no significant interaction effect ($F(2,309) = .259$, $p = .772$, $\eta^2 = .002$). The differences between the groups can be seen graphically in Figure 23.

Summary H$_{g3}$

Based upon the results, the alternative hypothesis (H$_{g3}$) can be partially accepted given that those with a higher perception of club support for off-field life had a higher perception of the value of their ACD activities. There was however no significant interaction with player career stage yet late career players on average did hold higher perceptions of value with respect to alternative career development activities. This provides evidence that alternative career development activities may become more meaningful to AFL players as their careers advance.

Chapter Seven: Off-field Activity and Athlete Engagement

The examination of players' participation in off-field activities reported in chapter six prepared the way to address the key research question.

Research question

What relationship does players' participation in off-field activities have with their experience of athlete engagement?

Three general hypotheses were proposed as a result of the literature review, and the subsequent research reported previously. These are presented below.

Hypotheses

Hg_4. Time spent in off-field activity will significantly predict athlete engagement.

Three sub-hypotheses were specified:

H_{4a} *Time spent in weekly social activities/going out will predict higher levels of athlete engagement.*

H_{4b} *Time spent in weekly recreational activities will predict higher levels of athlete engagement.*

H_{4c} *Time spent in weekly alternative career development activities will predict higher levels of athlete engagement.*

In addition to the temporal aspect of off-field activity, earlier investigations in this thesis have also considered both the overarching experience of player free time and also a special focus on the quality of player experiences in alternative career development activities. In chapter six, exploratory factor analysis identified 'quality of free time' and 'ACD activity value' constructs for the purposes of the ongoing

investigation. These constructs are utilised in the following hypotheses that consider their ability to predict athlete engagement.

Hg_5 Player perceptions of experiencing quality free time will significantly predict athlete engagement.

Hg_6 When players perceive a greater value in their alternative career development activity they will experience higher levels of athlete engagement.

Data preparation

The data used for the regressions presented in this chapter were subject to a process of screening and cleaning in line with the relevant assumptions for the statistical tests involved. For regression, (and later multiple regressions), these assumptions were checked by running the relevant procedure in SPSS, before assessing them, and then adjusting the data further if necessary. For each regression: the assumptions of independence of observations (i.e, a Durbin-Watson statistic close to 2.0), linearity (as checked by residual plots and partial regression plots), and; homoscedasticity (via the residual plot) were checked (Coolican, 2013a; Field, 2007c). Approximate normal distribution of the dependent variable was checked by observing the normality plot of the residual errors for each regression. The potential influence of outliers was assessed by SPSS diagnostics of cases where the actual value of the dependent variable was $\pm$ greater than three standard deviations from the predicted value. For simple regression these cases were removed from the analysis.

For the multiple regressions, multicollinearity (i.e., checking for correlations between independent variables >.7 and tolerance values less than 0.1) was also checked. Also considered in the multiple regression procedure was whether statistical outliers (or any case) had leverage points beyond 0.2 and Cook's distances values above one (Field,

Table 25

Summary Data Screening and Cleaning

Analysis	*Outliers removed*	*Durbin-Watson*	*Multico-linearity*	*Residuals: normal*	*Homo-scedasticity*
Social Activities/going out & AE	3	1.752	NA	✓	✓
Recreational Activities and AE	3	1.719	NA	✓	✓
ACD Activities and AE	3	1.852	NA	✓	✓
Quality of Free Time and AE	4	1.770	NA	✓	✓
ACD Activity Value and AE	4	1.937	NA	✓	✓
Social Activities/ Qual Free Time & AE	0	1.775	✓	✓	✓
Social Activities/ Qual Free Time, ACD Activity Value & AE	0	1.916	✓	✓	✓
AI, Club support for off-field life and AE	0	1.761	✓	✓	✓

Note: NA = Not Applicable, AE =Athlete Engagement, ACD = Alternative Career

Development, AI = Athlete Identity

2007c). If outliers beyond three standard deviations were not shown to be highly

influential on the multiple regression, they were retained. The results of these processes

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are reported in Table 25. Residual plots and partial regression plots can be seen in

Appendix E.

Hypothesis testing

Hg₄. Time spent in off-field activity will significantly predict athlete engagement.

H₄ₐ Time spent in weekly social activities/going out will predict higher levels of

athlete engagement.

A simple regression was run with hours per week spent in social activities/going

out ($M = 4.96$, SD, 3.73) as the independent variable and athlete engagement ($M =$

66.48, *SD,* 8.24) as the dependent variable. The regression revealed that social

activities/going predicted a significant portion of the variance in athlete engagement

scores $F(1,424) = 8.64$, $P < .05$ and the prediction was in the expected direction. Time

in social activities/going out could predict 1.8% (Adj. R^2) of the variance in athlete

engagement. However, it was noted that this prediction was quite small according to

Cohen's (1988) conventions.

H₄ᵦ Time spent in weekly recreational activities will predict higher levels of

athlete engagement.

A simple regression was run with hours per week spent in recreational activities

($M = 4.96$, SD, 3.73) as the independent variable and athlete engagement ($M = 66.27$,

SD, 8.54) as the dependent variable. The regression revealed that recreational activities

did predict an increase in athlete engagement scores $F(1,424) = 4.62$, $P < .05$ however

the prediction was so small (i.e., .008 % of shared variance, Adj. R^2) sub-hypothesis

H₄ᵦ was rejected and the variable of time spent in recreational activities was not

included in any further analysis.

H_{4c} Time spent in weekly alternative career development activities will predict higher levels of athlete engagement.

A simple regression was run with hours per week spent in alternative career development activities (ACD, $M = 4.40$, SD, 2.75) as the independent variable and athlete engagement ($M = 66.27$, SD, 8.54) as the dependent variable. The regression revealed that ACD activities did not predict any of the variance in athlete engagement scores $F(1,319) = 0.00$, $P = .935$. Based upon this result sub-hypothesis H_{4c} was rejected.

Summary Hg_4

Based upon the three results reported, the general hypothesis that time spent in activities away from the club would predict changes in athlete engagement can only be partially supported as only social activities/going could significantly predict any percentage of athlete engagement worthy of mention (i.e., 1.8%, Adj. R^2). This prediction however was quite small. Nonetheless, weekly time spent in social activities/going out appears to have some relationship with athlete engagement, whereas there was an absence of any meaningful predictions between weekly time spent in recreational and ACD activities and athlete engagement. This suggests that the spending of time in ACD activities has neither a positive or negative relationship with athlete engagement and the same can be said for the amount of time spent in recreational activities.

Hg_5 Player perceptions of experiencing quality free time will significantly predict athlete engagement.

A simple regression was run with quality of free time ($M = 16.07$, SD, 4.87) as the independent variable and athlete engagement ($M = 66.46$, SD, 8.26) as the

dependent variable. The regression revealed that quality of free time predicted a significant portion of the variance in athlete engagement scores $F(1,424) = 8.64$, $P < .05$. Quality of free time could predict 8.1% (Adj. R^2) of the variance in athlete engagement, a moderate prediction according to Cohen's conventions (1988). Based upon these results above, the general hypothesis five is supported. This suggests that it is the perception of quality with respect to players' experience of their free time that has a stronger association with athlete engagement than simply the amount of time spent in social activities/going out, recreational activities, and alternative career development activities.

Hg₆ When players perceive a greater value in their alternative career development activity they will experience higher levels of athlete engagement.

A simple regression was run with ACD activity value ($M = 36.46$, SD, 7.89) as the independent variable and athlete engagement ($M = 66.46$, SD, 7.98) as the dependent variable. The regression revealed that ACD activity value (for those who participated) predicted a significant portion of the variance in athlete engagement scores $F(1,317) = 11.52$, $P < .01$. Perceptions of its value could predict 3.2% (Adj. R^2) of the variance in athlete engagement. However this prediction was small according to Cohen's conventions (1988). Based upon the results above, hypothesis general six is supported.

Off-field activity predicting athlete engagement (whole sample)

The results above highlighted that it was not simply the amount of time invested in activities that can explain any benefits gained from participation, but also factors such as the players' overall sense of quality with respect to their free time experiences and the perceived value of their involvement in any career development activities.

Based upon these results, a multiple regression was run to consider how much variance in athlete engagement social activities/going out and quality of free time could predict together. Table 26 shows the results of this analysis. Given that not every player in the sample participated in ACD activities, a separate multiple regression was then run to include perceptions of value with respect to these activities.

Table 26

Multiple Regression for Off-field Activity Measures Predicting Athlete Engagement (N=429)

Variable	B	SE_B	β
Constant	58.771	1.385	
Social activities/going out	0.99	.111	.044
Quality of free time	.435	.085	.249[***]

*** $p < .001$.

Participation in social activities/going out and perceptions of quality of free time experienced were entered into a multiple regression model. This model was statistically significant $F(2, 426) = 16.05$; $P < .001$ and predicted 6.6% (adj. R^2) *of* the variance in athlete engagement. When modelled together, only quality of free time remained statistically significant with a higher beta value ($\beta = .249$, $P < .001$) than time spent in social activities/going out ($\beta = .044$, $P = .372$). In summary, the results of the multiple regression suggest that it is players' perceptions of the quality of free time that is the most significant predictor of athlete engagement rather than simply the amount of time spent weekly in the off-field activities of focus in this investigation.

Off-field activity predicting athlete engagement (Participators in ACD)

Based upon the initial finding that it was the perception of the value of ACD activity that was a significant predictor of athlete engagement, an additional multiple regression was run for only those players who participated in ACD. This was so that all three measures could be modelled together, social activities/going out, perceptions of quality of free time, and perceptions of ACD activity in order to assess how much of athlete engagement scores they could predict. Table 27 shows the results of this analysis.

Table 27

Multiple Regression for Off-field Activity Measures Predicting Athlete Engagement for Participators in ACD (N=322)

Variable	B	SE_B	β
Constant	54.304	2.545	
Social activities/going out	.161	.121	.075
ACD activity value	.144	.058	.133[*]
Quality of free time	.354	.099	.203[***]

*$p < $ .05. *** $p < .001$.

Time spent in social activities/going out, perceptions of the quality of free time, and the value of ACD activity were entered into a multiple regression model. This model was statistically significant $F (3, 318) = 9.09$; $P < .001$ and predicted 7.0% (adj. R^2) of the variance in athlete engagement. When modelled together, quality of free time

(β = .203, P < .001) and value of ACD activity (β = .133, P < .05) remained statistically

significant while time spent in social activities/going out (β = .075, P = .186) was no

longer significant. In summary, the results of the regression showed that at least in the

case of those players who participate in ACD, it was their perceptions of the quality of

their free time and the value of their ACD activity that were the most significant

predictors of increased levels of athlete engagement rather than just the amount of

participation in these varying activities conducted outside of the professional footballer

role.

Direct predictions of athlete engagement by athlete identity and club support for

off-field life

       The conceptual framework outlined within this thesis has denoted direct

relationships between athlete identity and athlete engagement and club support for off-

field life and athlete engagement. In order to better acknowledge possible direct effects

of athlete identity and perceptions of club support for off-field life on athlete

Table 28

Correlations between Athlete Identity, Club Support for Off-field Life and Athlete

Engagement

	N	*Athlete Engagement*
Athlete identity	430	.279[**]
Club support for off-field life	430	.424[**]

  [**] Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

engagement, a multiple regression was undertaken. Table 28 shows the individual

correlations between these variables prior to the regression procedure.

Table 29

Multiple Regression for Athlete Identity, Club Support for Off-field Life and Athlete

Engagement (N=430)

Variable	B	SE_B	β
Constant	34.868	3.060	
Athlete identity	.383	.070	.233[***]
Club support for off-field life	.664	.071	.397[***]

*** $p < .001$.

When these two variables were modelled together, the model was statistically

significant $F(2, 427) = 65.04$; $P < .001$ and predicted 23% (adj. R^2) of the variance in

athlete engagement. Both variables remained statistically significant with club support

for off-field life ($\beta = .233$, $P < .001$) having a larger standardised beta coefficient than

athlete identity ($\beta = .397$, $P < .001$). In summary, the results of the regression showed

that athlete identity and club support for off-field life together could predict a moderate

to large amount of the variance in athlete engagement. The results also showed that for

the conceptual framework overall, perceptions of club support for off-field life was the

strongest individual predictor of athlete engagement when compared to athlete identity

and time spent in off-field activity. Perceptions of quality of free time and athlete

identity were the second and third strongest predictors respectively.

Identifying the most important predictors of Athlete Engagement

As a final step in the analysis, the strongest variables in the conceptual framework that had been shown to significantly predict athlete engagement were modelled together to test how much variance in athlete engagement (AE) these variables could cumulatively predict. The tests also serve the purpose of identifying which variables are the strongest predictors when modelled together. For this analysis, the sample was split into early, middle, and late career stages to identify how these predictions might change when taking the variable of career stage into account. Firstly, the summary of the screening and cleaning of the data is reported in Table 30.

Table 30

Summary of Data Screening and Cleaning

Analysis	*Outliers removed*	*Durbin-Watson*	*Multico-linearity*	*Residuals: normal*	*Homo-scedasticity*
Early Career Sig. Variables and AE	2	2.017	✓	✓	✓
Middle Career Sig. Variables and AE	2	1.958	✓	✓	✓
Late Career Sig. Variables and AE	2	1.870	✓	✓	✓

i) Predicting higher levels of athlete engagement at the early career stage

All variables that were significantly correlated with athlete engagement were entered into a multiple regression model as can be seen in Table 31. This model was statistically significant $F(4, 205) = 18.49$; $P < .001$ and predicted 25% (adj. R^2) of the variance in athlete engagement for players in the early career stage. Three of the four

individual variables remained statistically significant when modelled together with club support for off-field life ($\beta = .339$, $P < .001$) having a larger standardised beta coefficient than quality of free time ($\beta = .189$, $P < .01$), and athlete identity ($\beta = .124$, $P < .05$). In summary, the results of the regression showed that these variables together can predict a large amount of the variance in athlete engagement. It confirmed that club support for off-field life followed by perceptions of quality in their free time experiences for early career players were the most important of the individual variables. Time spent in off-field activities was found to be non-significant when modelled with these other variables.

Table 31

Multiple Regression for prediction of Athlete Engagement at the Early Career Stage (N=210)

Variable	*B*	*SE* $_B$	β
Constant	40.438	4.462	
Athlete identity	.202	.099	.124[*]
Club support for off-field life	.541	.110	.339[***]
Quality of free time	.294	.109	.189[**]
Social activities/going out	.176	.123	.091

*** $p < .001$., ** $p < .01$., * $p < .051$.

ii) Predicting higher levels of athlete engagement at the middle career stage

Table 32 shows the results when the same set of predictor variables were entered into a multiple regression for players in the middle career stage. This model was statistically significant $F(4,139) = 9.204$; $P < .001$ and predicted 18.7% (Adj. R^2) of the variance in athlete engagement. When modelled together, two variables remained statistically significant in their own right with club support for off-field life ($\beta = .314$, $P < .001$) having a larger standardised beta coefficient than athlete identity ($\beta = .200$, $P < .01$). Perceptions of quality of free time and social activities/going out no longer contributed significantly to the model. The results of this regression show that at the

Table 32

Multiple Regression for prediction of Athlete Engaegment in the Middle Career Stage (N=144)

Variable	*B*	*SE* $_B$	*β*
Constant	38.043	5.050	
Athlete identity	.317	.122	.200[*]
Club support for off-field life	.457	.123	.314[***]
Quality of free time	.183	.150	.104
Social activities/going out	.075	.187	.032

*** $p < .001$., *** $p < .05$.

middle career stage club support for off-field life remains the most important predictor

of higher levels of athlete engagement but at this stage the individual's athlete identity

has started to assume a more important role.

iii) Predicting higher levels of athlete engagement at the late career stage

Table 33shows the results for the late career stage players with the same set of

predictor variables entered into a multiple regression model. This model was

statistically significant F (4,68) = 11.299; $P < .001$ and predicted 36.4% (Adj. R^2) of the

variance in athlete engagement. When modelled together, two of the four variables

remained statistically significant in their own right with athlete identity (β = .417, $P <$

.001) having a slightly larger standardised beta coefficient than club support for off-

field life (β = .412, $P < .01$). Again, perceptions of quality of free time and participation

Table 33

Multiple Regression for all Significant Variables in the Late Career Stage (N=73)

Variable	B	SE_B	β
Constant	16.649	8.638	
Athlete identity	.645	.163	.417***
Club support for off-field life	.916	.243	.412***
Quality of free time	.141	.218	.073
Social activities/going out	-.152	.274	-.057

*** $p < .001$.

in social activities/going out no longer contributed significantly to the model at this

level. In summary, the results of the analysis show that the environmental variable of

perceived club support for off-field life together with the individual variable of athlete

identity provide a powerful prediction of the level to which late career AFL players

engage in football.

Chapter Eight: Discussion and Conclusion

The motivation behind this thesis was to investigate the influence of professional AFL players' participation in off-field activities on their experience of athlete engagement. The conceptual framework that guided this thesis was informed by a 'person in the environment' view of behaviour and development (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Lewin, 1936). This was an investigation that sought to extend understanding of the influence of off-field activity on athlete engagement, not in isolation, but rather in the context of key personal and environmental influences on professional footballers' participation in off-field activity. This approach has placed the findings of this study within literature concerning athletes' involvement in non-sport activity (Aquilina, 2013; Cresswell & Eklund, 2007; Price et al., 2010), the holistic support provided by sporting organisations (Bennie & O'Connor, 2010; Douglas & Carless, 2006; Friesen & Orlick, 2010) and how this support is related to the way athletes approach their sport. The present thesis (within the AFL context at least) has contributed to a shift from the interpretation of anecdotal insights to the search for more systematic identification of relationships.

The findings/results presented in the previous chapters are supportive of a growing literature that argues for balanced participation in off-field activities and the notion that this provides an observable benefit, rather than a distraction to the way athletes perform in their sport (Douglas & Carless, 2006; Martindale et al., 2007; Poczwardowski et al., 2013). Interestingly, rather than simply the amount of time spent in social life/going out, recreational, or alternative career development activities, it was the players' overarching sense of the quality of the free time experiences that was the strongest predictor of enhanced levels of athlete engagement. This finding is consistent with contemporary human

resource literature that argues for the benefit of employers' work-life balance practices (Beauregard & Henry, 2009).

