



Crossing the line:  
An exploration of the experiences of  
male athletes who commit crimes.

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the  
requirements of Bournemouth University for the  
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# **Lucy Sheppard-Marks - Crossing the line: An exploration of the experiences of male athletes who commit crimes.**

## **Abstract**

In terms of research into sport and crime, there has been considerable investigation into the power of sport as a crime reduction tool. Evidence is far from conclusive and within the UK research has predominantly focussed on the links between active participation in sport and reduced criminal behaviour. Sport is widely hailed as a positive mechanism for crime reduction however, some have questioned the assumption that involvement in sport routinely leads to positive outcomes. Involvement in sport is not a barrier to negative behaviours, and the athlete world, like all sections of the population, contains those who become involved in crime. It is not clear the extent to which athletes are involved within crime, or how sport could contribute to criminal behaviour. There is a relative paucity of research into the experiences of athletes who commit crimes. Whilst previous links exist between involvement in sport and violent and sexual crimes, a more significant body of empirical evidence is lacking.

This thesis adopted a qualitative approach to explore the experiences of athletes who have committed crimes. Narrative inquiry was used to develop an understanding of the experiences of these athletes. This thesis utilised the concept of elite interviewing to explore the stories of ten male athletes who committed criminal offences either during or immediately after their athletic careers. Thematic analysis was used to explore the data and five key themes were established: the sporting experience, the criminal experience, the impact of external influences, the role of drugs and alcohol, and finally reflection on the participant's journey.

Overall this research extends knowledge in the area of athlete criminality, increasing understanding of athletes who commit crimes and the role sport plays in their criminal experiences. A conceptual framework is presented to illustrate the potential paths an athlete may take in the commission of crime, and considers the pursuit of edgework as a possible component, with criminal acts occurring as a consequence of edgework behaviour. Implications for practice and future research are provided, and this study supports the need to further explore the experiences of athletes who commit crimes. This study makes an important contribution to knowledge in this area, and is the first in depth examination of elite male athlete criminality from the perspective of the offender.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

### Sport and Society

Sport is highly valued by society (Greenhow and Raj 2020) and possesses global and universal reach (Weatherill 2017). People are actively encouraged to partake in sport, with participation widely hailed as a positive and beneficial experience, whose benefits include enhanced confidence and self-esteem; increased social integration, collective identity; improved health; and enhanced employment prospects (Giulianotti 2015). For many, sport is seen as an intrinsic part of life, and it occupies a unique and influential position in society (Liston et al. 2017). Sport is believed to play an essential role in the health and development of people, particularly the young (Donnelly et al. 2007) and is viewed as a bastion for social development, promoting assets such as social cohesion and solidarity (Schwery and Cade 2009). It is widely proclaimed that taking part in sport teaches people to be part of a team and to operate as a community. As a result, sport is viewed as foundation of moral virtue, encouraging participants to play fair and abide by rules (Armstrong and Hodges-Ramon 2015) thus providing a distraction from less meaningful activities.

The speed at which elite sport recommenced globally following the easing of restrictions in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, far in advance of other elements of society, only serves to emphasise its perceived importance and just how significantly sport is seen as a positive influence on humanity (Engelberg and Moston 2020). Sport has clearly emerged as a primary social engineering tool (Richards and May 2018) however, the evidence for the vast number of sporting initiatives is remarkably limited (Engelberg and Moston 2020).

Despite its positive aspects, Armstrong and Hodges-Ramon (2015) highlight that while sport can undoubtedly be enthralling and appealing, it does not always 'paint a pretty picture'. Brohm (1992) refers to the 'undesirable outcomes' that have invariably resulted from the marriage of sport and society, such as doping, corruption and exclusion. As Schwery and Cade (2009, p.469) state, "*there has always been a dark side to sport*". Sport is fundamentally based on the notions of fairness, respect and integrity (Vidal 2013) however, in reality it provides significant opportunities for deceit (Armstrong and Hodges-Ramon 2015). Robène and Bodin (2014) challenge the standing of sport as a 'virtuous' activity and suggest that by instilling the impulse to win in athletes many are incited to cheat. Questions have also been asked about the long-term negative impacts that taking part in sport can have, particularly on young people, in terms of physical and



emotional demands, exposure to negative adult interaction and the risk of injury (Brenner 2016). Through sporting participation athletes may be privy to cultures that ultimately do harm, including those that deny and accept abuse (Mountjoy 2019), condone bullying (Grey-Thompson 2017), or instil the belief that should they fail to conform they are dispensable (Pike and Scott 2014). There is a significant body of developing research that suggests instead of being a fortress for good, sport may in fact exert a negative influence on society (Engelberg and Moston 2020).

### **The World of the Athlete**

The visibility of athletes has increased (Driessens 2013), leading to their everyday lives and activities facing far greater scrutiny and investigation. The public are fascinated by the behaviours of athletes, both on and off the field of play, be that due to envy or admiration (Swann et al. 2015). Modern athletes often acquire 'super star' status and as a consequence their behaviours are constantly scrutinised (Paccagnella and Grove 1997). The term 'Tall Poppies' is often used to describe successful people who are pre-eminent in their field (Feather 1989) and sporting 'Tall Poppies' are often even more favourably viewed than those hailing from other areas such as TV or film (Feather et al. 1991). Elite athletes in particular occupy prominent positions in society and are often viewed as entertainers or icons (Allison et al. 2020). It could be suggested that, to the public, an athlete's perceived character is just as important to their sporting career as their athletic performances (Brown et al. 2015).

The media is particularly devoted to sport, and in certain media coverage surpasses that which is dedicated to the economy or religion (Delaney and Madigan 2009). Media coverage of sport has intensified (Raney and Bryant 2009) and this has coincided with athletes becoming more imbedded in celebrity culture (Dakhliya 2016). The rise of the internet, and in particular social media, has enabled more events to be broadcast, and fans to connect, and develop relationships, with athletes who were previously out of reach, increasing insight into athletes' lives (Kunkel et al. 2016; Stallings and Ward 2017). Social media provides fans with unprecedented access to athletes which can at times be positive, but enables fans to publicly, and at times brutally, shame them if they feel their behaviours violate norms (MacPherson and Kerr 2021). Rojek (2001) makes the distinction between 'attributed celebrities', those who acquire their fame through mass media and marketing – the reality TV generation, and 'achieved celebrities', those who are famous because of their achievements. Generally, athletes fall into the latter category and as such their sporting celebrity is based upon the public's perception of their heroic acts and feats of courage (Yar 2014), and the public is 'hungry' for heroes (Teitelbaum 2005).

Miller (2013) describes athletes as perfect celebrities; as a result, the public often have unrealistic expectations about how they should behave (Paccagnella and Grove 1997). Athletes are presumed to behave in certain ways and demonstrate admirable qualities, upholding norms and adhering to expectations (Stallings and Ward 2017). Athletes are viewed by many as models for the general public, as image vectors for their clubs or their sports, and consequently can have both positive and negative effects on the reputations of their sports (Avgerinou 2007; Chanavat 2017). This elevation of athlete to sport star creates what Yar (2014, p.11) terms “*the preconditions for the catastrophic collapse of the star’s social standing*” when that star is seen to behave in a way that the public does not expect. Garfinkel (1956) referred to status degradation ceremonies, where the public identity of a person is transformed as a result of a misdemeanour and that individual is consequently considered in lower terms socially. This unravelling of the sport star can transform them from hero to villain in a matter of hours (Yar 2014). Athletes’ behaviours are celebrated, revered, and imitated, however, like all spheres of society negative behaviours sometimes demonstrated by athletes are prevalent. Such behaviour by athletes can be particularly costly, especially when the social and economic investment that surrounds professional sport is risked (Ruppe et al. 2020).

## **Athletes and Crime**

Described as a ‘mirror of society’ (Schwery and Cade 2009) and a laboratory for general human behaviour (Parlebas 2002), the sporting world reflects the values and culture of society (Delaney and Madigan 2009). However, like all spheres of society it is impossible to ignore the more negative behaviours sometimes demonstrated by athletes. As Jamieson and Orr (2009, p.1) state, “*sport is merely a reflection of society, one lens by which we define what that society stands for and creates as an image for itself*”.

At the lower level, an athlete may commit an act that is deemed out of the ordinary, and this ‘player transgression’ may have negative repercussions for the athlete, team or stakeholders (Wilson et al. 2008). Player transgressions may be a source of crisis for those involved (Coombs 2002; Aaker et al. 2004; Kersten 2005), and in particular where an athlete is found to have broken the law; the nefarious acts of athletes draw considerable attention, as questions are asked about the prevalence of athlete criminality. Both sport and crime have the power to stir emotion in people, with most individuals holding opinions on both (Armstrong and Hodges-Ramon 2015). The association between sport and acts of crime have increased in consciousness over recent years, largely due to high profile cases of historic sex abuse by those in positions of responsibility over athletes (including the cases of Larry Nassar in the US and Barry

Bennell in the UK). These high-profile cases have raised awareness that the arena of sport is not immune from controversy and crime, and is perhaps an optimal space for violence and abuse to occur (Fisher and Anders 2019).

An athlete, like any member of society, may commit crime, and the impact on them as a consequence can be momentous. Any fall from grace is often significant for athletes given the expectations placed upon them; when athletes commit crimes, it is more likely that these will be reported in the media than if they were committed by individuals with lower profiles (Caron et al. 1997). Sport and crime occupy large sections of the news in print and online (Kohut 2001), so when the two areas are combined and an athlete is accused of a crime it is inevitable that headlines will follow (Mastro et al. 2011). The significant attention that athlete criminality receives in the media is consistent with the trend of reporting on crime in general (Stallings and Ward 2017) however, the need to seemingly 'air dirty laundry' when an athlete commits a crime has the potential to overwhelm the positive image of an athlete (Delaney and Madigan 2009).

The press outrage often demonstrated when athletes commit crimes is indicative of the betrayal felt by those invested fans whose belief in the athlete is shattered as a result of any revelations of their wrong doing (Yar 2014). Athletes can have a considerable impact on fans, influencing ethics and beliefs, with some more dedicated fans forming what Stallings and Ward (2017) describe as 'pseudo-relationships' with them. The greater a person's investment in a sporting hero the more extreme the resentment when that hero is perceived to have let them down (Teitelbaum 2005). In addition to the focus on the details of the crime committed by the athlete, considerable attention is given to how sporting authorities subsequently deal with them (Thornton et al. 2012). It is important to note however, that while any crime committed by an athlete is bound to attract significant media attention, this may give the impression that athletes commit more crimes than they actually do. Carmichael (2009) suggests that despite the number of sensationalised news stories the rate of criminal activity is no greater among athletes (in the US) than the general public.

Traditionally sport has been associated with crime as a means to divert individuals from criminal activity (Nichols and Crow 2004; Smith and Waddington 2004; Dunning 2005; Abbot and Barber 2007; Nichols 2007; Brosnan 2020). While evidence exists of sporting programmes and crime prevention outcomes, it is important to avoid making the simple assumption that sport 'works' (Groombridge 2016). Sport as a means to reduce crime is not without its sceptics or critics, and the once prominent view that sport can reduce crime is no longer unchallenged (Engelberg and Moston 2020). Stansfield (2017) even

states that sport fails as a social control measure. The relationship between sport and crime is clearly complex (Francis and Braggins 1996) and contains many paradoxes. Armstrong and Hodges-Ramon (2015) describe sport as the 'fulcrum' of the crime cure or cause debate, leading scholars to suggest that involvement in sport may expedite and promote antisocial behaviour (Hartmann and Massoglia 2007), with sport potentially acting as a risk factor for aggressive and illegal behaviour (Burton and Marshall 2005).

The potential link between sport and crime is highlighted by Crabbe (2000, p.384) who acknowledges that, "*we need to recognise that the sorts of experience people seek through sport – namely emotional satisfaction, exhilaration, confrontation, financial reward, the overcoming of fear and the joy of celebration – can also be accessed through both crime and drug use*". Coubertin (2000, p.565) acknowledged the five characteristics essential for the sportsman: "*initiative, perseverance, intensity, search for perfection, and scorn for potential danger*". While these characteristics will undoubtedly set an athlete apart in terms of competing with others, it could be argued that some of these characteristics are not always positive for other spheres of life. Additionally, Jupp (1996) draws parallels between the core features of athletic excellence such as competitiveness, aggression, and assertion, and those traits that underpin criminal activities. The question posed by Armstrong and Hodges-Ramon (2015), and which is highly relevant to this thesis, is whether sport is an agitator of deviance; is sport in fact a cause of offending behaviour rather than a cure? Yar (2014, p.5) observes that three dimensions of sport and crime research now exist, and this thesis aims to explore the second: "*The links between sporting cultures (and sub-cultures) and predisposition towards criminal and anti-social behaviour*".