In addition to the quality of their free time, the players' perceptions of the club's support for their off-field lives was shown to directly predict a moderate-large proportion of the variance in the athlete engagement scores. This is also consistent with research from contemporary workplaces (Attridge, 2009; Beauregard & Henry, 2009; Grawitch et al., 2006; Watson Wyatt Worldwide, 2002) which has shown that work environments that support the development and well-being of their employees as 'whole people' (and not only as 'workers'), have staff that are more engaged, productive, and who also show lower rates of absenteeism. The results presented in chapter seven confirm the salience of these findings when adopting a view of AFL players as members of a contemporary workforce, as is consistent with the AFL's status as an industry where the players are professional employees (Kelly & Hickey, 2010; Stewart & Dickson, 2007).

The findings presented in this thesis suggest that providing a sense of support for players' off-field lives can be achieved through displaying a genuine interest in the athlete as a whole person. The initial case study also suggested that to be effective the support of players' balanced lives needs to be compatible with an overarching club culture concerning the personal development of athletes (Henriksen, 2010). Such compatibility is reflected in a player development department that exists as a respected part of the organisation. The conduct of the player development manager (PDM), particularly with respect to the relationship that he had with the players was identified as a key component in this study. This finding endorses the strategy of Alessio (2011) who on behalf of the AFLPA had previously argued cogently for the importance of the PDM role and the hiring of suitably qualified and competent individuals to fill these positions.

The results also shed light on some of the 'suspicions' that have been harboured towards dual career/alternative career development activities (Henry, 2013; Hickey & Kelly, 2008; Park et al., 2012). They should help to allay some of the concerns of those in professional sport that the development of a second career may be a negative distraction (Chambers et al., 2013; Henry, 2013) for players and their optimal involvement in their sport. In the study, time spent in alternative career development activities was neither associated positively or negatively with respect to the players' engagement in their football.

What was shown to be important however was the extent to which players valued alternative career activities. Indeed, this had a small (yet significant) positive association with their athletic engagement. The qualitative findings in the first phase of this investigation offered important suggestions around the need for supporting ACD activities that players' value, that is, activities where the player experienced enjoyment, interest, and identified with their purpose. The results of the case study also suggested that clubs whose cultures support the holistic development of their players and who employ player development managers that are autonomy supportive (Ahlberg, 2008; Mageau & Vallerand, 2003) in their approaches appear most likely to foster participation in career development activities which the players value. An autonomy supportive approach is seen as one where the PDM acknowledges the perspectives of the players, discusses reasonable rationales for development in this domain, and supports player explorations of dual career activities that are of their own volition. Such an approach stands in contrast to previous reports of clubs encouraging participation as a means to meet industry (i.e., the AFL and AFLPA) expectations resulting in many staff and players holding little value for the activities in which they participated (Hickey & Kelly, 2008).

The conceptual framework adopted for the thesis also enabled the study to add to current understanding of life as an AFL player, and the nature of AFL player careers. The

case study confirmed that professional AFL players have differing challenges, developmental needs and experiences at different stages of their career both on and away from the field. These findings reinforced the value of Wylleman and Lavallee's (2004) developmental model of the stages and transitions faced by athletes and confirmed the efficacy of Kelly and Hickey's (2006) division of AFL players into early, middle, and late career stages. The influences of selected personal and environmental attributes on players' participation in off-field activity were found to vary depending upon the career stage in which they were in. The relationship between participation in off-field activities and athlete engagement were also shown to vary by career stage. These influences and relationships are now further discussed for each of the career stages in turn.

Early career players

Early career players on average had the most salient athlete identities (AI) amongst the sample and this was consistent with previous literature that has described AI as strongest among young athletes and declines with age (Martin et al., 2014). AI was also found to be significantly related to early career player uptake of off-field activity with those players who had stronger athlete identities spending significantly more time in recreational activities. A similar trend was observed for social activities however this was non-significant. At first glance this result may appear difficult to reconcile with literature that has reported on AI being negatively associated with engagement in life outside of sport (Cecić Erpič et al., 2004; Horton & Mack, 2000). However, when this result is considered from the perspective of the early career experiences of elite athletes, then interpretation may not prove as difficult.

Young athletes have typically described a desperation to 'make it' when transitioning into, and adjusting to an elite environment (Bruner et al., 2008; Hickey & Kelly, 2005; Holt & Dunn, 2004). Many AFL players have described a sense of shock and

the experience of fatigue with respect to the demands they found placed upon them (Hickey & Kelly, 2008). It has also been reported that the strength of young players' athlete identities is often a reflection of their on-field successes (Brewer et al., 1999; Grove et al., 2004). In the early career stage, high AI players are likely to be those who are achieving in their sport at a level that allows them to feel more comfortable in spending time in off-field activities. This would be in contrast to feeling a need to spend more time than necessary recovering, training, and worrying about their sport. The challenge for the professional AFL club is to find ways to encourage those early career players who are perhaps not meeting their performance expectations to maintain a balance between football and non-football activities. This is especially relevant given the positive relationships between the experience of quality free time and higher levels of athlete engagement identified in this thesis.

The results also showed that early career players spent significantly less time in alternative career development than both middle and late career players. This result may also be explained by the early career players' focus on 'making the grade' in their football. Any alternative career development activities these players participate in are likely to be those that require a low level of commitment and a high level of flexibility. This is consistent with findings from other literature concerning elite athlete environments (Christensen & Sørensen, 2009; Cresswell & Eklund, 2007; Henriksen et al., 2010a). An example can be found in Henriksen et al. (2010a) investigation into the Danish 49ers elite sailing environment. The authors reported that coaches encouraged their 'prospects' (i.e., early career athletes) to participate in education activities that did not demand too much and provided flexibility to facilitate their training and competition schedules. In the AFL club culture reported during the qualitative phase of this thesis, the coaches, executive staff, and player development manager believed that the first year on a list should be spent adjusting to life as a footballer and only after this should it involve the player exploring alternative

career options. First explorations were usually a certificate level course which required minimal commitment.

The reality for the majority of AFL footballers is that they will not proceed much further than the early career stage, with the average AFL career currently lasting five years (Baldwin, 2014). The challenge for AFL clubs and their player development managers is to encourage alternative career exploration while recognising the current primacy of the demands of their football career. This is in contrast to an approach whereby players might be forced to make firm commitments to courses that are too demanding and/or where they may be uncertain of having a genuine interest.

With regard to social activities/going out, early career players who felt more supported by their club in off-field life spent significantly more time in these activities. The importance of club support for such activities also needs to be understood in light of the perceived risks that surround professional AFL footballers engaging in social activities (McLeod, 2013). As discussed by Stewart and Dickson (2007) and Kelly and Hickey (2008, 2010), AFL players operate under a strict code of conduct that extends well beyond their working hours. To add to this, players are highly visible in the public and any apparent even minor indiscretion is likely to become a prominent news story. It is understandable then that players are often hesitant to engage in an active (and often inevitably public) social life if they perceive that their club is not supportive of their life beyond football. Given the positive association that the level of involvement in social activities had with athlete engagement for this cohort, this is an important finding. The value of social activities/going out to early career players is also perhaps reflective of the strong focus on forming social relationships and engaging in social activities normally found during young adulthood (Côté, 2006; Erikson, 1980).

For the early career players, club support for off-field life and the quality of their free time experiences were the strongest predictors of higher levels of athlete engagement. Strength of athlete identity was also significant when entered into a multiple regression along with these variables. This suggests that for early career players, AFL clubs should develop a targeted approach that recognises their specific needs at this stage of the developmental process. This would be a prerequisite, in order to positively impact the development and well-being of the players beyond their athletic roles (Bennie & O'Connor, 2010; Friesen & Orlick, 2010; Miller & Kerr, 2002).

Middle career players

The mean athlete identity score for middle career players was the lowest of the three career stage groups. With this group however, the strength of their athlete identity had little relationship with the time they devoted to off-field activity. Yet, perceptions of club support for off-field life did have an influence on off-field activity. Similar to early career players, their perceptions of club support had a significant relationship with the amount of time spent in social activities/going out. This further shows the influence of the club environment and culture with respect to healthy involvement in activities away from the workplace.

Interestingly, for middle career players, their perceptions of club support for off-field life also had a significant influence on the time spent in alternative career development activities. The qualitative results reported earlier in this thesis (and also the work of Hickey & Kelly, 2008) suggested that the middle career player had more or less 'made it' as an AFL footballer yet was also keeping a wary eye on maintaining this career. This group of players were likely to have moved out of the 'host family' living situation into their own residences, are more likely to have developed significant personal relationships, and in general to have more personal autonomy. As in Wylleman and Lavallee's (2004) developmental model, transitioning athletes in the mastery phase will be typically moving

beyond their adolescence and into young adulthood. For many, this period may also involve undertaking the challenge of higher education. The middle career player's adult life would be becoming increasingly more complex. All of this while still being employed in what is a particularly demanding and insecure profession.

For middle career players then, it is plausible that the authenticity of the support that a club provides for their off-field life will influence their level of commitment to alternative career development. This is in contrast to early career players whose lives are more 'managed' by the clubs, and who are also more likely to simply 'do as they are told'. It is also a situation in contrast to that of the late career players, for whom the approaching end of the football career and the need to prepare for alternatives has more psychological relevancy and valence (Lally, 2007; North & Lavallee, 2004).

For the middle career players, club support for off-field life and athlete identity were the strongest predictors of athlete engagement. Together with quality of free time and time spent in social activities/going out these variables could predict 19% of the variance in athlete engagement. This suggests that with middle career players, investment in taking a whole of person approach to their development, one that supports them in the pursuit of life away from the football club may reap substantial benefits. This appears particularly important with respect to their participation in alternative career development activities.

Late career players

Late career players reported spending significantly less time in social activities/going out than early and middle career players. This contrasted with the priority for social activities that many young adults/emerging adults experience during their early twenties (Arnett, 2000; Côté, 2006; Erikson, 1980) as earlier discussed. Late career players are more likely to be experiencing aspects of their maturing adulthood which could include a relationship with a significant partner and children as identified in the psycho-social

trajectory of the Wylleman and Lavallee (2004) developmental model and also during the initial case study of this thesis. At this stage of their life, it appears that social activities/going out is less of a priority.

An interesting finding was that those late career players who could be classified as having a stronger AI (with reference to this sample) spent significantly less time (2h 37 min/wk) in social activities/going out each week. A similar trend was observed for recreational activities however this relationship was not significant. These results suggest that a late career player with a high athlete identity may be more exclusively focussed on the athlete role. This is consistent with the earlier findings in the literature that AI is negatively associated with players' willingness to participate in non-sporting activities (Brewer et al., 1993; Fraser et al., 2010; Horton & Mack, 2000). Yet in this study, such a relationship was only true for players who had been in the AFL system for more than eight years.

It was also the case that the late career players who spent more time in social activities/going out were also less engaged in their football. This was the opposite of the findings for the early and middle career players. This may be due to a lack of workplace satisfaction, rather than as part of a pursuit of a more balanced life. This is given that late career players on average spent significantly less time in social activities than early and middle career players. Therefore, spending time in social activities/going out at this stage of the career may take on a different meaning with respect to the utility of these activities. However, further investigation is needed into why this might be the case.

For late career players, it was their perception of club support for off-field life which was a substantial predictor of athlete engagement as opposed to their perceptions of the quality of their free time or the actual time spent in off-field activity. The strongest predictor of all however was the strength of their AI. There may be some tension here given the problems commonly associated with a strong of AI upon retirement (Park et al., 2012). For

professional AFL clubs, having athletes who report high levels of confidence, dedication, enthusiasm, and energy for their football is advantageous. However the clubs must also be conscious of the potential problems facing these players when they transition out of the AFL system and into athletic retirement.

A strong AI however does not necessarily mean that an individual's identity is foreclosed (Brown et al., 2000). The athletes in this study also reported strong multi-dimensional self-concepts. In the case of the late career players, the support they received for life away from football was a significant and moderate to strong predictor of their athlete engagement. When club support for off-field life was regressed against athlete engagement together with athlete identity, it remained significant suggesting that club support is relevant even for those athletes with a strong athlete identity. The value of holistically supporting late career athletes both as a means to enhance the way they approach their football, and also in support of a healthy multi-dimensional conceptualisation of self (Stambulova et al., 2009) is supported by these findings.

It was the late career players, who on average spent the most hours per week in ACD activities and had the highest proportion of participators. This might be seen as simply reflecting their growing awareness that their career would soon come to an end. As described by a late career player in the case study, "you're an AFL footy player and yeah, you're earning good money for now but that's a small window of your life". Previous studies however have identified some late career athletes' approaches to athletic retirement as psychological avoidance and a lack of actual preparation (Cecić Erpič et al., 2004; Hickey & Kelly, 2008; North & Lavallee, 2004). This seems to emphasise the responsibility of the surrounding club culture to be mindful of the challenges that lie ahead for players transitioning into retirement, and to provide the appropriate support.

The athlete as a whole person and the importance of the environment

This present AFL player cohort had well-formed athlete identities and yet also identified strong senses of the importance of non-athletic dimensions and confidence in their self-concepts within these domains. This adds to a growing number of examples that suggest the strong AI does not have to come at the cost of a strong sense of self-concept in other domains (Fraser, 2012; Horton & Mack, 2000). The results in this thesis suggest that the opportunities provided by the surrounding athletic environment and its culture will have the more important influence on player participation in off-field activities. Environmental support in particular appears to mitigate some of the previously reported negative aspects of a strong athlete identity (Brewer, 1993; Cecić Erpič et al., 2004; Horton & Mack, 2000). It appears that an athlete can (while remaining firmly committed to training and competition as an athlete) become involved in personal development, relationships, and activities in non-sporting domains. This of course is more likely in environments where athletes are supported as whole people who are "doing sports but also other things in life" (Stambulova et al., p. 403) as well.

Although it was hypothesised that AI would have a negative effect on the time spent in ACD activities, results showed that generally, this was not the case. These results however need to be interpreted in the light of the broader macro-environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Henriksen et al., 2010b) that surrounds AFL footballers. The AFL and AFLPA provide substantial encouragement and support for player participation in ACD and this has been a recognised aspect of the overarching AFL industry culture (Chambers et al., 2013; Clarke & Salter, 2010). In this sense, preparing for life after football is an 'expected norm' and not considered to be an unusual activity. This is also reflected in the fact that 75% of the present sample participated in some form of ACD.

The argument that the macro-environmental support of academic/vocational development influences athlete participation (regardless of AI), has also been proposed by other researchers in the Australian context. For example, Fraser (2012) attributed the positive attitudes towards (and uptake of) career development activities among elite Australian athletes to the influence of the National Athlete Career Education service (NACE). NACE provides a similar level of support to that afforded by the AFL and AFLPA. Similar arguments have also been put forward by Fogarty and McGregor-Bayne (2008) in their research into junior elite athletes who were part of the NACE program and their career decision making. Although any of these arguments in isolation must be limited in their generalizability and to a certain degree remain tenuous, the list of these examples is growing and suggests that the culture surrounding athletes' dual career development does exert an important influence. The important thing to remember from these findings is that there is a difference between mere participation and a quality experience in these activities.

In taking the results of the present study together with those reported by Fraser (2012) and Fogarty and McGregor-Bayne (2008), the practical implication for sporting organisations is to develop structures and cultures that are supportive of player academic/vocational development. Such cultures need to recognise (and celebrate) the importance of the athlete role within the players' lives while at the same time encouraging the exploration of other careers and opportunities. This is in contrast to the example of settings where in the past ACD has been seen as a conspiracy against the football career (Chambers et al., 2013; Henry, 2013). An example can be seen in the recently developed AFLPA MAX 360 program (Fillipou, 2014). The MAX360 program reflects a shift in AFLPA philosophy where the focus on football is a recognised priority and players are encouraged to explore their passions (both within and beyond football) while taking advantage of the many opportunities that a career in the AFL can bring.

The MAX360 program aims to take a holistic approach to the development of players as opposed to starting from a narrower rationale based on a need to prepare for life after football. The previous argument has for many players, particularly in the earlier career stages, lacked relevance. A similar shift in philosophy can be seen in the redevelopment and branding of the NACE program to 'performance excellence'. Here dual career development is just one of the many aspects of the athletes' overall development and well-being (Australian Institute of Sport, 2015). These developments may be seen to represent a shift from dual career development veiled as holistic development to holistic development which contains a substantial dual career development component.

Finally, cumulative intellectual self-concept scores as derived from the SDQ-III (Marsh & O'Neil, 1984) was shown to be related to time spent in ACD for both early and middle career players. It suggests that elite athletes who have a low sense of intellectual self-concept may need extra support with respect to developing an alternative career, particularly in the early and middle career stages. It is important to encourage players to pursue courses that are commensurate with their current academic ability (or strength in other domains) and also consider the provision of extra learning support where required. Apparently, such a finding further highlights the need for suitably qualified player development managers who have the requisite skills and knowledge to support the individual career development needs of professional athletes (Alessio, 2011). Within frameworks such as MAX 360 and the Australian Sports Commission's Performance Excellence program, those employed to foster player development can do so in a manner that is inclusive of the athlete and pragmatic with respect to development away from sport. This has brought athlete support a long way beyond providing situations where the career development activity neither matched the players' current abilities, nor recognised the realities of the surrounding elite sport context.

Conclusion

The modern professional AFL player faces many challenges with respect to his development both as a player and as a person. In addition to the intensely competitive nature of trying to 'make it' in the AFL, he faces the more personal challenge to find the time to replenish, recover, re-create himself, and maintain important relationships. As a part of this he is challenged to develop an alternative career for the inevitable time when his playing will be over. All of this must occur within an industry where the 'sporting arms race' has led to increased workplace demands. Although notions of 'off-field development' and 'work-life balance' from the AFL and AFLPA have been viewed with suspicion within some AFL club circles, the belief that there is an on-field performance benefit both within the AFL and beyond has grown steadily stronger. The results presented in this thesis support this growing belief that AFL clubs (as professional workplaces) stand to benefit in a practical and immediate way from the holistic support of players' off-field development and lifestyles.