## **Research Aim and Objectives**

This research aims to explore the experiences of elite male<sup>1</sup> athletes who commit crimes. The focus is placed on the voice of the participants, in hearing their own versions of their criminality in order to understand their individual experiences. Four objectives have been set for this thesis:

1. To investigate the reasons why athletes commit crimes.
2. To identify behaviours and circumstances within an athlete's life that may lead to the commission of a crime, with a focus on the role of sport.

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<sup>1</sup> While sex denotes biological elements, it is acknowledged that gender is both socially and culturally constructed (Krane et al. 2012). For the purposes of this thesis the terms men and male, when used to describe the participants, refer to their assigned gender – that to which they were assigned at birth. All participants were born male and identify as men.

3. To develop an understanding of the impact that involvement with crime has on an athlete's life.
4. To develop a conceptual framework for the understanding of athlete criminality.

## **Rationale**

Although research into athletes and crime has been conducted, and suggestions have been offered as to why athletes may behave criminally, findings are limited and often based on solitary cases. Explanations for criminal behaviour often lack depth and are based on assumptions about personality traits of athletes that are generalised to the whole athletic body; the question is rarely posed to athletes 'why did you commit a criminal offence?'. Offences committed by athletes are rarely addressed in the literature. Atkinson and Young (2008) note that often athletes who commit crimes are identified as isolated offenders whose behaviours are not typical of their sporting culture and therefore unrepresentative of the usual behaviour identified by athletes. They explain that by examining individual cases and not the cultures that help construct their behaviours and psychologies, the spotlight is deflected away from sport as a system of values that enables nefarious personalities to emerge and as a culture that can produce offenders. Armstrong and Hodges-Ramon (2015) emphasise that there is a need to focus not on sport as a means purely to control crime, but on the role that sport plays as a potential contributor.

A number of authors are resolute in their belief that there are more commonalities than contrasts between the worlds of sport and crime (Crabbe 2000), and emphasise that sport should not be viewed conclusively as a positive social force. Hartmann and Massoglia (2007) urge policy makers to avoid complacency when it comes to encouraging and facilitating sport given their discovery that multiple indicators of sport participation are linked with various forms of antisocial and potentially criminal behaviour. Kudlac (2010, p.138) is confident enough in his findings to state that athletes are more likely than non-athletes to commit crimes: "*when comparing male athletes (high school, college and professional) to the general population, it should not be surprising that athletes, because of their gender and age, would be at a higher risk to be involved with crime*". There are however, many authors who urge against making a categorical link and stress the importance of viewing each deviant and criminal behaviour differently. Davis and Menard (2013) believe that the causal relationship between sport and illegal behaviour lacks clarity and that the question of a link between the two areas remains unanswered. Perhaps a more realistic view is that sport produces both prosocial and antisocial behaviours, and for some athletes being involved in sport tends to minimise

deviant behaviours whereas for others the tendency is heightened (Hartmann and Massoglia 2007). Dunning and Waddington (2003) argue that sport promotes positive normative effects as well as less attractive, more socially dysfunctional outcomes such as crime. It is important that sport is viewed as one of the many influences that could lead to the pathway of crime, rather than an absolute.

Overall it is clear that there is a need for further exploration into athletes and crime. Atkinson and Young (2008) state that more can be learnt about deviance in sport by exploring its parameters rather than trying to pretend it doesn't exist – the same can be applied to crime in sport. Hartmann and Massoglia (2007, p.487) appeal against identifying sport as vessel into or away from crime and cite *“the need for new conceptual model of the relationship between sport participation and delinquency, one that allows for the possibility of both positive and negative effects, and that in addition explores the factors and conditions that shape these differential trajectories”*.

Despite Snyder (1994) stating that existing studies told us little about how or why deviance and crime within sport occurred, few studies have filled this gap. As Groombridge (2016) states sport is not a thing in itself that can cause or cure something, it is merely a part of life that sociology is already exploring, and where criminology should follow suit. The boom of sports entertainment has resulted in a perceived insight into athletes and their criminal behaviour (Stallings and Ward 2017) but without the research to support this. Despite the media focus on athlete indiscretions there is a scarcity of in-depth research in the area (Armstrong and Hodges-Ramon 2015) with what limited literature there is focusing on anecdotal evidence rather than analysis focussed on applying criminological perspectives (Di Ronco and Lavoragna 2014).

Research into athletes and crime over the last 15-20 years has stagnated (McCray 2015), with momentum clearly slowing. Findings are also predominantly based on quantitative data with specific details of offences committed by athletes also rarely addressed in the literature. In 2020 *Sport in Society* featured a special issue entitled 'Crime and Misconduct in Sport'. This issue called for papers that considered the types, and scale, of crime and misconduct in sport. The purpose was to amalgamate new research exposing the darker side of sport, considering causes, identifying prevalence and consequences, and propose potential solutions to these issues. The only article included which directly explored the criminal experiences of athletes, and the potential reasons for their behaviours, featured findings from within this thesis itself<sup>2</sup>. To date there

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<sup>2</sup> Sheppard-Marks, L. H., Shipway, R. and Brown, L., 2020. Life at the edge: exploring male athlete criminality. *Sport in society*, 23 (6), 1042–1062.

has been limited explanation as to 'why' an athlete may commit a crime. Hypotheses have been put forward but no research has considered this question from the perspective of the athlete. This study aims to close the gap in the literature and extend understanding of the impact of sport on criminal activity.