In the present thesis, players who experienced a greater sense of support for their off-field life and a sense of quality with respect to their experience of free time were also players who were significantly more engaged in their football. Given the significance of athlete engagement with respect to the way professional athletes approach their sport and perform on the field, these results have important implications for professional AFL clubs. In addition to the requisite physiological, tactical, and technical training, the findings presented in the present thesis suggest that the holistic support of athletes should also be a part of a prudent high performance strategy of any professional AFL club.

Chapter Nine: Limitations, strengths, and recommendations

Limitations

There were several limitations to the results presented in this thesis, which need to be acknowledged and these are presented below;

1. The qualitative phase was limited to one club as the focus of the case study. This meant that the key themes might have had limited relevance to other clubs participating in the AFL. This risk however was addressed through the piloting procedures described in chapter five. The questionnaire items that were developed out of these themes were presented to players in three other AFL clubs in separate geographical locations with differing performance records. These players confirmed that these items were relevant to them and understood well.

2. In the quantitative phase, the collection of data relied on self-reported measures meaning there was a reliance on the accuracy and integrity of players' responses which could not be guaranteed. The results may therefore have been subject to the influence of social desirability (i.e., players reporting what they think the researcher, AFL, or club wants to hear) or players simply not completing the questionnaires to the best of their ability. This was mitigated by adherence to the usual conventions (Fowler, 2001; Rust & Golombok, 2009) of ensuring players were informed that their individual responses remained private, would not be viewed by anyone other than the researchers, and that there were no 'right', 'wrong', or expected answers.

3. The cross-sectional and non-experimental nature of the design rendered it impossible to establish true cause and effect relationships.

4. There were many potentially important variables relating to the players, their environments, and their off-field involvements that might have been included without the need to make the response burden tenable for the participants. For example, the experience of athlete engagement could be influenced by numerous factors such as personality, motivation/s, coach behaviour, and the quality of a club's on-field development program to name a few. Only three types of off-field activity were analysed as these were identified as likely to be most pertinent during the literature review and the case study. The inclusion and omission of any specific personal, environmental and intervening variables and the justification for these decisions are the responsibility of the researcher.

5. There is limited external validity for the club support, quality of free time, and ACD activity value measures. Although the face and content validity as well as factor structures from an exploratory point of view were ascertained, there can only be limited generalizability of the findings beyond the current professional AFL footballer cohort. It is suggested that more generic measures that consider professional athletes' (and not only AFL players) experience of support for off-field life and their ability to participate in non-sport activity might be developed in a more rigorous psychometric fashion as a contribution to future research.

Strengths

The justification provided for the choice of a mixed methods design for this study was the depth of understanding that the combination of qualitative and quantitative analysis could bring and the ability of each type of research to 'cover' the shortfalls in the other (Bergman, 2008; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2010). It is believed that the design has been a particular strength of the thesis and has led to a depth of understanding and practical

implications delivered with a level of confidence that would have been more difficult to achieve by use of either qualitative or quantitative methodologies alone. Teddlie and Tashakkori's (2008) integrative framework for judging the quality of inferences in mixed methods research is therefore used to summarise the author's arguments for design quality and interpretive rigour in Tables 34 and 35 following.

Table 34

Design quality

	Indicator or audit	**Evidence**
1. Design suitability	Were the methods of study appropriate for answering the research questions?	The sequential mixed design enabled the exploration of a novel area qualitatively and the identification and validation of relevant phenomena before more quantitative testing of their relationships (see Chapter 3 of thesis; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009)
2. Design adequacy	2a) Were the procedures implemented with quality and rigour? 2b) Were the methods capable of capturing the meanings, effects, or relationships? 2c) Were the components of the design (e.g., sampling, data collection procedures, data analysis procedures) implemented adequately?	2a) Substantial detail of the QUAL methods is provided in Chapter 4 whilst the same level of details for the QUANT phase is provided in Chapters 5, 6, & 7. 2b) Justification (with references) is provided in both the QUAL and QUANT methods sections with limitations of each approach acknowledged. 2c) Over 50% of all possible AFL players sampled, Member checking, assumption testing, pilot testing, limiting social desirability, etc. is described (see Chapters, 4,5,6,&7)

3. Within design consistency	Do the components of the design fit together in a seamless manner? Is there 'within design consistency' across all aspects of the study?	Chapter 5 provides detailed description of how the QUAL inferences and details are linked with, and contribute to the QUANT conceptualisation and variable selection and development. Data are further linked in the discussion and conclusions chapter (i.e., Chapters 7 & 8).
4. Analytic Adequacy	Are the data analysis procedures/strategies appropriate and adequate to provide possible answers to research questions?	Case study allows the investigation of complex phenomena within a specific context (Yin, 2003). This was consistent with the conceptual framework (Chapter 3) and theoretical assumptions of the thesis (Chapter 2). Qualitative analytic procedures (e.g., content analysis) were matched to the exploratory case study (Maaloe, 2009)

The QUANT investigation allowed the generalisation of the observed phenomena and their relationships to the wider AFL player cohort. |

Table 35

Interpretive Rigour

	Indicator or audit	Evidence
5. Interpretive consistency	5a) Do the inferences closely follow the relevant findings in terms of type, scope, and intensity?

5b) Are multiple inferences made on the basis of the same findings consistent | Final inferences are linked to the findings/results from the QUAL (Chapter 4) and QUANT (Chapter 8) phases in the discussion chapter with due care taken to use language consistent with the limitations of each aspect of |

	with each other?	the design (e.g., see p. 265-278 of Chapter 8).
6. Theoretical consistency	Are the inferences consistent with theory and state of knowledge in the field?	The inferences are discussed in context of previous research. The inferences also extend present understandings of professional AFL players. Inconsistencies with previous literature are discussed and explanations proposed (e.g., see p. 265-278 of Chapter 8).
7. Interpretive agreement	7a) Do other scholars reach the same conclusions on the basis of the same results (i.e., peer agreement) 7b) do the investigator's inferences match participants' constructions (i.e., is there researcher-participant agreement?)	Ultimately to be determined by the reader. Please also refer to the "peer examination" (Krefting, 1991) during the QUAL phase. In the QUAL phase this was ascertained through the process of member checking. QUAL themes represented in the question items were also piloted in three AFL clubs separate to the case study to ascertain their relevance.
8. Interpretive distinctiveness	Is each inference distinctively more plausible than other possible conclusions that can be made on the basis of the same results?	Alternative inferences are explored during Chapter 8 where there is more than one plausible inference. The career stage typology was useful for this purpose.
9. Integrative efficacy (mixed and multiple methods)	Do the meta-inference/s adequately incorporate the inferences made from qualitative and quantitative strands of the study	Chapter 8 (p. 265-278) involves the discussion of the QUANT results with regular reference to QUAL findings that support and add depth to the understandings gleaned from the qualitative phase.

Table 36

Recommendations to AFL clubs

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Recommendations

- Clubs seeking to maximise the engagement of their athletes in football should seek to support their players in the following ways;

    o Take a genuine interest in the athlete as a 'whole person', not just as a footballer

    o Support the development of a healthy self-concept in players' intellectual, social, and moral domains.

    o Promote a culture where the player development department is a serious and respected part of the club's operations.

    o Hire suitably qualified player development managers who use autonomy supportive approaches with respect to the encouragement of player off-field activities (including alternative career development activities).

    o Schedule and promote time for players to achieve a balance between football and non-football activities (this also requires dialogue with each individual player)

    o Actively assist players in finding career development activities where they experience a positive immersion as opposed to merely meeting club's or player association's expectations.

    o Recognise the unique challenges and experiences at different player career stages and tailor suitable player development approaches

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Appendices

Appendix A: Example Interview Transcript (Qualitative phase)

TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW (with late career player)

Matt: Thanks for coming in today ▮▮▮▮ really appreciate it. First question; how did you arrive at the ▮▮▮▮Football Club?

Player: I was playing in a TAC Cup for my local TAC Cup side, played good enough there and through the National Championships to then get drafted by ▮▮▮▮

Matt: Okay. And when was that?

Player: ▮▮▮National Draft I was in. So end of ▮▮▮season drafted to ▮▮▮▮ and my first playing season for ▮▮▮ was ▮▮

Matt: So you've been here for 10 years.

Player: Yep. This is my tenth year.

Matt: So that's a fair bit of time. What was it like when you first got drafted?

Player: Obviously you're elated and excited once you get drafted 'cause it's what you want to achieve when you set out. But it's also – I don't know – a way to explain it would be first day of school again. You're meeting new people again. You feel completely out of your depth. You feel like you have no knowledge and it's all in front of you. And I think even down to the basic – it didn't matter what number you got drafted; everyone was again from scratch and you were trying to meet new people, earn respect from new people and try and impress coaching staff and everything else.

Matt: And what kind of role did the club play in that; can you remember what that was like?

Player: There's an introduction period, there was for us, of course you got together with other draftees and you bonded pretty quick with them 'cause you're all in the same boat. We did a lot of that sort of stuff and even down to the training process we weren't exposed to the full load of training gradually added into the things, pulled out of things and just – 'cause you have so many contact hours with the football club you did meet a lot of the senior boys and you interacted a lot with them anyway.

Matt:

And what's it like being at your current career stage now. Obviously you're 10 years in, you've been here for a while; how would you describe your mind set as being where you're at now?

Player:

I think the reality sets in that obviously you've got less time in the game and it's – the end is a lot nearer than you want it to be. I think you've reached a certain point and it dawns upon you that times passing by pretty quick. But I think then you value it a lot more, you try and make the most of it as much as you can 'cause it is a great profession and a great life. So I think you're a little bit comfortable that you've been able to be here for so long and you've got the credits in the bank where it's you're not going to get shifted out straight away the next day. But, in saying that, you know you've got to make every day count even more so now.

Matt:

And what about – you mentioned that you might not have that much time left; do you think about what you're going to do when you finish?

Player:

Yeah. I'm a constant thinker of what I'm going to be doing next. I get agitated and wonder what I'm going to be doing the next day and I chop and change and then I have concerns that – I've always had that though when I started football; that football can end the next day. Probably 'cause I've seen some good friends involved in football go through career ending injuries that they're still dealing with in normal life being unable to do what all of us can do just go for a run and things like that. So I've always had it as a perspective. So I am constantly thinking what to do next and as they say you're a long time retired and that really hits home for me a lot.

Matt:

How do you cope with that? Do you have any strategies to, I guess, you think about it a lot; do you have any strategies to deal with that?

Player:

Yeah. I think by trying to get involved in education or keep education going; programmes, certificates, hopefully a uni degree soon, done a couple lots of work placement to find out what I'm really interested in 'cause it's sort of hard to actually know what you want to do. Because, unlike friends who finish Year 12 and they go to university to get to a path that's pretty much been clear for them since they're 18, we've wanted to play an elite sport, that's what you want to do and then okay, now I've got to think of a second or third or fourth option because it's a lot harder in my case to walk into a career that you want to do at 28, 'cause people have got a 10 year head start on you. So I've just tried to upskill myself as much as possible and then hopefully on top of that with my experience in an

elite sporting environment try to make the two merge together to something I want to do.

Matt: When you reflect back on your experience and I heard you just mention then you tried a few different things and I also heard you say that you weren't quite sure; can you tell me what that was like and then, also, if you had to give someone else some advice that's just about to start on that journey what you would say; what worked, what didn't?

Player: I tried an outdoors job, like a trade, and it gave me an appreciation of those blokes, how hard they work but then also it opened my eyes I didn't want to be doing – for me, personally, I didn't want to be doing that for the next 30 years after I retired. I think it actually helped my football as well because it made me value what I was doing already even more – 'cause I love that more, where it might be different for somebody else. And then I tried like a sales rep; put the shirt and tie on and shaking hands all day and there wasn't enough excitement or it didn't thrill me, it was a grind, it was a bit mundane. So I think for advice for someone is yeah, sure, go try but get something out of, don't just go do it because someone told you to go do it. I deliberately picked those things to find out whether I like those fields and also to give me an appreciation for what I was already doing. It was just more to narrow my focus of what I would then do but also improve what I thought of what I was doing already.

Matt: Do you get told to go and do things here?

Player: No. Players aren't pushed into things but it's highly encouraged to do a trade, education courses, work on a business if you're that way inclined; but to do something. And it's pretty much put out in front of you, you've got some great facilities and advantages you might as well take part especially throughout player's union, you can get education grants, you can get your computer looked after. Even through the club there's people that they know who can help you tutor, they've got great teachers who come in from institutes who can do short courses for guys. So the club encourages it and they make the things available for you too, which is a great thing because they could encourage you but then make it impossible for you to do. They do both. So they understand guys that have got exams might have a conflict with training, the club's all about going to your exams, which is great because you need a balance. If you've got blokes who are balanced, they're probably going to give you better football anyway.

Matt:	Now that's an interesting thought; the idea of balance and going better at football. Have you experienced that yourself or what's your personal gut feel on that? Because I hear it a lot but how do you think it would work?
Player:	My personal feeling is, yeah, balance is important. I don't think it's necessarily for just football. You talk to anybody with their life whether it be – I've got good friends who have got wives and kids and things like that and work and they say when that's all balanced well, everything is happy and work runs well and everyone is happy at home and they get still see all their kids and whatever may be the set up. But I think that's what everyone is looking for is that good healthy balance. 'Cause if you're over the top too focused on football you can do your head in, it can be a frustrating game, it's a high pressure game and everything is analysed and you can get yourself down and run yourself into the ground and that sort of thing and vice versa; if you're doing way too much, you've got nothing to give to the football and your form will suffer and, again, you'll be – pressure on again and it'd become a vicious cycle.
Matt:	Okay. So what else do you do to keep your balance?
Player:	Myself, well I study. I've just taken up a couple of friends who have always been heavily involved in business, they've got me involved in a business of theirs so I can – they're almost mentoring me as well so I can learn that side of it. So I do that as well. I still make sure I catch up with friends and family whether it be on the phone when you're in the car all the time or make the effort to go and have dinner with groups of them. You just make sure you do that stuff even down to take the dog for a walk down the beach just to get out and have your own time. I think it's more just keeping you active as well, don't just waste your whole day sitting on the couch letting your mind tick over everything.
Matt:	Do you think you get enough time to do those things?
Player:	Sometimes you don't. I feel sometimes I don't give some things the time and effort I should because (i) you're exhausted or you're just not ready; I think it's a different stage of my career, I think my studies have suffered because of it and I've been frustrated with myself at the time but in hindsight I knew I probably wasn't – I was time poor anyway, so probably took on a bit too much.
Matt:	Sure. Do you think that had anything to do with your footy?
Player:	The study?

Matt:	Yeah or the – you described when perhaps it wasn't going so well.
Player:	Yeah. But I think in every stage I've still known that football was my number one priority and my profession, I'd still make sure that was never neglected. If anything else got neglected it was the extras.
Matt:	Okay. So if I'm hearing you right it sounds like a prioritising kind of thing?
Player:	Yeah.
Matt:	And if one is not going well did you find that you could leave that out of the other, if that makes sense?
Player:	Yeah. I think I've always been good at separating. I don't ever take football home – take work home as people say and I don't bring study into here, my problems or I'm struggling with maybe a subject or an assignment. Obviously there's guys here who I know have got similar things and bounce ideas off but I very rarely, when I go see family and friends, I very rarely talk about football and things like that.
Matt:	And what's it like being around the club on a day to day basis? How would you describe it, a typical day, what's it like?
Player:	As far as the mood or just what training is like?
Matt:	Yeah, yeah. The mood, being around the place.
Player:	It's a great place to be around. I don't think there's too many work environments where everybody comes to work to get better. I think we're pretty fortunate in this industry, if you'd call it that, where there's every person is wanting to be better at what they do. Like, I talk to mates and they've got colleagues that just sit there and watch the clock or they hand all their work over to them and it could be – it could do your head in and probably a tough adjustment for me to go into that work environment. But it's highly competitive, demands excellence and demands the best out of people I think at a football club, but it's also a lot of fun. Well, of course when you get 40 odd guys between 18 and 33, there's a lot of fun, a lot of banter and things are all take in good humour and probably – it'd make probably HR cringe a bit at any other work industry but everyone knows it's all in good humour and there's an incredible amount of care for each other.
Matt:	Okay. I understand what the word care means but how would you describe that care?

Player: I think it's all encompassing. Guys are generally concerned about guys' health, wellbeing, their lifestyle, their family life, what they're doing outside of football, even the way guys pull around guys who have issues with family – family member is sick and another guy said look, how can we help, what can we do, instantly on the phone and ███ coined it, it is a big family because the closeness and the proximity the guys are each day and the way they have to train together; everything is teamwork so then it's just a natural thing. Of course you're going to care about that guy more than I think most people understand outside the club.

Matt: Do you think it's like that at every club?

Player: I can only assume so 'cause I've never been involved in another club. But I know I've spoken to guys who come from other clubs and there almost seems to be two different sides of clubs, where you've got like what I said about ███ where everyone is pretty open and feels free to move – a pretty confident 20 year old could go up to a 30 odd year old and have a joke with him or have a coffee or they get – if you're comfortable sitting down next to them at lunch and just talk about anything, just based on common interests. But you hear from other clubs there's a real groups amongst groups and they tend to spend their – stick in their groups and things like that. But we're pretty realistic that in a group of 42 guys from different backgrounds not everyone is going to love everyone, but I think the common theme is respect each other and you don't have to be his best mate and go for coffees every afternoon with him but respect him, work with him and you find most of them get along.

Matt: And what are the staff like here at the club? And I guess particularly the guys that interface with the players, so I guess I'm talking coaches, development managers, S&C guys; what are they like?

Player: They're excellent, especially ███ You find in most clubs a lot of them are ex-players who have been involved in football already and the ones that work well never seem to forget what it was like to be a player, which some ex-players do have that tendency, especially when you find when they go into the media they tend to find all the negative and not realise how hard it actually is. But coaches are great 'cause they, again, they're an extension of the playing group, they work so intimately with every player across all levels and it's a – it's the ultimate man management in the coaching staff and the ones that do it well you can see it have an effect on the whole list.

Matt:	What's it like or what are your experiences with the PDMs; do you have much to do with them?
Player:	I've had a little bit to do with them, probably not as much as younger guys, just because I think there's more that the younger players have to go through now 'cause 10 years ago there was no PDMs, it was the coaching staff, they'd ask you a few questions and keep on top of you and things like that, so we sort of learnt on our feet. We were thrown in and given pointers and tips from different staff members if something came up. But, yeah, I have a little bit to do with them and I probably will over the next few years as I do go into that phase of pushing on doing something else after football.
Matt:	Do you think it's better now, I guess, that there's PDMs around? Is that …
Player:	Yeah. There was obviously a glaring hole in – especially AFL football with transitioning not only out of football but into football and also just that area where players can feel comfortable whether it be educational training but also psych services, just general day to day things like relocation, family, just that – there was a genuine area of that 'cause asking the coaching staff was too much of a burden on them, but then there was also that ground where maybe someone separated from the whole match day sort of thing made players more comfortable to approach someone like that I think.
Matt:	Okay. Because, if I'm hearing you correctly, 'cause it's not directly related to their on field support?
Player:	Some of it is, some of it isn't, yeah.
Matt:	Yeah. Okay. How do you think the club sees you?
Player:	I'm not sure. I don't know. Good question. I don't know to be honest. It's always hard to try and talk about yourself isn't it?
Matt:	Or I guess how other people see you; that may be a bit more difficult.
Player:	Yeah. I suppose in football terms hopefully I'm respected amongst the playing group and the coaching staff and pretty open and approachable from the younger players and knowledgeable about the game and things about life that I can pass on to some of the younger guys. I don't know. That's a hard question.
Matt:	Well, it's not to try and put you under the hammer or under the pump or anything like that. I'll throw up a scenario for you; let's say you weren't doing anything at all off the field, so not into any course, not

interested, don't want to do it, just want to focus on your footy; how do you think that would be received here?

Player: I think they'd ask a few question why not, could you be doing anything, how's it affect you? I'm pretty sure coaching staff and football management and the player development would ask why, is there a reason? They'd ask first and I'm pretty sure then they'd help and they'd probably encourage me to do something but it wouldn't be an issue broadcast to the playing group like oh, guess what, he's not doing anything. It would just be maybe more concern if he's all right, how can we make you improve and I think that's a genuine feel that you get from our player development guys. I think they just want to make the guys better people and more rounded.

Matt: Okay. Good. And do you think that's something that's valued by the club over all?

Player: Yeah. I reckon it's highly valued. You can just see the respect that ▬▬▬▬▬ and ▬▬▬▬▬ have in the group and the way that if they're programmes or they've got any issues they want to put in place how they're put across, they're announced in team meetings, they're on boards, they're reminders in text messages to guys, it's in part of our weekly planning schedule so it's not just some bit of fluff on the sides, it's genuinely part of how we work every week.

Matt: You mentioned a bit of fluff on the side; has it ever been seen that way?

Player: I don't think so much here. I think it's – I think maybe – when I first started it was just seen as like you're just doing a bit of study on the side but I think it's just grown and grown I think as something important to be doing and like we were saying, make the most of what you can use, the facilities available, the – what you can get exposed to.

Matt: And you mentioned courses in house; are you doing one of those at the moment?

Player: I do it in house but they've got an external provider in the ▬▬▬▬▬ ▬▬▬▬▬ So they've got an external provider to come in and do it. 'Cause there is such a strong interest from the group who do it, the teaching staff came here. Which is great because in a class with 15, 20 of us all just sitting there doing it together.

Matt: Okay. And it's at the club, it actually happens on site?

Player:	Yeah.
Matt:	And are you into it?
Player:	Am I into it like am I enjoying it or?
Matt:	Yeah...
Player:	Yeah. I loved it. I was just hoping to maybe go through it quicker but I found it great.
Matt:	And when you look around the room in the class; how do you think the other boys are going?
Player:	Some of them – it's like any classroom, some guys struggle to grasp concepts, others are quick learners but you know for each – you can tell that each one of the guys they're taking out of it what's relevant to them and where they're at and what they plan on doing. Some guys are doing that course in particular to get credits for their uni course, others guys are doing it because they're starting businesses, other guys are doing it just to get a little bit more knowledge in that field. So it's good that you can see that they're all taking their own angle or approach to it.
Matt:	If they're not interested, there's a few lads there that, say, aren't into it; do you think it's wasted time?
Player:	It's only wasted time for them. I think that's the environment you're in with football if folks want to not put in any effort well then that's totally up to them. You only get out what you put in, I know the old corny line but it works more than ever in a football club.
Matt:	Okay. If I'm hearing you right it sounds like that was with the course as well – people rocking up to it. If you were to describe it in a few sentences; what does support off the field for a player mean to you?
Player:	It's bit of a safety net, I think, the word support, it's stable, it gives you something to bounce ideas off, it gives you – help you get a bit of direction. I think it provides a bit of direction, a bit of a guide – someone to point you or a guideline how to get to where you want to go I reckon.
Matt:	And outside of footy; how would you describe yourself?
Player:	Pretty relaxed and laid back. I don't get fussed. I love to travel, love to read, just love to learn new things. I probably try and start learning

something new and then find something more exciting and try and learn that. So, yeah, that's probably the best way to describe me.

Matt: Okay. And just switching the focus for a little bit, if we think about ▮▮▮▮▮▮ club, if you had to describe the club to someone from a different culture, so they don't really know anything about ▮▮▮ at all; how would you describe it to them?

Player: Pretty honest, competitive, pretty ruthless in a way, but not in the nasty ruthless – you know how people think ruthless it means win at all cost. It's pretty considered in what it wants and goes after it and strong character. I reckon that's a big thing. Players and staff characters are probably more important than talent.

Matt: Okay. A couple of quick terms and I'm just interested in what they mean to you. Your off field roles as a footballer; what do you think they are?

Player: So off field but still as the footballer? This is always the awkward conversation. I guess you are a role model; you're on the job 24/7. What you do and act is being watched so I figure as long as you have a positive influence and doing the right thing I think people are pretty happy.

Matt: Okay. Professional development; what does that mean to you?

Player: I think it's constantly growing. It's learning more, it's upskilling, it's listening and it's being willing to listen to other people I think. You're never the – if you think you're never the smartest person in the room, I think you're right 'cause there's always something to learn.

Matt: Okay. And personal development; what does that mean?

Player: It's pretty similar. I think – I always make it a point to learn something new and travel, experience new cultures. You just try and – and also keep perspective. I think things are never as bad as they seem and they're never as euphoric or great as they are. Just keeping balanced, I think, is a good way.

Matt: Okay. ▮▮▮▮ I really appreciate your time today.

Player: Thanks mate.

Matt: If there's anything else that you think of, like, tomorrow you think oh, I wish I had of said that feel free to …

[END TRANSCRIPT]

Appendix B: Club Environment EFA Correlation Matrix

Item	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. The club makes it easy to keep a balanced life											
2. The club is interested in me as a person as well as a player	.629										
3. I am free to make decisions about my off-field life	.522	.452									
4. The player development/welfare department is respected by other departments at the club	.522	.557	.462								
5. I feel comfortable to be honest with the player development/welfare manager about my off-field activities	.384	.454	.382	.601							
6. The club makes it difficult to keep a balanced life	.609	.470	.398	.437	.296						
7. I am able to 'switch off' from being a footballer in my free time	.302	.241	.273	.131	.090	.243					
8. I have enough free time each week outside of work	.468	.367	.303	.314	.197	.376	.458				
9. I am able to spend enough time with my friends/family	.415	.269	.244	.210	.151	.330	.374	.568			
10. There is enough space for me to have interests outside of football	.490	.324	.293	.286	.164	.419	.327	.675	.646		
11. I am too tired to do much else except rest in my free time	-.117	-.120	-.009*	-.026*	-.088	-.228	-.128	-.095	-.173	-.177	

* = *Note:* All correlations significant to *P*= < .05 unless denoted with *

Appendix C: Alternative Career Development Activity EFA Correlation Matrix

Item	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. I am doing this activity to get ready for employment after football.											
2. I see the point in getting involved with this activity	.964										
3. I mainly do this activity to keep the club happy*	.899	.909									
4. I am doing this activity to try something new	.717	.733	.679								
5. I am doing this activity for my own personal development	.948	.955	.932	.761							
6. I do well in this activity	.898	.903	.874	.739	.913						
7. I rarely have enough time to do the activity properly*	.699	.720	.732	.658	.735	.771					
8. I have friends at this activity	.592	.609	.574	.590	.601	.639	.657				
9. I enjoy participating in this activity	.852	.868	.848	.717	.877	.891	.743	.658			
10. This activity helps take my mind off my job as a professional footballer	.864	.869	.838	.717	.885	.879	.706	.590	.883		
11. I find this activity interesting	.871	.884	.869	.718	.900	.894	.719	.585	.922	.913	
12. I have enough time to do as well as I would like in this activity.	.725	.740	.711	.680	.755	.779	.827	.636	.763	.722	.732

* = Transformed negative item

Note: All correlations significant to $P < .001$

Appendix D: QQ Plots of Studentised Residuals (Chapter 6)

Athlete Identity and Social Activities/Going out (Square root transformed) by Career Stage

Normal Q-Q Plot of Studentized Residual for Social Activities/Going Out
Early Career Stage and Low Athlete Identity

Normal Q-Q Plot of Studentized Residual for Social Activities/Going Out
Early Career Stage and High Athlete Identity

Normal Q-Q Plot of Studentized Residual for Social Activities/Going Out
Middle Career and Low Athlete Identity

Normal Q-Q Plot of Studentized Residual for Social Activities/Going Out
Middle Career Stage and High Athlete Identity

Normal Q-Q Plot of Studentized Residual for Social Activities/Going Out
Late Career and Low Athlete Identity

Normal Q-Q Plot of Studentized Residual for Social Activities/Going Out
Late Career and High Athlete Identity

Athlete Identity and Recreational Activities by Career Stage

Normal Q-Q Plot of Recreational Activities (hrs/wk)
Early Career Stage and Low Athlete Identity

Normal Q-Q Plot of Recreational Activities (hrs/wk)
Early Career Stage and High Athlete Identity

Normal Q-Q Plot of Recreational Activities (hrs/wk)
Middle Career Stage and Low Athlete Identity

Normal Q-Q Plot of Recreational Activities (hrs/wk)
Middle Career Stage and High Athlete Identity

Normal Q-Q Plot of Recreational Activities (hrs/wk)
Late Career Stage and Low Athlete Identity

Normal Q-Q Plot of Rec_midpoint
Late Career Stage and High Athlete Identity

Social Self-Concept and Social Activities/Going Out by Career Stage

Normal Q-Q Plot of Studentized Residual for Social Activities/Going Out
Early Career Stage and Low Social Self-Concept

Normal Q-Q Plot of Studentized Residual for Social Activities/Going Out
Early Career Stage and High Social Self-Concept
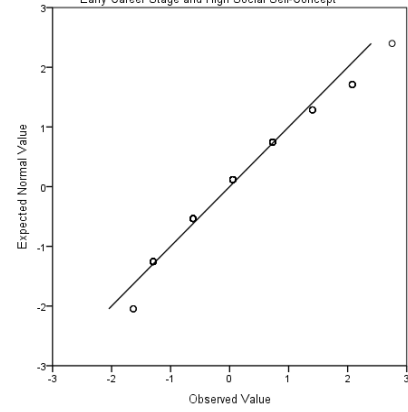
Normal Q-Q Plot of Studentized Residual for Social Activities/Going Out
Middle Career Stage and Low Social Self-Concept
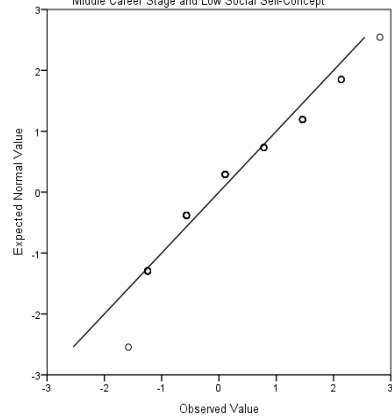
Normal Q-Q Plot of Studentized Residual for Social Activities/Going Out
Middle Career Stage and High Social Self-Concept

Normal Q-Q Plot of Studentized Residual for Social Activities/Going Out
Late Career Stage and High Low Social Self-Concept
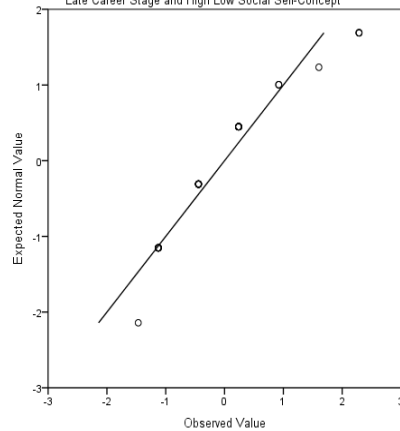
Normal Q-Q Plot of Studentized Residual for Social Activities/Going Out
Late Career Stage and High Social Self-Concept
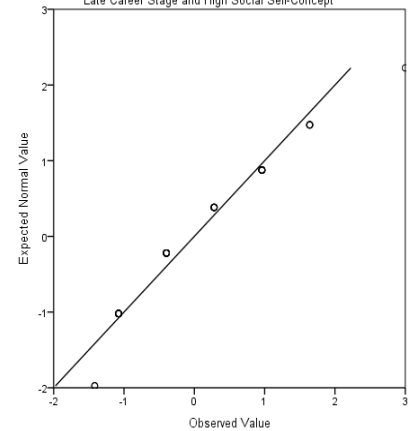
Athlete Identity and Alternative Career Development (hrs/wk) by Career Stage: Square Root Transformed
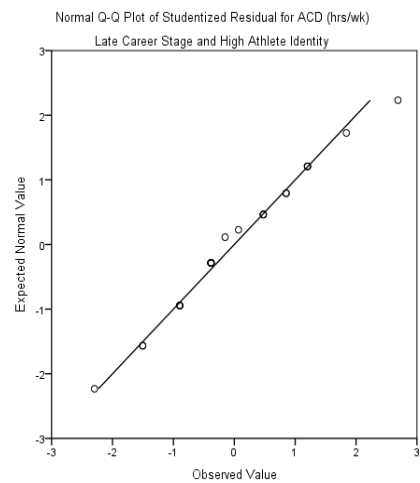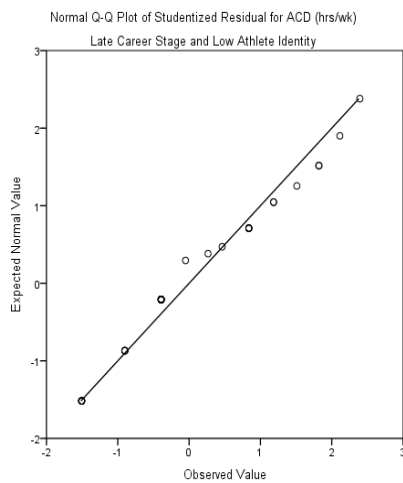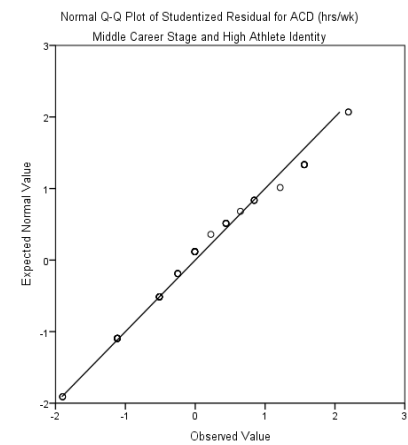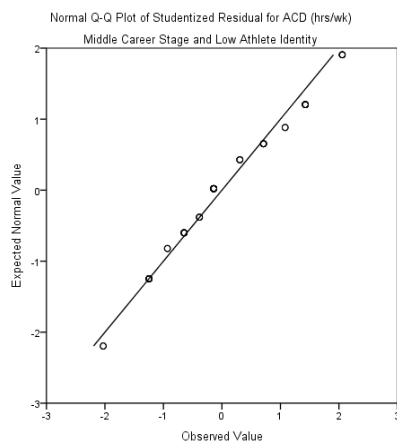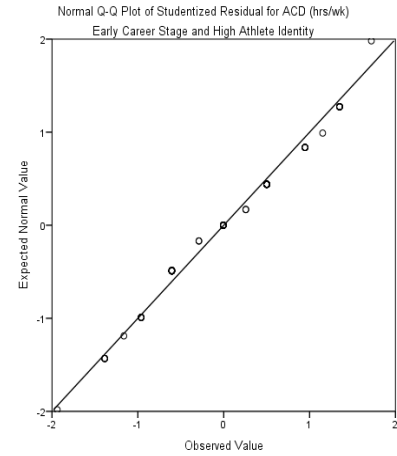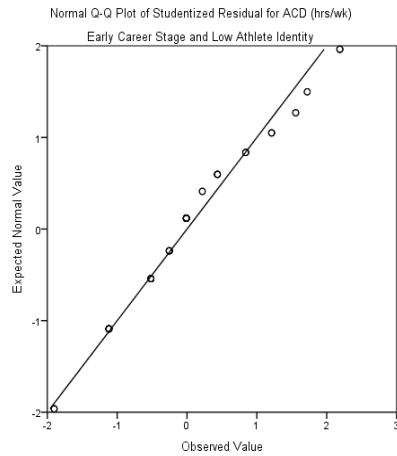
Intellectual Self-Concept and Alternative Career Development (hrs/wk) by Career Stage: Log 10 Transformed
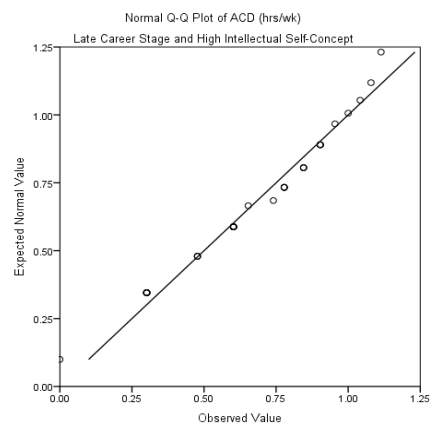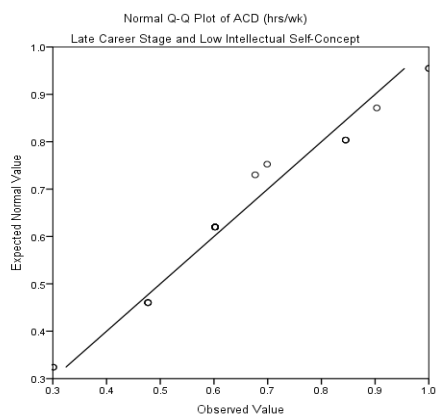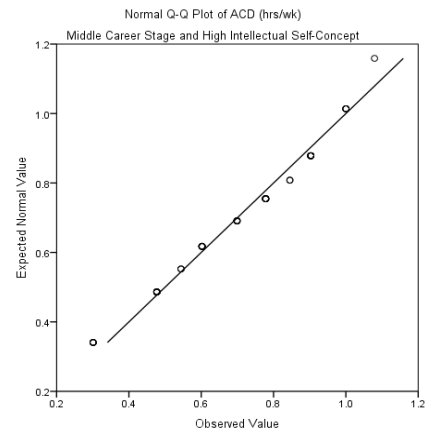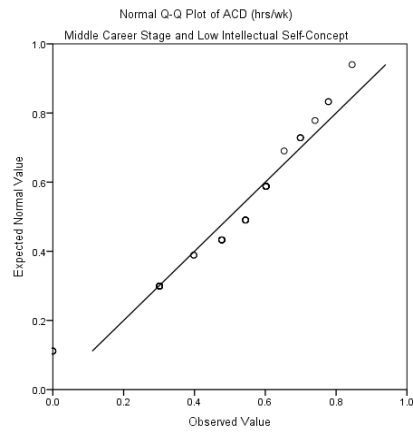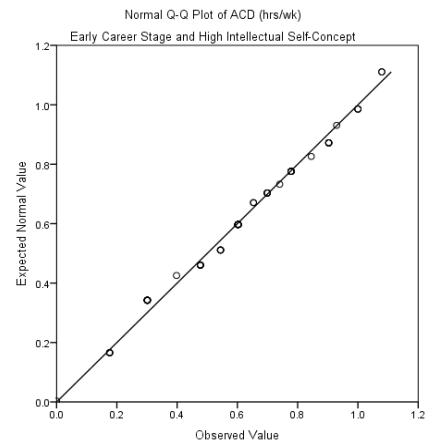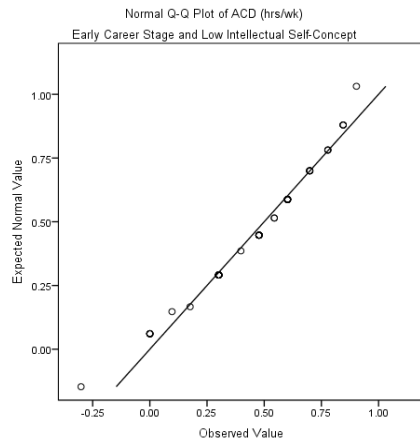
Club Support for Off-field Life and Social Activities/Going Out (Square root transformed) by Career Stage