## **Contribution to Knowledge**

This thesis contributes to a body of work referred to as 'dark side research' (Parnitzke Smith and Freyd 2014), it focusses on phenomena that many people would prefer to believe didn't exist (Engelberg and Moston 2020). The ultimate goal of this study is to be able to enhance the understanding of the life of the athlete, and to assist in the prevention of potential criminal activity in the future. Stallings and Ward (2017) state that for athlete criminality to be prevented in the future their individual behaviours need to be explored further. Such exploration requires investment and a thorough examination of the turning points in their lives, in order to consider what may encourage athletes to desist from crime – as such each interview in this thesis addressed the point at which the athlete decided to commit a crime. Additionally, athletes have a responsibility to those who invest in their sports, and often their fans will develop emotional and cognitive connections with them (Stallings and Ward 2017). Fans may engage in 'mimicking' behaviour of athletes, assuming the same personality and behaviour attributes as them (Earnheardt 2010) which can have negative consequences when that athlete then commits a crime. Reducing athlete criminality has the potential to interrupt this negative ripple effect.

The majority of National Governing Bodies and players' associations have already acknowledged the need to support athletes both during and after their careers, and call for a deeper understanding of the demands placed on athletes (Grey-Thompson 2017). As Jamieson and Orr (2009) argue, a deeper exploration of athletes who are involved in crime will enable solutions and programs to be developed to help athletes. This thesis was supported by the Dame Kelly Holmes Trust who recognised its potential implications for practice and policy.

The current study aims to align with current and relevant UK research agendas. The Partnership for Conflict, Crime and Security Research (PaCCS) is focussed on three higher level themes (conflict, cyber security and transnational organised crime). At the extreme level, organised crime poses a threat to populations and economies however, even lower level crimes can also have a significant impact on the victim, offender and their social networks. It is clear from these research themes that there is a high level of interest in how crime arises and how it is organised, and this starts from the very bottom

by considering an individual's decision to commit a crime. This thesis will therefore contribute to knowledge on criminal behaviour, and illuminate the link between sport and crime.

This thesis aims to offer an alternative insight into athlete criminality than previously presented. Helfgott (2008) states that the dominance of quantitative criminology means that the motivations, meanings and experiences of criminal behaviour, and the factors that shape an offender's decision-making processes are not well understood. Qualitative methods enable the complete story of crime to be told. This study makes a contribution to knowledge through a rich qualitative investigation of male athlete criminality, and in doing so it redresses the current methodological imbalance in sport, and crime, research. There is a general assumption that the best way to learn about a phenomenon is through those most intimately involved in it (Katz 2019), as such the current study focusses on recollections of crime from the criminals themselves. By concentrating on the offenders' thoughts and feelings at the critical moment of crime it is possible to understand the offence and the context in which it occurred (Topalli et al. 2020).

The creation of the conceptual framework ensures that this thesis provides a contribution to knowledge, and a novel perspective through which to consider athlete criminality. By using the concept of edgework (Lyng 1990) the ways in which participants took, and viewed, risk was considered. Some athletes appeared to commit crime as a consequence of risk-taking behaviour and the conceptual framework captures the role that being an athlete had on them pursuing this risk-taking behaviour. While previously used to explore behaviour within high-risk sport, and as an explanation for criminal activity (Lyng 1993), the concept of edgework has not been utilised to date to address the criminal activities of athletes.

### **From Athlete to Researcher – My Position Within the Research**

It is important in qualitative research to acknowledge the positionality of the researcher in order to show awareness of the ways in which the researcher influences the research project (Jones et al. 2012). It is also an indicator of trustworthiness and improves the validity of the study. Within narrative inquiry the role of the researcher's own voice is key, as they work to construct their participant's voices and realities (Chase 2005); therefore, acknowledging how my voice was established is essential. Positionality is fluid (Mikecz 2012) and it was clear that my positionality influenced the following areas:



## **Choice of Research Area**

A researcher's background, and current role, will influence what they choose to study and the research question itself (Kuper et al. 2008). My background had a significant influence on my choice of research area. I became immersed in the world of sport from a very young age, after playing football at club level I discovered the sport of hockey and quickly found my niche. Hockey went on to become the most significant part of my life and I have competed internationally at both junior and senior levels. As a Police Officer in the Royal Air Force I also travelled internationally to represent the Air Force and the United Kingdom Armed Forces in hockey. For many years other aspects of my life, including my Sport Science degree and military career choices, were shaped by my desire to continue playing hockey at the top level. Sport also became my social life and to a certain extent, the friends I made through my sport became my extended family.

After my first Royal Air Force deployment to Afghanistan in 2005, I was approached by the Commanding Officer of my branch and asked to devise a way to gain International hockey honours at the same time as progressing my military career. For me the most logical step for this was to return to Loughborough University and study an MSc in Criminology while at the same time training full time as an athlete. I was awarded elite athlete status by the Royal Air Force Sports Board and found myself as a full time Masters student at the age of 25. The MSc in Criminology opened my eyes to the world of criminological theory and sparked an interest in me that inevitably ignited this PhD. When considering the focus of my future PhD it was a natural choice for me to locate my research within the fields of sport and criminology given both my previous studies, my personal experiences and my passion for these areas. I was focused on finding a way to examine the relationship between sport and crime in a different way than had previously been undertaken.

## **Interview Approach**

My previous experiences of police interviews predisposed me to a need to follow chronology when listening to stories, something that I initially found very difficult to manage in early interviews. Chronology was something I had to essentially 'let go' of, and instead had to recognise that rather than hear stories in a sequential form, I would learn about the athletes' experiences through plots constructed from different events (Jovchelovitch and Bauer 2000). Czarniawska (1997) discusses how hard she found it when participants would deviate from her questions and 'break through' the structure of the interview she had envisioned, but through experience she explains that the deviation is the point of the interview. I was aware that I needed to view the participant as the narrator (Chase 2005) and not force my need for structure and order on them. In order

to conduct interviews as a researcher as opposed to an investigator, I needed to try and forget my previous training, and approach each interview as a blank slate.

In some ways, my previous experiences helped rather than hindered me. Following a second deployment to Afghanistan I was trained in Trauma Risk Management, a real-time tool to enable to early identification of post-traumatic stress disorder in those returning from theatres of operation. The skills I gained through this qualification enabled me to further develop my understanding of the impact that significant and traumatic events can have on a person, but most importantly for this study, they taught me how to speak with people under high pressure in an alternative way to a traditional police interview.