Club Support and Recreational Activities by Career Stage

Normal Q-Q Plot of Studentized Residual for Recreational Activities
Early Career Stage and Low Club Support for Off-field Life

Normal Q-Q Plot of Studentized Residual for Recreational Activities
Early Career Stage and High Club Support for Off-field Life

Normal Q-Q Plot of Studentized Residual for Recreational Activities
Middle Career Stage and Low Club Support for Off-field Life

Normal Q-Q Plot of Studentized Residual for Recreational Activities
Middle Career Stage and High Club Support for Off-field Life

Normal Q-Q Plot of Studentized Residual for Recreational Activities
Late Career Stage and Low Club Support for Off-field Life

Normal Q-Q Plot of Studentized Residual for Recreational Activities
Late Career Stage and High Club Support for Off-field Life

Club Support and Alternative Career Development (hrs/wk) by Career Stage (LG10 Transformed)
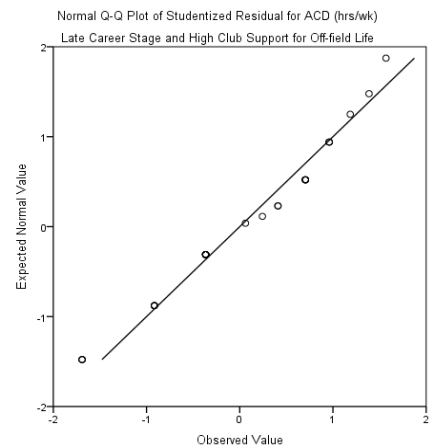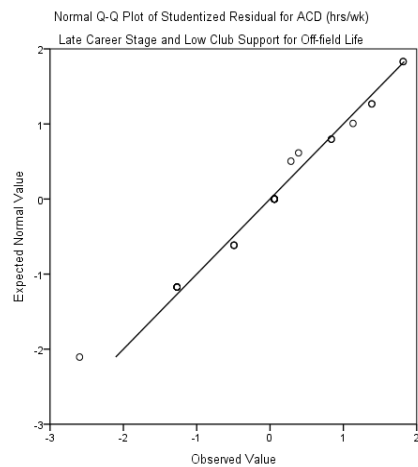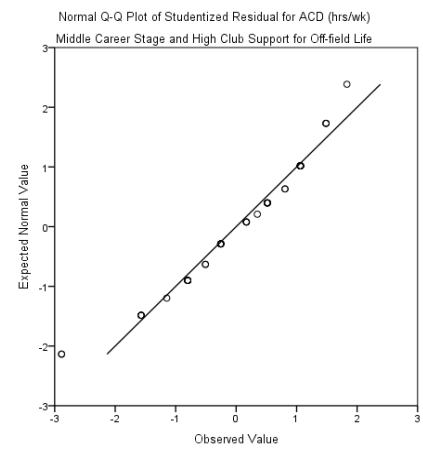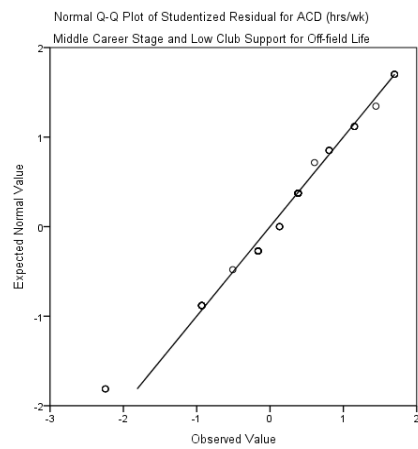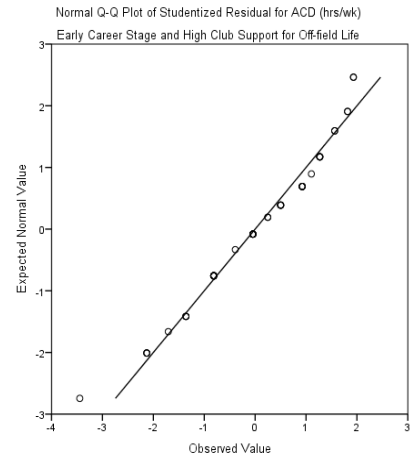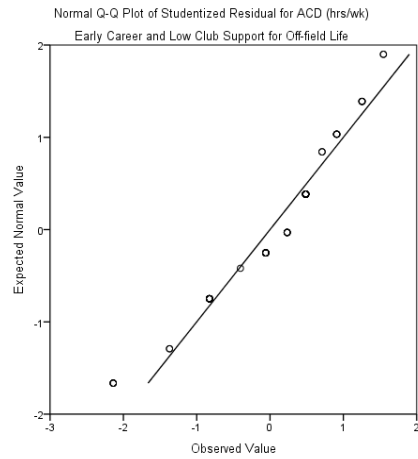
Club Support and ACD Quality by Career Stage (Square Root Transformed)
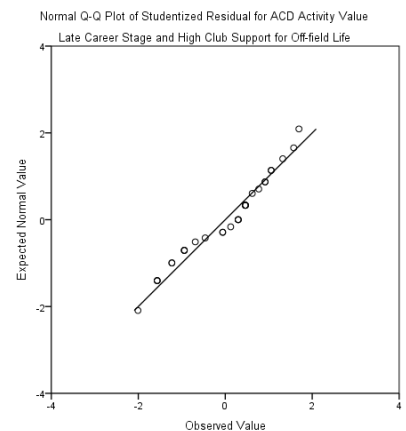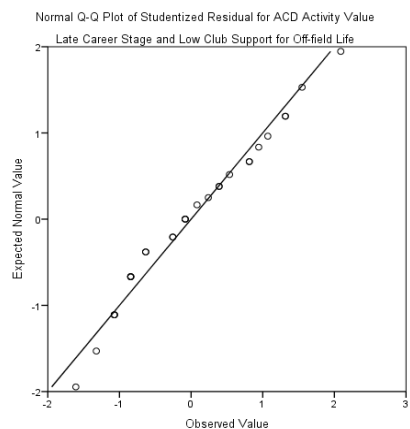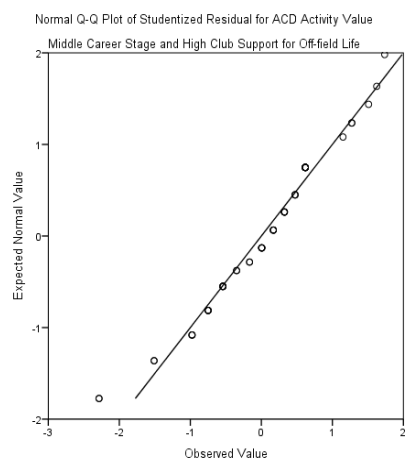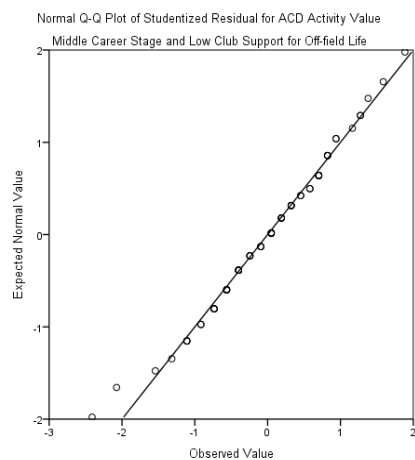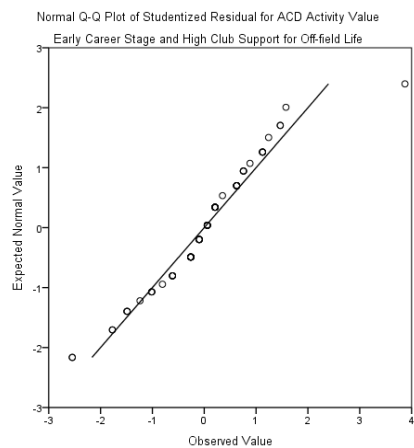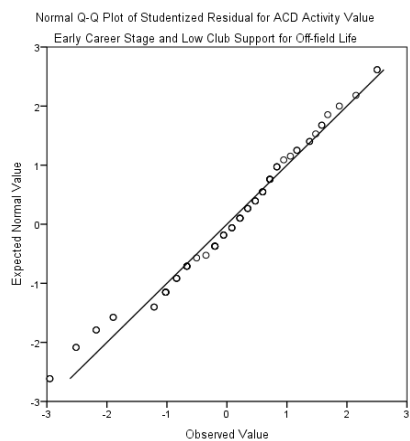
Appendix E: Histograms, P-P Plots, and Partial Regression Plots: Regression analyses (Chapter 7)