### **Rapport with Participants**

Interviews are contextual events; therefore, it is essential that the participant is aware of the researcher's culture and background (Mikecz 2012). Given the nature of the subject I was exploring, and my background in policing, I was open and transparent with participants (Ostrander 1993). I needed the athletes to know that I was speaking with them primarily as a fellow athlete, and not as someone who previously worked within law enforcement, so that they did not perceive me incorrectly (Young 2011). My ability to gain the trust of the athletes' through acknowledgement of my positionality, resulted in them being comfortable to recommend me to their friends as someone who was trustworthy. As Mikecz (2012) explains, my transparency enabled me to create a positive 'track record' as someone to be trusted.

By acknowledging the ways in which my experiences have influenced me, and the meanings I have attached to them, I was better able to understand the athletes I interviewed (Holloway and Freshwater 2007). While some of my participants were more willing to speak with me and naturally displayed higher levels of trust (Junninen 2008), by being emotionally self-aware I was more open to the stories they told, and was able to use my emotions to good effect (Ezzy 2010).

### **Interpretation of Theory**

Previous experiences influence the way a researcher interacts with the data they collect (Polkinghorne 2007). Every researcher possesses a unique lens that is shaped by their own personal biography, and this will influence the way in which they view the social world around them (Rossman and Ralis 2012). My previous research in criminology and my practical experiences as both an investigator and commanding officer have enabled me to understand my position as an interdisciplinary criminologist. I appreciate that an

acceptance of theories from across criminological perspectives is a realistic way to interpret criminal behaviour. I understood that I needed to detach myself from my awareness of theory in order to remain truly inductive throughout the research process and acknowledge that my previous educational and practical experience inevitably influenced my eventual interpretation of the data collected.

### **Attitude Towards Crime**

My experiences of policing, of investigations and interviews mean that very little shocks me when it comes to the nature of criminal revelations. I believe my experiences, particularly having dealt with cases of a highly sensitive and emotive nature, meant that when participants spoke to me about the intricacies of their offences, I showed very little adverse reaction, and limited detectable judgement. I have learnt to understand offenders in a unique way. I rarely view offences in isolation, and understand that a criminal offence for many is the culmination of a great deal of influences, and invariably their decision to commit an offence is rarely done without deep thought or reflection.

As both an investigator, and latterly a supporting officer attending court with personnel who had committed criminal offences, I have seen first-hand the devastating effects that crime can have on a person's life and career. I have watched on numerous occasions as a person is told their military career is over because of the bad decisions they have made, and for many decisions that were made alongside otherwise flourishing careers. My desire to understand this decision-making process, and to further explore the athlete world that for so many years I was a part of, are the key foundations to the choice of PhD topic.

While studying these two fields is clearly a passion of mine, I am also adamant that I find a way to ensure that this research has practical implications. Crime can wreak havoc on a person's life, when it is clear that there are alternatives to the path they decide to choose. Within the military crime inevitably means the end of a career, but this is not always the case within sport, greater levels of support could be offered to athletes and it is my hope that I can increase awareness of how this could be facilitated. Prevention is of course better than cure, and this research could go some way in helping to identify the kinds of behaviour that conspire to lead an athlete towards crime.

### **The Structure of the Thesis**

The review of literature (Chapter 2) provides an overview of the vast array of criminological theories that exist, and presents the case that an interdisciplinary approach can be useful for examining a phenomenon such as athlete criminality.

Existing research into athletes and crime is presented, and previous attempts to apply criminological theory to athlete crimes are considered. This chapter identifies a clear gap in the current research, and a lack of understanding in terms of individual athlete experiences. Chapter 3 presents the methodology which was designed in such a way as to optimise the opportunity I was given to hear the stories of a particularly niche group of participants. The backgrounds of the participants are presented as vignettes in Chapter 4 so as to ensure that coherent narratives (Papathomas and Lavallee 2014) were captured. Each emergent theme is presented and analysed within the discussion chapters (5,6,7,8, and 9) and finally the conclusion is posed at Chapter 10 which includes the conceptual framework and recommendations for future research.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### Introduction

This chapter serves as an overview of theory within the area of crime and athlete criminality, setting the context for the study. A narrative review was conducted in order to present a historical overview of research in the area of athlete criminality, and aimed to demonstrate how research within this field developed over time (Snyder 2019). A narrative review was adopted to enhance the reader's understanding of the research area and highlight relevant theory development (Dixon-Woods et al. 2006; Furley and Goldschmied 2021).

Within this chapter, three key areas will be covered in order to direct the reader towards the research question: crime and criminology, existing research on sport and crime, and available explanations of athlete criminality. The concept of crime will be defined and the complexities of criminology discussed, specific criminological theories and perspectives will be presented with a focus on the importance of interdisciplinary criminology. Gender and age in relation to crime will also be considered. Existing research on sport and crime will be presented with a focus on previously targeted areas such as the prosecution of athletes and sport and crime reduction. Previous research into the criminal activity of athletes will be discussed including literature that considers the propensity of athletes to engage in violent crime, violence against women, and sexual violence. The role of sporting masculinity and the influence of alcohol on athlete criminality will also be visited. Available explanations of athlete criminality including historic applications and previously utilised criminological theories will be presented, with suggested causes of athlete crime detailed. Finally, limitations of previous research will be highlighted.

### Crime and Criminology

*"Crime itself is constructed deep in the cracks that make up everyday life"*  
(Presdee 2004, p.44).

### Defining Crime

Crime is an element of society that is as old as humanity (Gover and Senol 2017). As a concept, crime is complex and multi-faceted; many theorists acknowledge its multifarious nature. In the UK, the Criminal Justice System dictates what acts are and are not criminal. Criminal law is unique (Richman 2021) and directs that for a crime to have occurred there must be the presence of both Mens Rea (the guilty mind) and Actus Reus (the guilty act). While there is no scientific interpretation of what constitutes a crime, the most widely understood and utilised definition is a behaviour that violates criminal law

(Lynch et al. 2015). In clearest terms crime is a behaviour deemed illegal by the state, committed by an individual within a specific social context. However, crime is never that simple and is better viewed as the final outcome of a complex interplay between an individual and a wide variety of forces. Hayward and Young (2004) describe crime as an act of rule breaking, which encompasses an individual's attitude to the rules and a motivation to break them either by transgression or neutralisation. Canter (2008, p.5) contends that it is more accurate to consider crime as part of a process rather than a distinct act; he encourages researchers to consider the whole picture of the offender and not just the final deed: "*crime and criminality can never be considered in isolation from the processes by which the actions that are considered criminal come to notice, and the route by which the offender emerges into view*".

Within the literature that considers sport and crime, the term deviance is often used – some authors talk exclusively about sport and deviance and others use the terms crime and deviance more interchangeably. For the purposes of this thesis the terms will be dealt with separately, with deviance being acknowledged as a completely separate entity. Crime is an act that clearly breaks a law of society, whereas deviance is a behaviour that moves away from conventional values and appears to violate social norms. Both crime and deviance embody how society frames what is and isn't acceptable behaviour, and all societies will vary in their forbearance of deviant behaviours (Coomber et al. 2015). It is clear that deviance is much harder to define, and is dependent on situations and circumstance; it can also be viewed in positive or creative ways, and in some circumstances, lead to positive outcomes (Petrou et al. 2020). It is the perspective of a specific individual or group in society that determines what behaviours are deemed normal or deviant (Beirne and Messerschmidt 2000).

### **Acknowledging Zemiology**

A number of authors suggest that it is impossible to consider crime without paying consideration to the concept of zemiology. While zemiology is ambiguous (Copson 2018) it is broadly understood to be the study of social harms. Presser (2013) describes harm as a more foundational object for explanation than crime, and explains that while most people in society will respond to harm, the same cannot be said for crime. Crime is described as having no ontological reality (Hillyard et al. 2004). The vast majority of acts defined as crimes are minor and do not result in significant personal hardship (Hillyard and Tombs 2004). Many events that cause serious harm are not in fact criminal, behaviour can cause significant harm even if it is not prohibited by law (Monaghan and Prideaux 2016). Criminal law does not encapsulate those forms of harm often deemed more damaging and pervasive (Hillyard and Tombs 2007), the majority of those

individuals impacted by social harms will have limited recognition from the legal system (Tombs 2018). Lacey and Zedner (2012) argue that the concept of crime is so familiar to the public that it is taken for granted and never really examined. Acts of clear moral indiscretion can be far more harmful and further reaching than an act that would result in a person gaining a criminal record.

In terms of this thesis criminal acts are used as the focal point however, in each instance consideration of the wider harm caused by the act is made and it is acknowledged that while the athlete may have committed an offence that constitutes a crime, they may have committed or been subjected to other acts that have caused further harm to themselves or others than the specific act deemed criminal.

### **The Complexities of Criminology**

As Gadd and Jefferson (2007, p.5) state, "*it is absurd to attempt to produce a general theory about something as diverse and context bound as crime*". Criminal behaviour in itself is difficult to understand, as Fyodor Dostoevsky (1864) once stated, "*nothing is easier to do than denounce the evil doer; nothing is more difficult than to understand him*". Walters (2012) explains that crime exists along a continuum rather than in pockets of categorised behaviour. Walters (2012) refers to a 'spectrum' of criminal behaviour and acknowledges that there are many factors that can influence the path an offender takes.

Despite the acknowledgement of the complexities of crime, and the fact that crime is a social construct (Hillyard and Tombs 2004), there is still a need within criminology to explain why people commit crime. Helfgott (2008) believes this 'need' to understand why crime occurs and who commits it is driven by people's desire to be able to control and respond to crime. Humans have a desire to know how and why events occur, and what threatens their survival, and this has led to what some term a 'morbid curiosity' of crime (Boorsma 2017). Fascination with the etiology of crime has led to a mass of criminological theories, perspectives, frameworks and disciplines (Barak 1994). Each theory, or perspective, identifies a distinctive set of variables believed to explain a person's criminality (Wilcox and Gialopsos 2015). Williams and McShane (2014) refer to 'disciplinary hegemony', with each discipline of criminology tending to focus on its own variables. Pratt (2016, p.37) entertainingly encapsulates the 'stew' that is criminology: "*It appears we have as many varieties of explanations as to why people break the law as ways that Wile E. Coyote has tried to snuff out the Roadrunner...clearly we are not suffering from a shortage of ideas*".

## **Criminology Theory and Perspectives**

Criminology is a challenging field to make sense of; theories and approaches are diverse and sometimes conflicting. As Opp (2020) identifies each theory possesses its own weaknesses, and no scholar categorically knows which theory is best. Generally, there are three approaches to criminology which broadly encapsulate the pockets of individual theories (Helfgott 2008): positivist criminology, classical criminology, and contemporary criminology. Positivist criminology sees the root causes of criminal behaviour as identifiable factors or 'truths' (Morrison 2014); theories are deterministic and seek to establish objective causes of behaviour. Classical criminology sees criminal behaviour as a choice, a rational decision to commit a criminal act (Nirvaan and Goel 2018) based on the free will of the individual. Finally, contemporary criminology considers both free will and deterministic influences. Although classifying theories into 'camps' is described as somewhat arbitrary by Tittle (2016), when faced with a mass of criminological theory it helps to understand the basics of the approaches in order to be able to consider which theories best apply. The list of criminological theories is vast and as Groombridge (2016) explains, there is no single comprehensive list to follow. Theories vary in terms of the amount of support they receive but all have value in increasing the understanding of the roots of criminal behaviour. No one theory provides the answer, otherwise there would be no need for further research (Tittle 2016).

Theories vary in what they attempt to identify, and are often viewed as competing explanations of the problem of crime (Eck and Weisburd 2015). Some consider factors that place individuals at 'risk' of offending, others consider what factors converge to influence criminal behaviour. The contemporary approach to criminology would encourage the understanding that there is no one single cause of crime; there is no single answer to the question "what causes crime?". Schwartz and Brownstein (2016, p.302) describe what at best a criminological theory will aim to achieve:

*"A criminological theory explains how and why some people at some times and in some circumstances deviate or not from some social norm or norms; how and why some or all other people around them, each with varying degrees of socially legitimate authority, respond or not to real or imagined transgressions or antisocial actions or behaviour; and how and why that response does make a difference or not".*

Criminologists offer a range of theories (Bhattacharya and Marshall 2012) and these tend to lie within areas, or perspectives, each of which offer a particular way of viewing crime and the factors that contribute to criminal behaviour. As with all elements of criminology these perspectives are open to interpretation, and there is a great deal of overlap when it comes to placing theory within a perspective. Table 2.1 identifies how different authors classify theory. It demonstrates the diversity that exists when it comes to identifying



perspectives and how confusing it can be trying to present an overview of criminological theory.