Time in social activities/going out predicting athlete engagement
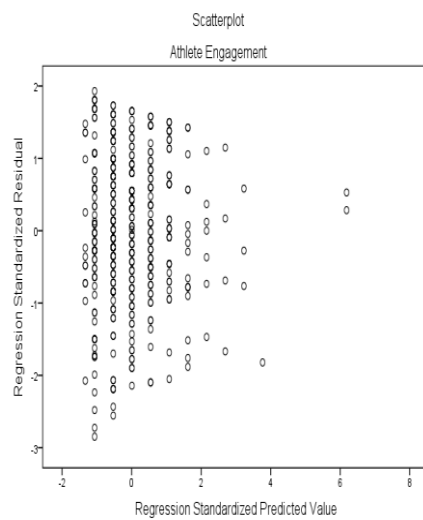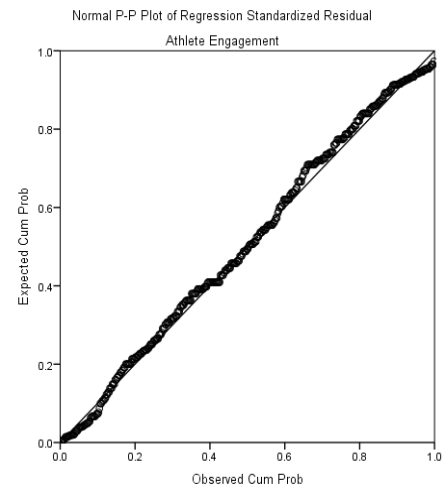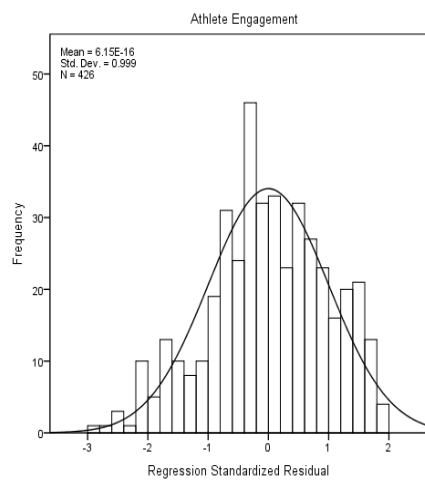
Time in recreational activities predicting athlete engagement
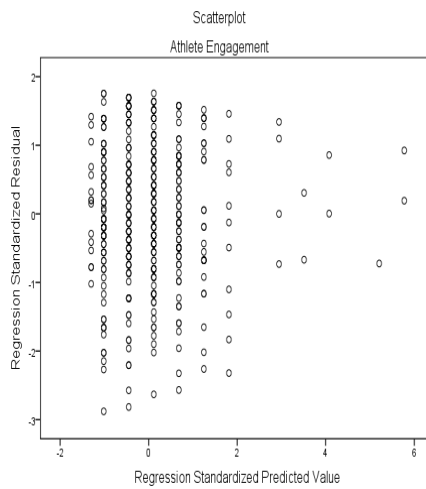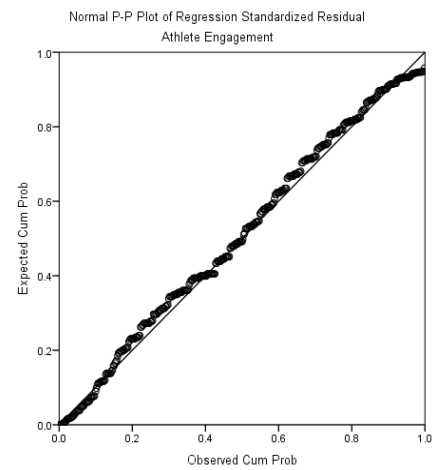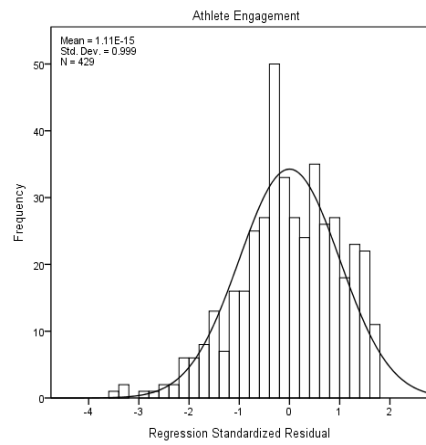
Time in ACD activities predicting athlete engagement
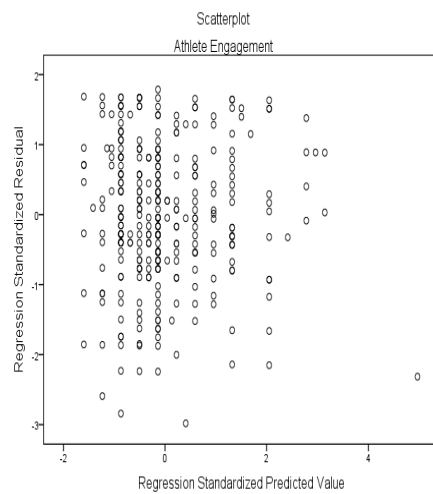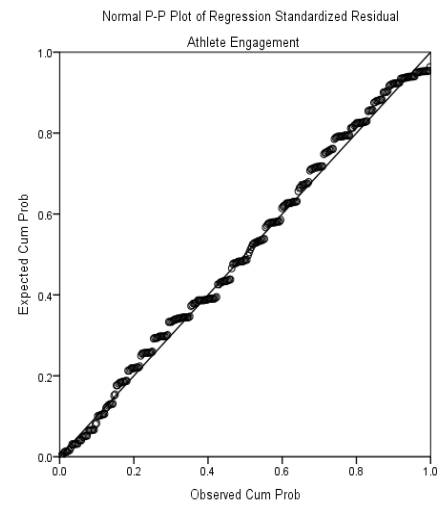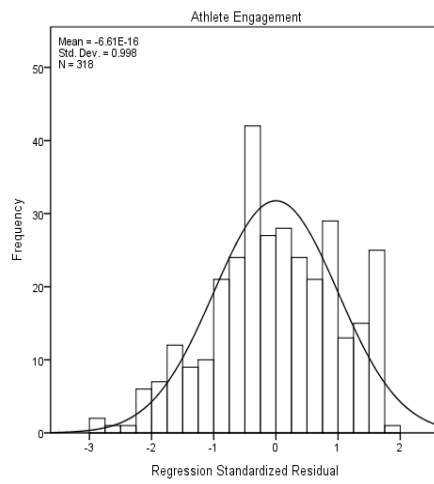
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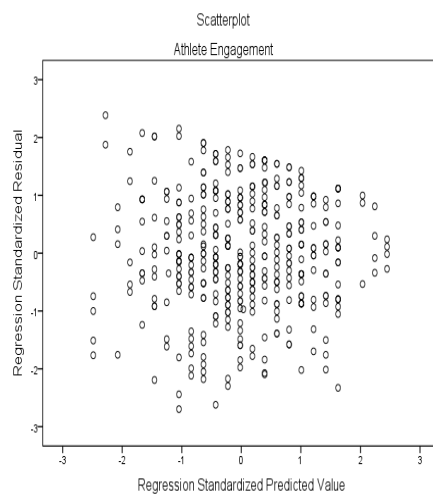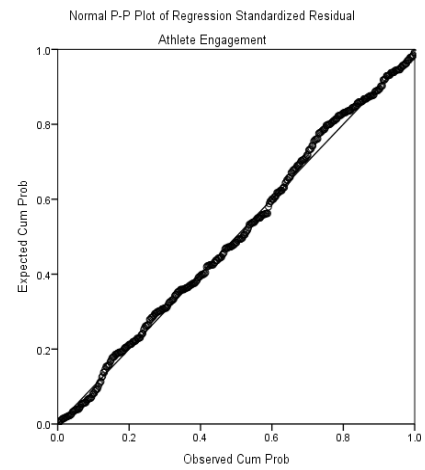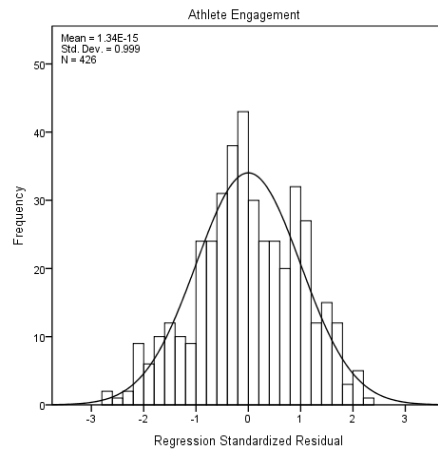
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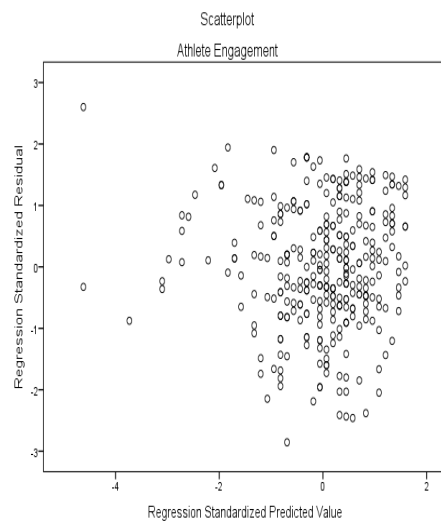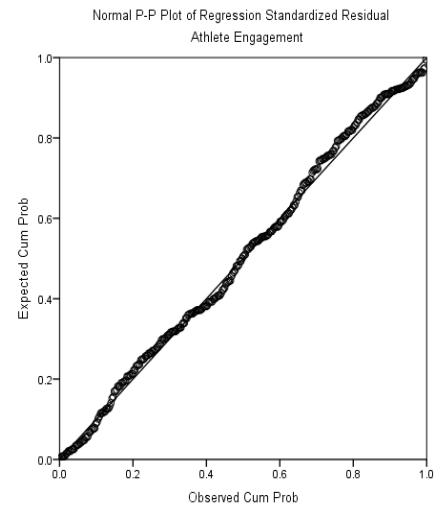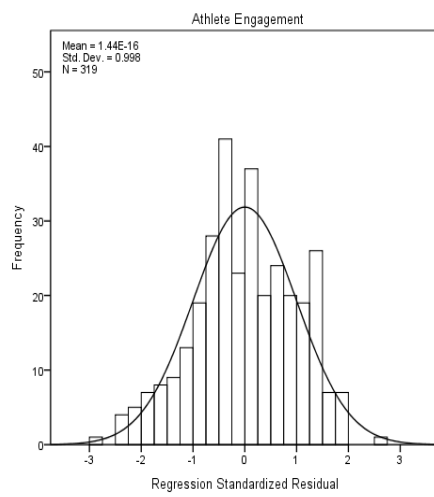
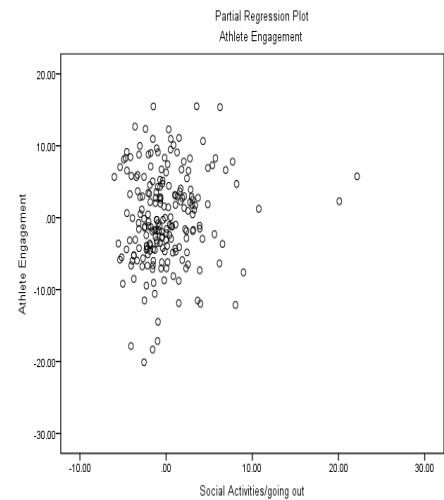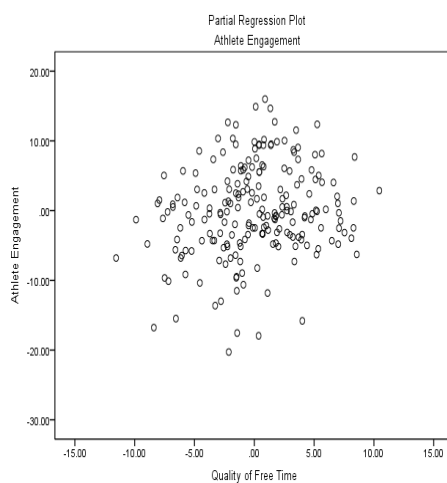Multiple regression for off-field activity measures predicting athlete engagement (whole sample)
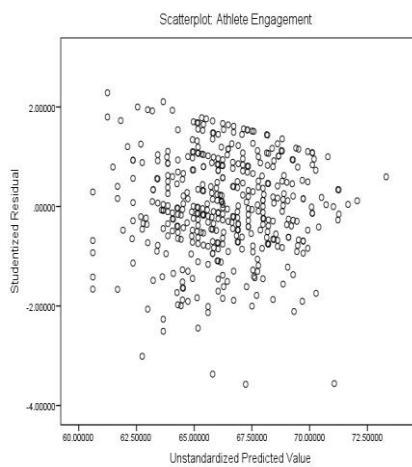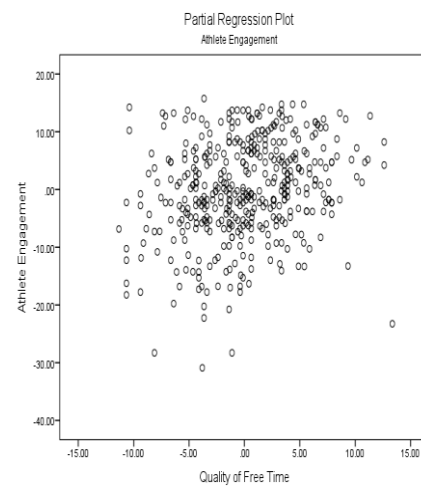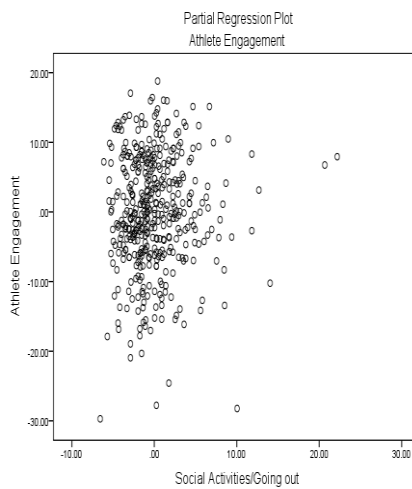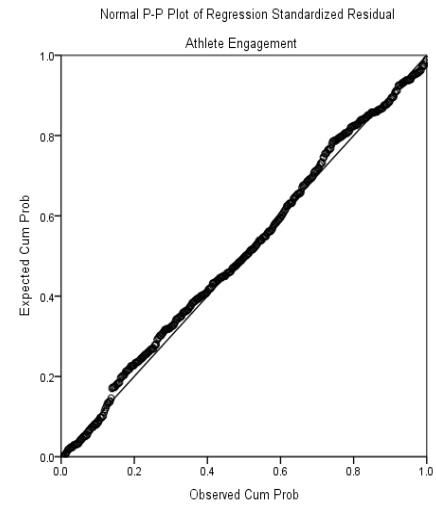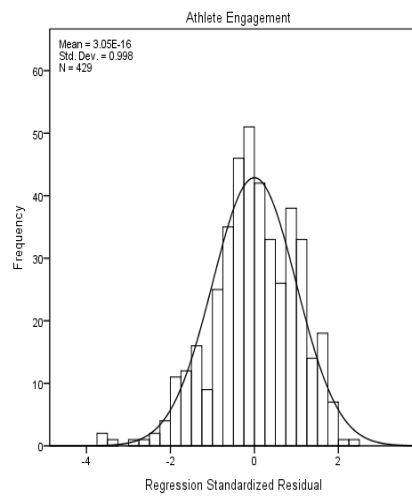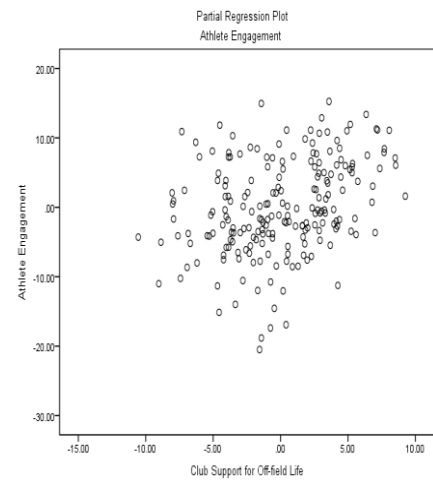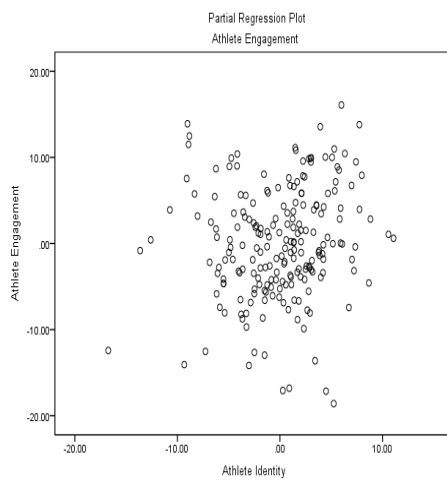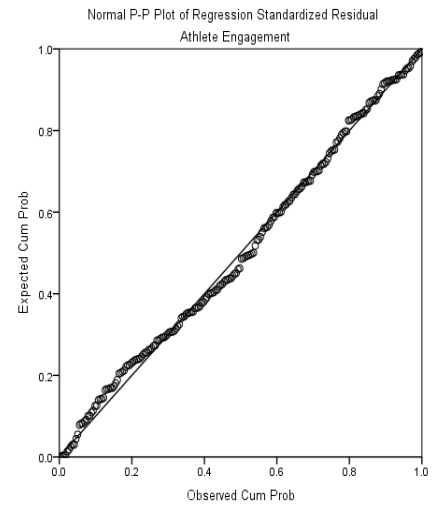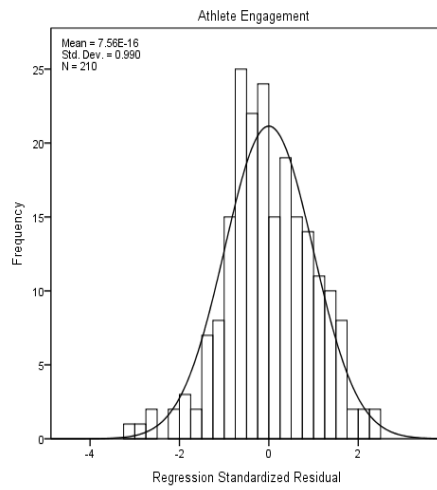
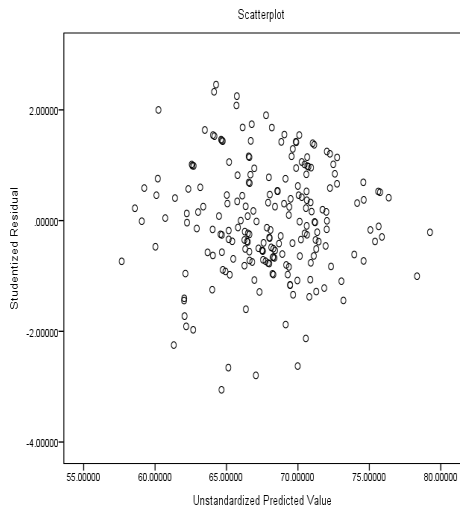Off-field activity predicting athlete engagement (participators in ACD)
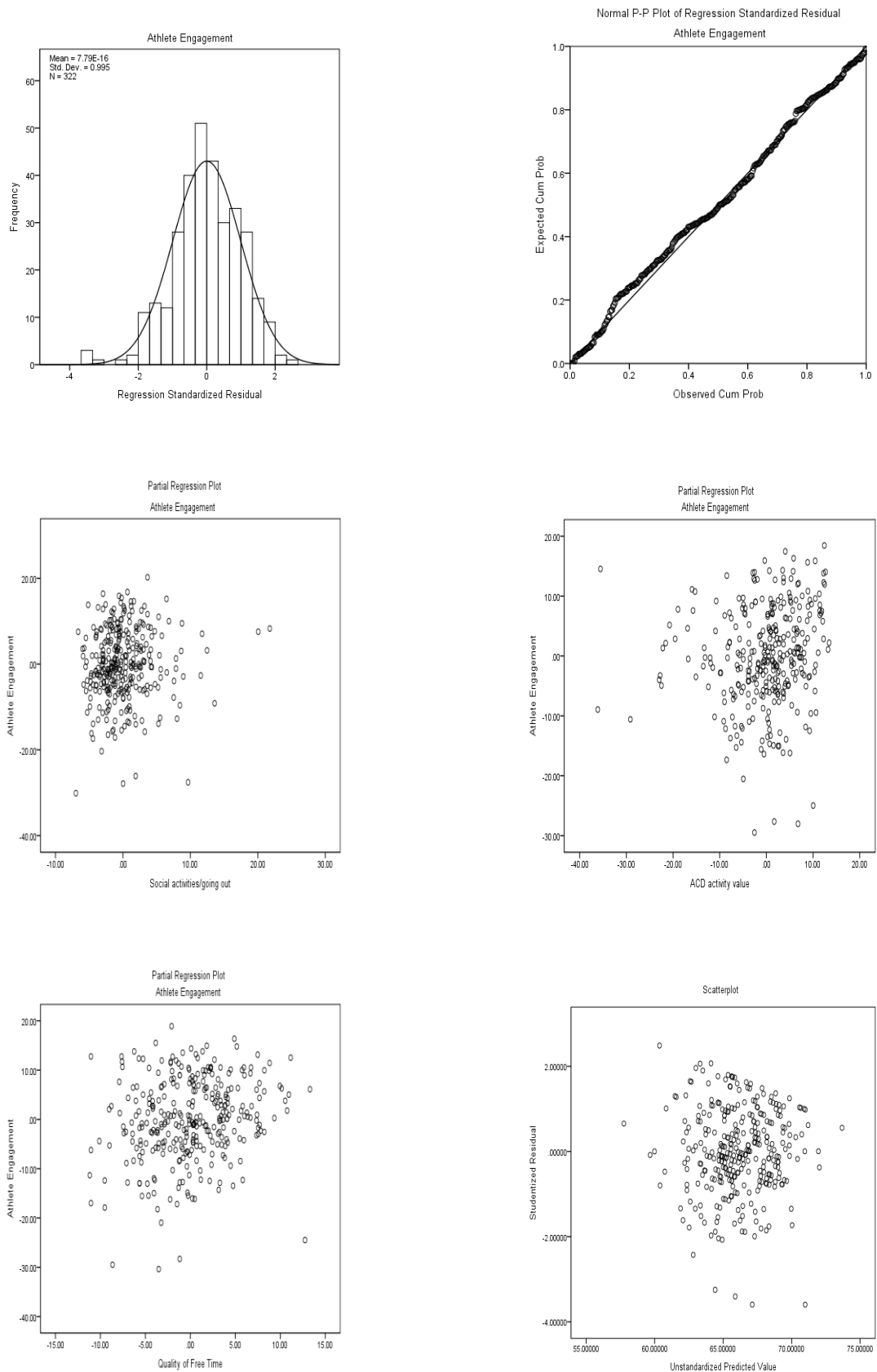
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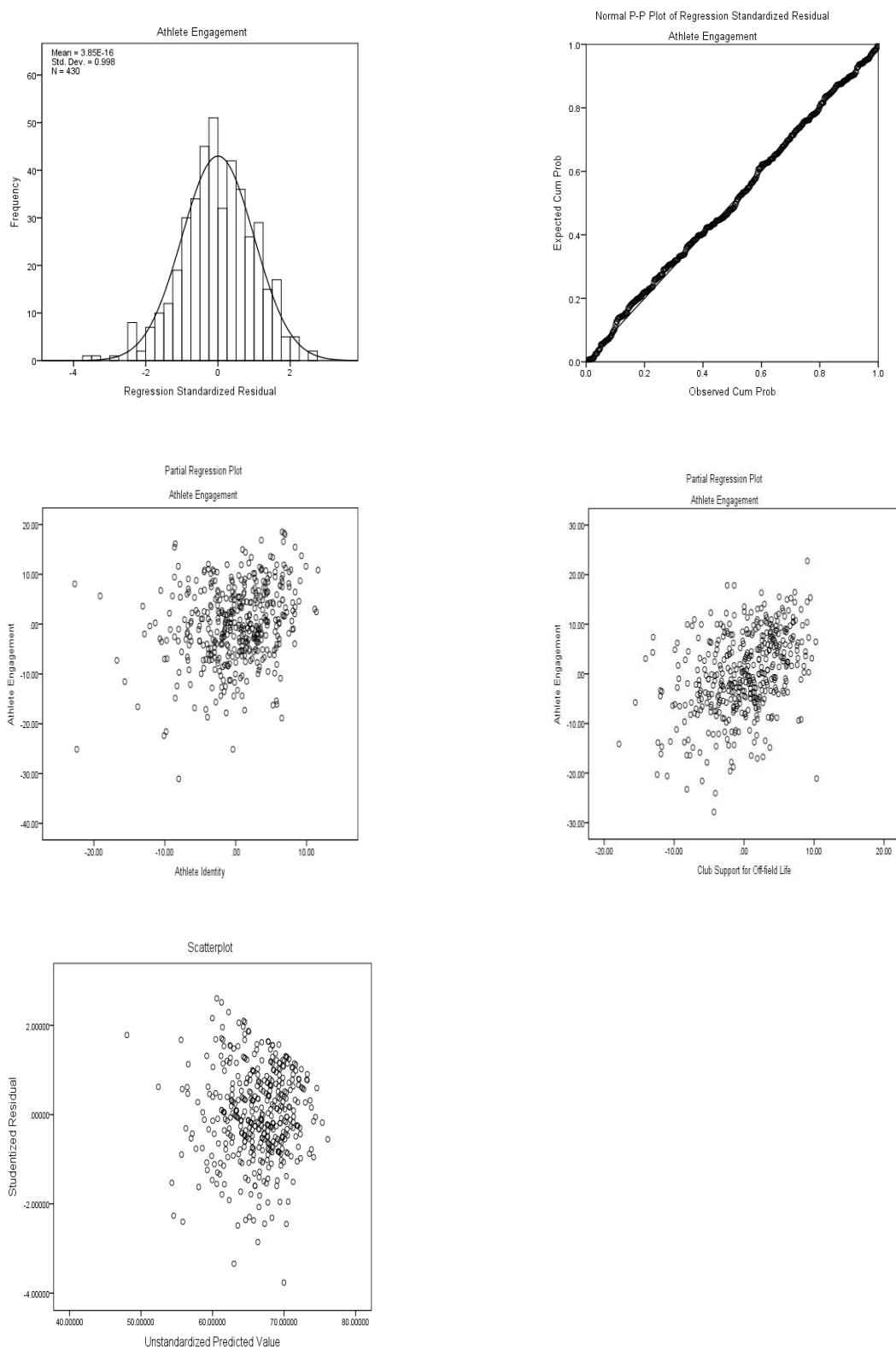
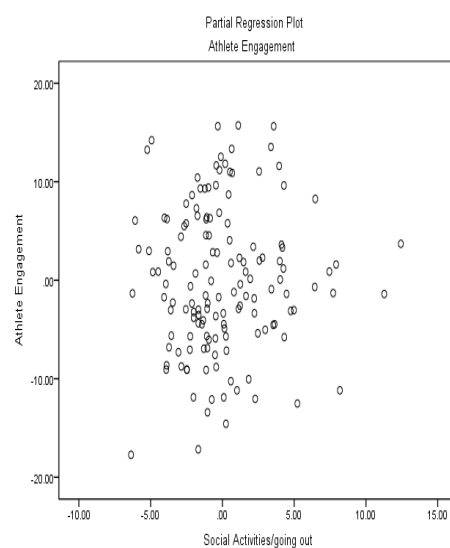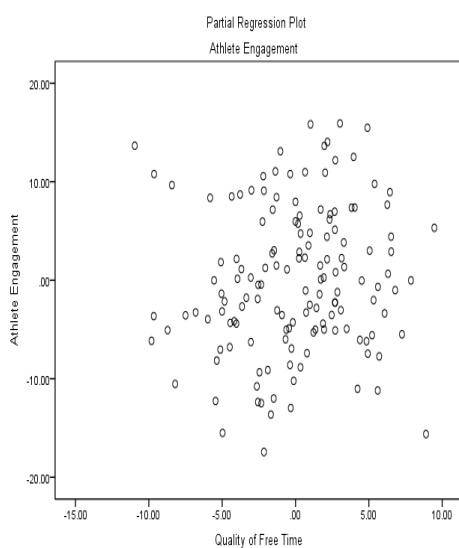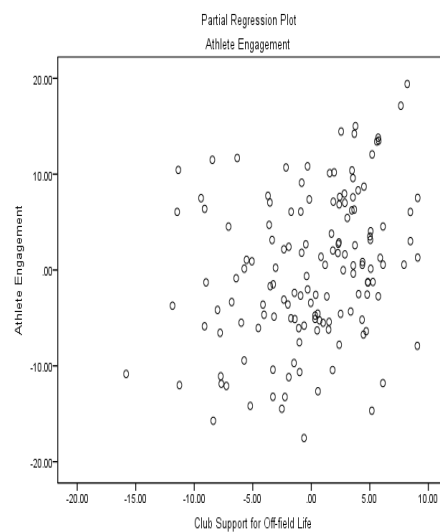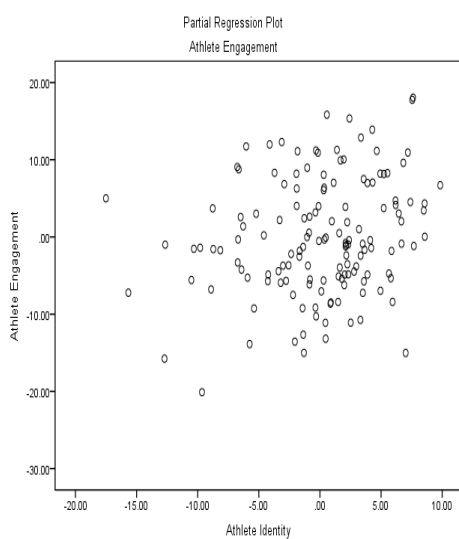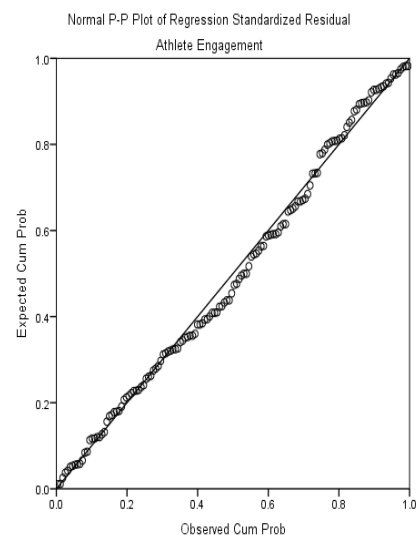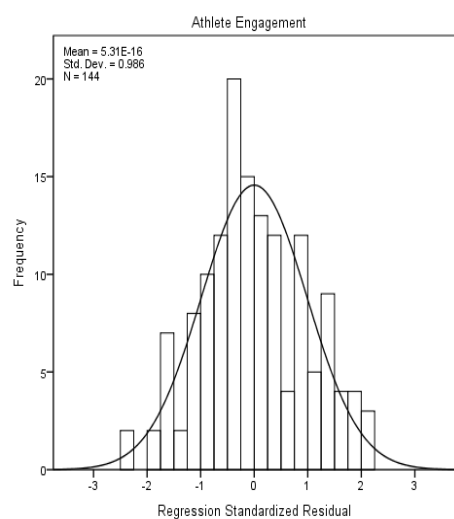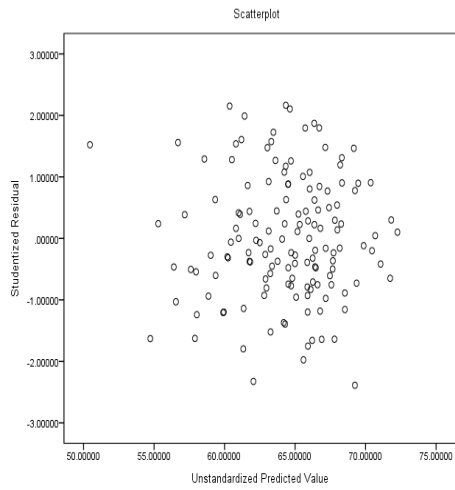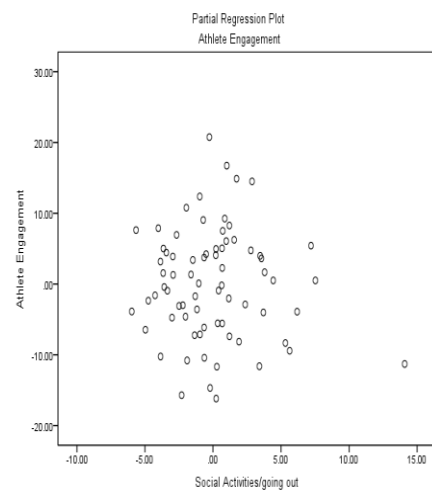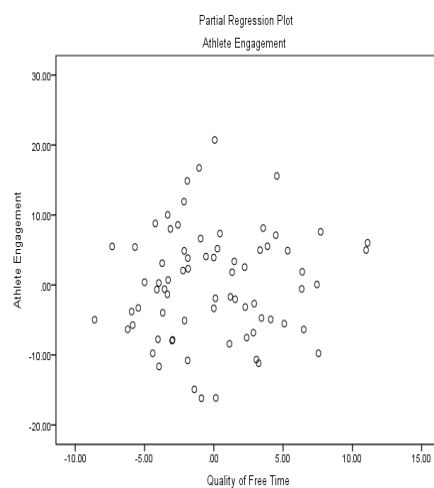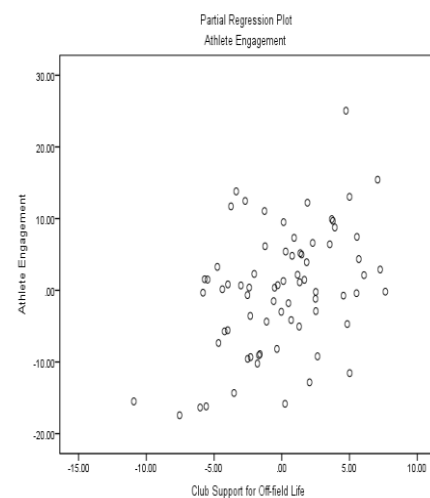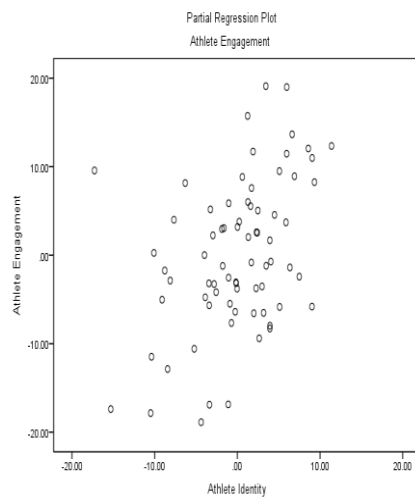Multiple regression for all significant variables in the early career stage