Table 2.1. Examples of the Diversity of Criminological Perspectives

Akers and Sellers (2012)	Akers (2012)	Tittle (2016)
Classical criminology Bio/biosocial Psychological Social learning Social bonding and control Labelling and reintegrative shaming Social disorganisation theory Anomie and strain Conflict Marxist (capitalism) Radical and critical theories Feminist theories	Classical criminology and deterrence doctrine Bio and psychological theories Social learning theories Social bonding and control theories Labelling theory Social disorganisation, anomie and strain theories Conflict theories Marxist and critical theories Feminist theories	Theoretical science Problem solving Verstehen analysis Descriptive approaches, Critical work Nihilistic thinking Amelioration

(Source: author's own)

In order to make sense of theory and present a logical overview, Helfgott's (2008) six perspectives have been chosen as these appear to capture the majority of key theories whilst attempting to provide answers to the key question 'why do people commit crime?':

1. Biological – what are the biological roots of criminal behaviour?
2. Psychological – what psychological factors contributed to this behaviour?
3. Sociological – what sociological factors contributed to this behaviour?
4. Routine Activity Theory (RAT)/Opportunity/Ecological – what situational, contextual, environmental factors provided the setting and opportunity for this crime to occur?
5. Cultural – what cultural forces provided the context in which this crime could occur?
6. Phenomenological – what personal meaning does the crime hold for the offender? (Helfgott 2008, p.37).

A brief synopsis of each of these perspectives is provided in the following sections.

## **Biological**

The biological perspective assumes that some people are born criminals, offenders are born and not made (Martin 2005). Theories within this perspective focus on the fact that criminals are physiologically different from non-criminals. As such these theories are reductionist as they infer that actions as complex as committing crimes can be attributed

to simple biological causes. Theories centre on the differences between criminals and non-criminals (Zembroski 2011).

Early work in this area was conducted by Lombroso who considered criminals to be evolutionary throwbacks (Ellwood 1912). Lombroso believed that a criminal could be identified on physical features alone such as the shape of a face or size of the skull. In 1876, he published 64 pages of pictures documenting what a genetically primitive species such as a criminal should look like. His findings went unquestioned until Goring (1913) was able to show that there was no validity to Lombroso's findings. More modern applications of biological theory focus on how factors such as certain genes, neurological deficits and serotonin activity may influence a person's propensity for crime.

Examples of biological theories such as neuropsychological theories consider how disruptions to neural mechanisms can influence a person's activities. Links are made between levels of aggression, impulsivity, anti-social behaviour, psychopathy and the likelihood of displaying criminal behaviour (Helfgott 2008). Research into nervous system activity (CNS and ANS) makes links between sensation-seeking and risk-taking behaviour. People with low levels of both are less likely to be deterred from committing anti-social acts and show less regard for punishment. The relationship between hormones and aggression, which itself is linked with violent crime, has been extensively studied in the field of behavioural endocrinology (Adreani et al. 2018).

Biological theories consider the genetic makeup of a person, although genes do not cause criminal behaviour, rather they result in a person being predisposed to certain conditions (Helfgott 2008). Criminal behaviour is a phenotype expression, with phenotypes being the observable product of genes and environment, other examples are personality and intelligence. Robinson (2004) explains that genes determine *what* we are, but not *who* we are, which suggests there is more to consider about criminals than simply genes. Some biological theories offer too simple an explanation of crime. Fishbein (2001) argues that crime depends on the interaction between biological predispositions and environmental conditions, and how these combine to influence actions. Even those who are staunch advocates of the biological roots of crime, such as Rowe (2001), believe that other shaping factors such as opportunity and social influences cannot be ignored. Evidence of biological factors is hard to acquire unless research is conducted in a specific setting or without a targeted approach to identify a key trait such as impulsivity or aggression. Graham et al. (2021) go as far as to state that it is clear that there is no such thing as a crime gene; criminal behaviour is complex and

develops as a mixture of genetic variants and environmental influences (Barnes and Tielbeek 2018).

## **Psychological**

The psychological perspective is diverse and encompasses a wide range of theories, with clear overlaps at points between those classified as psychological, and those classified as sociological. As a general overview, the psychological perspective considers crime as a symptom of a psychological condition, but also considers the role of development, learning, decision making, personality and the influence of family; social scientists have consistently acknowledged the importance of family and peers in understanding the etiology of crime (Boman and Mowen 2020). Crime is the product of individual differences which occur as a result of early psychodynamic development, information processing and cognition, and conditioning processes (Helfgott 2008).

There are broadly three areas of theory within the psychological perspective:

**a. Psychodynamic Theories.** These theories focus on the development of a person's psyche in infancy. Theories include Freud's ID, Ego and Super Ego, offender types (Andrews and Bonta 2003), and psychopath characteristics (Cleckley 1941).

**b. Cognitive Theories.** These theories consider crime as a result of thinking errors and information processing irregularities. Criminal behaviour therefore is considered to be a product of cognitive defects. Theories include rational choice theories that view crime as a conscious activity committed at will, criminal personality theories (Yochelson and Samenow 1976) that consider criminals to have unique patterns of thinking and common thinking errors, and information processing theories (Sykes and Matza 1957).

**c. Behavioural theories.** These theories consider crimes as learned behaviours, which are shaped by forces around an individual – this area is where most overlaps between psychological and sociological theories occur. Theories include operant and classical conditioning (Pavlov 1906; Skinner 1938), differential association (Sutherland 1974), Differential Association Reinforcement theory (Burgess and Akers 1966) and social learning theory (Akers 1973; Bandura 1977).

## **Phenomenological**

The phenomenological perspective is rooted in the belief that a perpetrator's viewpoint is underrepresented in the literature: "*the social science literature contains only scattered evidence of what it means, feels, sounds, tastes or looks like to commit a particular crime*"

(Katz 1988, p.1). This perspective seeks to understand the meaning of offences to the offender, and assumes that activities and associated meanings can produce an explanation of crime (Manning and Raphael 2012). The perspective views crime as a unique experience which can be understood once the motives and decision-making processes of the offender are explored, the focus is crime from the offender's viewpoint (Cromwell 1996); this thesis adopts this particular element of the perspective. Theories include Katz's (1988) phenomenological theory of crime, and criminal Verstehen (Ferrell and Sanders 1995; Ferrell and Hamm 1998) which focuses on understanding criminal behaviour from the inside out.