Scatterplot

Multiple regression for all significant variables in the middle career stage

Scatterplot

Multiple regression for all significant variables in the late career stage

Scatterplot
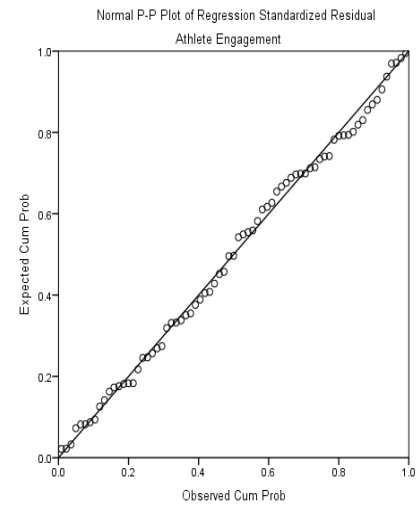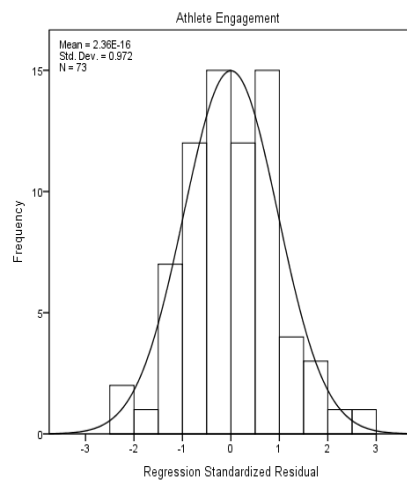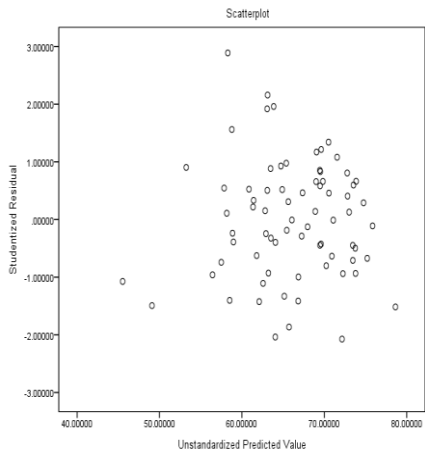
Appendix F: Ethical Clearances, Letters to Participants, and Consent Forms

Qualitative Phase:

Ethics approval letter

From: Kylie Pashley On Behalf Of Res Ethics
Sent: Monday, 28 May 2012 9:25 AM
To: John Saunders; Matthew Pink
Subject: FW: Ethics application approved!

Dear Applicant,

Ethics Register Number: 2012 129Q
Project Title: A Cultural Analysis of a Successful AFL club: A Case Study of a Club that Cultivates Both Off-field Engagement and On-field Success
End Date: 31/10/2012
Level of Risk: Low Risk

This email is to advise that your application has been reviewed by the Australian Catholic University's Human Research Ethics Committee and confirmed as meeting the requirements of the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research.

Whilst the data collection of your project has received ethical clearance, the decision and authority to commence may be dependent on factors beyond the remit of the ethics review process. For example, your research may need ethics clearance or permissions from other organisations to access staff. Therefore the proposed data collection should not commence until you have satisfied these requirements.

If you require a formal approval certificate, please respond via reply email and one will be issued.

Decisions related to low risk ethical review are subject to ratification at the next available Committee meeting. You will only be contacted again in relation to this matter if the Committee raises any additional questions or concerns.

This project has been awarded ethical clearance until 31/10/2012 and a progress report must be submitted at least once every twelve months.

Researchers who fail to submit an appropriate progress report may have their ethical clearance revoked and/or the ethical clearances of other projects suspended. When your project has been completed please complete and submit a progress/final report form and advise us by email at your earliest convenience. The information researchers provide on the security of records, compliance with approval consent procedures and documentation and

responses to special conditions is reported to the NHMRC on an annual basis. In accordance with NHMRC the ACU HREC may undertake annual audits of any projects considered to be of more than low risk.

It is the Principal Investigators / Supervisors responsibility to ensure that:
1.   All serious and unexpected adverse events should be reported to the HREC with 72 hours.
2.   Any changes to the protocol must be approved by the HREC by submitting a Modification Form prior to the research commencing or continuing.
3.   All research participants are to be provided with a Participant Information Letter and consent form, unless otherwise agreed by the Committee.

For progress and/or final reports, please complete and submit a Progress / Final Report form:
http://www.acu.edu.au/about_acu/research/staff/research_ethics/

For modifications to your project, please complete and submit a Modification form:
http://www.acu.edu.au/about_acu/research/staff/research_ethics/

Researchers must immediately report to HREC any matter that might affect the ethical acceptability of the protocol eg: changes to protocols or unforeseen circumstances or adverse effects on participants.

Please do not hesitate to contact the office if you have any queries.

Kind regards,
Insert REO name

Ethics Officer | Research Services
Office of the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research)
Australian Catholic University

INFORMATION LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS

TITLE OF PROJECT:

Cultural Analysis of a Successful AFL Club

Principal Supervisor: Associate Professor John Saunders

Student researcher: Mr Matthew Pink

Degree in which enrolled: Doctor of Philosophy

Dear Participant,

You are invited to participate in the aforementioned study that seeks to understand the culture of your club ███████ that has been identified by the AFLPA as successfully supporting both player engagement in off-field activities (e.g., professional development, personal development, and recreation), and, on-field success. Through an understanding of how the culture of your football club achieves this, this study aims to support the welfare of all AFL players through providing recommendations for best practice. This project forms part of a larger study that aims to understand the relationship between the quality of a player's off-field engagements and on-field performance.

We intend to collect data by observing the club in action (e.g., training, meetings, and general club operations), supplemented by one-on-one interviews conducted with players and staff, and also the viewing of club documents relating to the management and welfare of players. It is important to note that the viewing of club documents will **not** include individual files on players or any of their personal information that is not freely available in the public domain. It is hoped that through these methods we can understand the culture of your club, especially in regards to the support of off-field engagements.

In relation to our observation of training, team meetings, and general club functioning, the ███████ ███████ Club has approved our presence. However, in the field notes that we write on our observations you will remain anonymous and your privacy will be protected. The ███████ Club has reserved the right to exclude us from specific club operations where it sees fit and you also have the right to express your concern to the club in relation to our observation of specific events.

Through participation in this project there is a minor risk that you may become uncomfortable during an interview. If this occurs you may terminate the interview at any stage and if necessary may seek counselling from your club psychologist ███████ We must reiterate that it is perceived that there is only a minor risk of this occurring. You have the right to express only what you wish to. There is also a minor risk that your identity may be deduced by members of the reading public due to the small numbers participating in the study and its specific nature ███████ ███

As a participant you will be required to attend an interview that should not last longer than between 30-45 minutes. The interviews will be recorded on a digital audio recording device and the files will be kept securely. You may be requested for a follow up interview (approximately 30-45 minutes) however your agreement to do so will be at your discretion. Also, to ensure that we have understood the culture well we intend to present our interpretation back to you so that you have the opportunity to confirm that this is appropriate and to offer suggestions for amendments where necessary. This final step will also take approximately 30-45 minutes and will be at your discretion.

If participating in the interviews the projected total time required is as follows:

Interview:	30-45 minutes
Follow up interview: (optional)	30-45 minutes
Interpretation check: (optional)	30-45 minutes
Minimum time required:	30-90 minutes
Maximum time required:	90-135 minutes

It is intended that interviews will be conducted onsite at the club however you have the right to negotiate a mutually agreeable alternative location.

It is expected that the results of this research will benefit players in clubs across the AFL and assist the AFLPA in support of player welfare. The results of this research may also benefit elite athletes in other sporting competitions. We intend to publish the results in an academic journal concerned with the sociology of sport. All players (including their comments) will remain anonymous.

Although we welcome you to participate in the study you are free to refuse consent altogether without having to justify that decision in any way. You may also withdraw your consent at any stage of the project without justification, and without receiving prejudice of any kind. In the event that you do withdraw your consent from participation transcripts and recordings of interviews where you are the participant will be destroyed.

Your confidentiality will be maintained at all times through the research and this is a priority of the researchers. This will be achieved by ensuring that in the reporting of the data (whether that is to the AFL community, the academic community, or other) no participant's identity will be revealed. In the reporting of the data, salient comments regarding the culture of the club will be quoted however these comments will remain anonymous. This will be achieved by replacing participants' names with codes and withholding any personal information that may reveal the players identity.

Any questions regarding this project should be directed to the Principal Investigator and/or the Student Researcher:

Mr Matthew A Pink
PH: +61 432 277 168
School of Exercise Science
Australian Catholic University
1100 Nudgee rd, Banyo
QLD, 4014

Associate Professor John Saunders
PH: +61 422 137 165
School of Exercise Science
Australian Catholic University
1100 Nudgee rd, Banyo
QLD, 4014

We intend to provide you with feedback on the findings of this project. We will also make available copies of any publications that arise from this research project.

This study has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee at Australian Catholic University and also the Australian Football League's research committee. In the event that you have

any complaint or concern, or if you have any query that the Investigators have not been able to satisfy, you may write to the Chair of the Human Research Ethics Committee care of the nearest branch of the Research Services Office.

VIC: Chair, HREC
C/- Research Services
Australian Catholic University
Melbourne Campus
Locked Bag 4115
FITZROY VIC 3065
Tel: 03 9953 3158
Fax: 03 9953 33

Any complaint or concern will be treated in confidence and fully investigated. The participant will be informed of the outcome.

We would value your assistance in this research project. If you agree to participate in the interviews, you should sign both copies of the consent form, retain one copy for your records, and place the other copy in the drop box located at reception. If you do NOT wish to participate please place a copy of the consent form WITHOUT your signature in the drop box.

……………………………………   …………………………………………

Associate Professor John Saunders   Matthew Pink

Principal supervisor   Student Researcher

CONSENT FORM

Copy for Researcher to keep

TITLE OF PROJECT:

Cultural Analysis of a Successful AFL Club

Principal Supervisor: Associate Professor John Saunders

Student researcher: Mr Matthew Pink

Degree in which enrolled: Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)

I .... *(the participant)* have read (*or, where appropriate, have had read to me)* and understood the information provided in the Letter to Participants. Any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this study during the month of June 2012. I agree to attend an interview with the researcher that should not last longer than 30-45 minutes and that this will be recorded on an audio recording device. I understand that the interview/s will take place either onsite at the ███████████████ a mutually agreeable location that I negotiate with the researcher. I understand that I may be asked for a follow up interview of between 30-45 minutes and that attending this is at my discretion. I recognise that I will have the opportunity to comment on the findings of the study and offer my opinion on their appropriateness. I will also have the opportunity to offer suggestions for amendments. I recognise that this third step in the interview process is also at my discretion and should not last longer than 30-45 minutes. I understand that the researcher will be observing club functioning and recording field notes during the month of June and that this has been approved by my club. I recognise that I have the right to express my concern to the club with regards to any event that I feel the researcher should be excluded from observing. I recognise that I can withdraw my consent at any time without adverse consequences. I agree that research data collected for the study may be published or may be provided to other researchers in a form that does NOT identify me in any way.

NAME OF PARTICIPANT: ....

SIGNATURE ....

DATE ....

SIGNATURE OF STUDENT RESEARCHER ....

DATE:………………………..

Quantitative Conceptualisation:

Dear Applicant,

Principal Investigator: A/Prof John Saunders
Student Researcher: Mr Matthew Pink
Ethics Register Number: 2013 43Q
Project Title: Measuring the quality of off-field activities and the support provided by an AFL club
Risk Level: Low Risk 2
Date Approved: 04/03/2013
Ethics Clearance End Date: 31/07/2013

This email is to advise that your application has been reviewed by the Australian Catholic University's Human Research Ethics Committee and confirmed as meeting the requirements of the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research.

This project has been awarded ethical clearance until 31/07/2013. In order to comply with the National Statment on Ethical Conduct in Human Research, progress reports are to be submitted on an annual basis. If an extension of time is required researchers must submit a progress report.

Whilst the data collection of your project has received ethical clearance, the decision and authority to commence may be dependent on factors beyond the remit of the ethics review process. For example, your research may need ethics clearance or permissions from other organisations to access staff. Therefore the proposed data collection should not commence until you have satisfied these requirements.

If you require a formal approval certificate, please respond via reply email and one will be issued.

Decisions related to low risk ethical review are subject to ratification at the next available Committee meeting. You will only be contacted again in relation to this matter if the Committee raises any additional questions or concerns.

Researchers who fail to submit an appropriate progress report may have their ethical clearance revoked and/or the ethical clearances of other projects suspended. When your project has been completed please complete and submit a progress/final report form and advise us by email at your earliest convenience. The information researchers provide on the security of records, compliance with approval consent procedures and documentation and responses to special conditions is reported to the NHMRC on an annual basis. In accordance with NHMRC the ACU HREC may undertake annual audits of any projects considered to be of more than low risk.

It is the Principal Investigators / Supervisors responsibility to ensure that:

1. All serious and unexpected adverse events should be reported to the HREC with 72 hours.

2. Any changes to the protocol must be approved by the HREC by submitting a Modification Form prior to the research commencing or continuing.

3. All research participants are to be provided with a Participant Information Letter and consent form, unless otherwise agreed by the Committee.

For progress and/or final reports, please complete and submit a Progress / Final Report form:
www.acu.edu.au/465013

For modifications to your project, please complete and submit a Modification form:
www.acu.edu.au/465013

Researchers must immediately report to HREC any matter that might affect the ethical acceptability of the protocol eg: changes to protocols or unforeseen circumstances or adverse effects on participants.

Please do not hesitate to contact the office if you have any queries.

Kind regards,
Insert REO name

Ethics Officer | Research Services
Office of the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research)
Australian Catholic University

INFORMATION LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS

TITLE OF PROJECT:

Measuring the quality of off-field activities and the support provided by an AFL club

Principal Supervisor: Associate Professor John Saunders

Student researcher: Mr Matthew Pink

Degree in which enrolled: Doctor of Philosophy

Dear Participant,

You are invited to participate in the aforementioned study that seeks to develop a questionnaire that measures the quality of players' experiences in off-field activities and also the support they receive from their clubs in relation to these activities. The questionnaire will then be used in a larger study that seeks to investigate associations between players' off-field activities and their on-field performances. Such information has the potential to influence policy that concerns the welfare of AFL footballers. This study has been endorsed by both the AFLPA and the AFL's research committee.

We intend to collect data by attending your club and asking willing participants to complete a draft of the questionnaire and then provide some feedback on the quality of the questions. It is expected that this process will take approximately 45-60 minutes. The conversation will be recorded on an MP3 recording device so that the researchers can check participants' comments. Participants' comments will not be quoted in the reporting of the research. It is hoped that through these methods we can refine these questionnaires so that they are effective in investigating players' off-field activities and the support they receive from their respective clubs.

It is intended that the completion of the questionnaires will occur onsite at the club however you have the right to negotiate a mutually agreeable alternative location.

It is expected that the results of this research will benefit players in clubs across the AFL and assist the AFLPA in support of player welfare. The results of this research may also benefit elite athletes in other sporting competitions. We intend to publish the results in an academic journal concerned with either the psychology or sociology of sport. All players participating in the research will remain anonymous.

Although we welcome you to participate in the study you are free to refuse consent altogether without having to justify that decision in any way. You may also withdraw your consent at any stage of the project without justification, and without receiving prejudice of any kind. In the event that you do withdraw your consent from participation any questionnaires that you have completed will be destroyed.

Your confidentiality will be maintained at all times through the research and this is a priority of the researchers. This will be achieved by ensuring that in the reporting of the data (whether that is to the AFL community, the academic community, or other) no participant's identity will be revealed. Only statistics concerning the total data set will be reported and all players' data will be de-identified prior to analysis. This will be achieved by replacing participants' names with codes and withholding any personal information that may reveal the players identity.

Any questions regarding this project should be directed to the Principal Investigator and/or the Student Researcher:

Mr Matthew A Pink	**Associate Professor John Saunders**
PH: +61 432 277 168	PH: +61 422 137 165
School of Exercise Science	School of Exercise Science
Australian Catholic University	Australian Catholic University
1100 Nudgee rd, Banyo	1100 Nudgee rd, Banyo
QLD, 4014	QLD, 4014

We intend to provide you with feedback on the findings of this project. We will also make available electronic copies of any publications that arise from this research project.

This study has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee at Australian Catholic University and also the AFLPA and the Australian Football League's research committee. In the event that you have any complaint or concern, or if you have any query that the Investigators have not been able to satisfy, you may write to the Chair of the Human Research Ethics Committee care of the nearest branch of the Research Services Office.

VIC: Chair, HREC
C/- Research Services
Australian Catholic University
Melbourne Campus
Locked Bag 4115
FITZROY VIC 3065
Tel: 03 9953 3158
Fax: 03 9953 3315

Any complaint or concern will be treated in confidence and fully investigated. The participant will be informed of the outcome.

We would value your assistance in this research project. If you agree to participate in completing the questionnaires and the following group discussion, you should sign both copies of the consent form, retain one copy for your records, and return the other copy to your club's player development manager or the AFLPA regional development manager relevant to your club.

………………………………………   ………………………………………

Associate Professor John Saunders   Matthew Pink

Principal supervisor   Student Researcher

CONSENT FORM

Copy for Researcher to keep

TITLE OF PROJECT:

Measuring the quality of off-field activities and the support provided by an AFL club

Principal Supervisor: Associate Professor John Saunders

Student researcher: Mr Matthew Pink

Degree in which enrolled: Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)

I .... *(the participant)* have read (*or, where appropriate, have had read to me*) and understood the information provided in the Letter to Participants. Any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this study during the month of June 2013. I agree to complete a series of questionnaires provided by the researcher and provide feedback on the quality of the questions. I understand that the total time commitment for this process will be approximately 45-60 minutes. I understand that the session will be recorded on an MP3 device that only researchers will listen to and not direct quotations from me will be evident in publications arising from the research. I recognise that I will have the opportunity to comment on the findings of the study and offer my opinion on their appropriateness. I recognise that I can withdraw my consent at any time without adverse consequences. I agree that research data collected for the study may be published or may be provided to other researchers in a form that does NOT identify me in any way.

NAME OF PARTICIPANT: ....

SIGNATURE ....

DATE ....

SIGNATURE OF STUDENT RESEARCHER ....

DATE:………………………..

Quantitative Phase:

From: Kylie Pashley [Kylie.Pashley@acu.edu.au] on behalf of Res Ethics
[Res.Ethics@acu.edu.au]
Sent: Thursday, 4 July 2013 9:24 AM
To: John Saunders; Matthew Pink
Subject: 2013 139Q Ethics application approved!

Dear Applicant,

Principal Investigator: A/Prof John Saunders Student Researcher: Mr Matthew Pink Ethics
Register Number: 2013 139Q Project Title: Measuring the relationship between AFL player
off-field activities and their on-field performances Risk Level: Low Risk 2 Date Approved:
04/07/2013 Ethics Clearance End Date: 30/08/2013

This email is to advise that your application has been reviewed by the Australian Catholic
University's Human Research Ethics Committee and confirmed as meeting the requirements
of the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research.

This project has been awarded ethical clearance until 30/08/2013. In order to comply with
the National Statment on Ethical Conduct in Human Research, progress reports are to be
submitted on an annual basis. If an extension of time is required researchers must submit a
progress report.

Whilst the data collection of your project has received ethical clearance, the decision and
authority to commence may be dependent on factors beyond the remit of the ethics review
process. For example, your research may need ethics clearance or permissions from other
organisations to access staff. Therefore the proposed data collection should not commence
until you have satisfied these requirements.

If you require a formal approval certificate, please respond via reply email and one will be
issued.

Decisions related to low risk ethical review are subject to ratification at the next available
Committee meeting. You will only be contacted again in relation to this matter if the
Committee raises any additional questions or concerns.

Researchers who fail to submit an appropriate progress report may have their ethical
clearance revoked and/or the ethical clearances of other projects suspended. When your
project has been completed please complete and submit a progress/final report form and
advise us by email at your earliest convenience. The information researchers provide on the
security of records, compliance with approval consent procedures and documentation and
responses to special conditions is reported to the NHMRC on an annual basis. In

accordance with NHMRC the ACU HREC may undertake annual audits of any projects considered to be of more than low risk.

It is the Principal Investigators / Supervisors responsibility to ensure that:
1.   All serious and unexpected adverse events should be reported to the HREC with 72 hours.
2.   Any changes to the protocol must be approved by the HREC by submitting a Modification Form prior to the research commencing or continuing.
3.   All research participants are to be provided with a Participant Information Letter and consent form, unless otherwise agreed by the Committee.

For progress and/or final reports, please complete and submit a Progress / Final Report form:
www.acu.edu.au/465013

For modifications to your project, please complete and submit a Modification form:
www.acu.edu.au/465013

Researchers must immediately report to HREC any matter that might affect the ethical acceptability of the protocol eg: changes to protocols or unforeseen circumstances or adverse effects on participants.

Please do not hesitate to contact the office if you have any queries.

Kind regards,
Kylie Pashley

Ethics Officer | Research Services
Office of the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research) Australian Catholic University

INFORMATION LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS

TITLE OF PROJECT:

Measuring the relationship between AFL player off-field activities and their on-field performances

Principal Supervisor: Associate Professor John Saunders

Student researcher: Mr Matthew Pink

Degree in which enrolled: Doctor of Philosophy

Dear Participant,

You are invited to participate in the aforementioned study that seeks to investigate associations between players' off-field activities (particularly educational and recreational) and their on-field performances. Such information has the potential to influence policy that concerns the welfare and work-life balances of AFL footballers. This study has been endorsed by both the AFLPA and the AFL's research committee.

We intend to collect data by attending your club and asking willing participants to complete a questionnaire that asks questions about you, your off-field educational and recreational activities and the support you receive from your club. It is expected that this process will take approximately 30 minutes. It is hoped that through these methods we can understand how player's off-field activities may be associated with on-field performance. The results of the questionnaires will be compared to player rankings for season 2013 provided by coaches to the Australian Football League's Coaches' Association. The questionnaire itself also has a measure of engagement in football built into it. No individual data in any questionnaire or performance measure will be made public for any player. It is intended that the completion of the questionnaires will occur onsite at the club during the AFLPA's annual club visits during July and August.

It is expected that the results of this research will benefit players in clubs across the AFL and assist the AFLPA in support of player welfare. The results of this research may also benefit elite athletes in other sporting competitions. We intend to publish the results in an academic journal concerned with either the psychology or sociology of sport. All players participating in the research will remain anonymous.

Although we welcome you to participate in the study you are free to refuse consent altogether without having to justify that decision in any way. You may also withdraw your consent at any stage of the project without justification, and without receiving prejudice of any kind. In the event that you do withdraw your consent from participation the questionnaire that you have completed will be destroyed.

Your confidentiality will be maintained at all times through the research and this is a priority of the researchers. This will be achieved by ensuring that in the reporting of the data (whether that is to the AFL community, the academic community, or other) no participant's identity will be revealed. Only statistics concerning the total data set will be reported and all players' data will be de-identified prior to analysis. This will be achieved by replacing participants' names with codes and withholding any personal information that may reveal a players identity.

Any questions regarding this project prior to data collection should be directed to the Principal Investigator and/or the Student Researcher:

Mr Matthew A Pink   **Associate Professor John Saunders**
PH: +61 432 277 168   PH: +61 422 137 165
School of Exercise Science   School of Exercise Science
Australian Catholic University   Australian Catholic University
1100 Nudgee rd, Banyo   1100 Nudgee rd, Banyo
 QLD, 4014   QLD, 4014

Further, you may also ask your AFLPA regional manager questions about this project prior to the data collection:

Insert AFLPA regional manager's details relevant to that region

We intend to provide you with feedback on the findings of this project. We will also make available electronic copies of any publications that arise from this research project. We hope to provide this information to you via email however if you do not wish to provide us your email address during data collection we will still make an electronic copy of the research report available to your club for you to access.

This study has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee at Australian Catholic University and also the AFLPA and the Australian Football League's research committee. In the event that you have any complaint or concern, or if you have any query that the Investigators have not been able to satisfy, you may write to the Chair of the Human Research Ethics Committee care of the nearest branch of the Research Services Office.

VIC: Chair, HREC
C/- Research Services
Australian Catholic University
Melbourne Campus
Locked Bag 4115
FITZROY VIC 3065
Tel: 03 9953 3158
Fax: 03 9953 3315

Any complaint or concern will be treated in confidence and fully investigated. The participant will be informed of the outcome.

We would value your assistance in this research project. If you agree to participate in completing the questionnaires, you should sign both copies of the consent form and retain one copy for your records. You can either return a signed copy of your consent form via mail or email to either the

researcher or your AFLPA regional manager prior to data collection or bring your signed consent form on the day of data collection. Data collection will occur at your respective club at a date to be negotiated between the researcher's and club officials. Data collection will occur in a private room (to be advised) where only the researcher and possibly the AFLPA regional manager will be in attendance.

…………………………………….   ………………………………………

Associate Professor John Saunders   Matthew Pink

Principal supervisor   Student Researcher

CONSENT FORM

Copy for Researcher to keep

TITLE OF PROJECT:

Measuring the relationship between AFL player off-field activities and their on-field performances

Principal Supervisor: Associate Professor John Saunders

Student researcher: Mr Matthew Pink

Degree in which enrolled: Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)

I .... *(the participant)* have read (*or, where appropriate, have had read to me)* and understood the information provided in the Letter to Participants. Any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this study during the months of July and August 2013. I agree to complete a survey/questionnaire provided by the researcher that asks questions about my experiences as an AFL footballer and my off-field educational and recreational activities. I understand that this survey will be compared to a ranking of my performance for the year however all of these data remain confidential. I understand that the total time commitment for this process will be approximately 30 minutes. I recognise that I can withdraw my consent at any time without adverse consequences. I understand that my personal data will NOT be made available to anyone who works for my club, the AFL, or the AFLPA. I agree that research data collected for the study may be published or may be provided to other researchers in a form that does NOT identify me in any way.

NAME OF PARTICIPANT: ....

SIGNATURE ....

DATE ....

SIGNATURE OF STUDENT RESEARCHER ....

DATE:………………………..