## **Cultural**

The cultural perspective views both crime and control as culturally constructed products, products of meaning (Ilan 2019), and that to make sense of crime there needs to be an understanding of the culture in which it occurs (Ferrell and Sanders 1995). Key authors within this area, Katz (1988) and Lyng (1990), both emphasise the parallels between understanding crime and understanding the structural conditions of life. Just as with other perspectives there are overlaps as, like phenomenological theories, the cultural perspective also aims to unearth and discuss the meanings of offences (Presdee 2004) and explore the emotional and interpretative characteristics of crime. Cultural criminology can be viewed as a fusion of numerous criminological traditions which is ultimately greater than the sum of its parts (Hayward 2016). Theories within this perspective consider class and power relations, the role of culture, social construction, and how criminal behaviour is created through influences such as media, popular culture and appearances of authority (Helfgott 2008).

One of the key areas of theory within this perspective is work that considers criminal behaviour as not simply a response to the demands of society, but as a search for excitement (Ferrell 2013). Ferrell's work builds on earlier work by Elias and Dunning (1986) which considers the excitement of physical action and acknowledges that people can experience a 'high' when committing crime (Gove and Wilmoth 1990). Zuckerman (1979) suggests that individuals need to experience novel and varied sensations and that in seeking sensations, individuals are prepared to take social and physical risks - which may inadvertently, or deliberately, result in criminal action. Katz (1988) refers to the seduction and thrill of crime that may enable a person to escape a mundane existence, as reinforced by Miller (2005, p.155): "*Crime is seen as a powerful, seductive, emotional experience that allows social actors to transcend their otherwise routine mundane lives*". Katz (1988) discusses about the emotional power of crime, how it offers distinctive rewards and feelings and discusses the concept of transcendence, the

crossing of a threshold which results in a person feeling out of rational control (O'Malley and Mugford 1994).

This perspective also encompasses Lyng's (1990) theory of edgework which considers the ways in which people intentionally push themselves to the edge of danger in search for excitement and uncertainty, where people lose control only to take control (Miller 2005). Lyng examines the boundary between chaos and order and identifies four discrete feelings associated with edgework: self-determination, fear of failure, excitement, and hyper reality. One of the more recent applications of the edgework theory, is as an explanation for criminal and deviant activity, for example, drug use (Reith 2007; McGovern and McGovern 2011); general crime (Lyng 2004; Anderson and Brown 2010); and adolescent delinquency (Miller 2005). Lyng (1993) acknowledges the potential of the edgework model as a way to explain why individuals commit crime, and the model has been subsequently developed to consider the links between crime, risk-taking and thrill seeking (Miller 2005). It has long been acknowledged that the commission of a criminal act requires an individual to transcend defined boundaries. Matza (1969) describes the 'invitation edge' that divides the 'inside' and 'outside' of a deviant, or criminal activity. The application of edgework to criminal activity supports those who believe that committing crimes conveys both motivation and meaning (Ferrell et al. 2001; Sandberg 2009). While the edgework concept has been commended for its applicability to such wide forms of human behaviour (Anderson and Brown 2010), there are concerns that this application is too broad and edgework is in danger of losing its expounding ability (Bunn 2017). Nonetheless, edgework may offer a potential explanation for the escalation of criminal acts over time as 'edgeworkers' continually modify the edge (Bunn 2017), seeking higher level risks when risk become routine and achievable.

### **Routine Activity Theory (RAT)/Opportunity/Ecological**

The RAT/Opportunity/Ecological perspective explores how situational, contextual or environmental factors influence a person's behaviour. Again, there are overlaps with other areas, namely cognitive theories, as many of the theories within this perspective consider crime as a rational choice.

Routine activity theory (Cohen and Felson 1979) considers the influence of opportunity, and states that crime is the result of the convergence of motivated offenders and suitable targets in settings where capable guardians are absent (the fuel, the oxygen and the spark). Felson (2002) describes this as the 'chemistry for crime'. RAT assumes that crime occurs because of increased temptation and reduced restraints, and that crime is a product of interaction between individual, situation/context and environment; crime is

consequently most likely to occur where opportunities are greater (Jones and Pridemore 2019). RAT has subsequently been amalgamated with Lifestyle Exposure Theory (Hindelang et al. 1978) to create Lifestyle-routine Activities Theory (L-RAT) (Garofolo 1987). L-RAT offers a more general explanation of why crime and victimisation occurs, and focuses on the fact that opportunities for criminal victimisation occur as a consequence of an individual's everyday routines and lifestyle behaviours that expose them to risk (Felson 2002). L-RAT is believed to be the most commonly utilised framework in the analysis of victimisation risks (Cass 2007).

This perspective also includes crime, place and space theories such as broken windows theory (Wilson and Kelling 1982), which identifies that the presence of disorder can be temptation, and is still being utilised today to explore crime and disorder in varying settings (Ellis 2020; Vilalta et al. 2020). Using the analogy of windows, if the first window in a building is broken and not fixed, then people assume that no one cares and more windows will be broken. The theory considers the role of ineffective policing and how a lack of apparent care can infect whole communities. Theories also consider the locations where crimes occur and relationships with physical environments; attempting to understand why crimes occur when and where they do has been studied by environmental criminologists for decades (Wortley and Townsley 2017). Findings are often utilised to inform crime prevention measures.

## **Sociological**

The sociological perspective considers crime as a social phenomenon (Rock 2012) and explains the effect that social conditions have on an individual's propensity to commit crime. This perspective considers the role of social influences such as community disorganisation, social inequalities, labelling, peer influence, delinquent subcultures, and social bonds (Helfgott 2008). Rock (2012) identifies that at the heart of many sociological theories is the assumption that crime occurs as a direct consequence of ineffective social regulation. According to some theories within this perspective criminal behaviour is learned, either directly or indirectly, and there are clear overlaps with behavioural theories.

Helfgott identifies three areas of theory within the sociological perspective:

**a. Structural.** These theories consider crime as a product of the structure of society, and root crime in two primary factors: differential opportunity and discrimination towards powerless groups in society - crime is viewed as an alternative source of success. Theories include structural functionalism (Durkheim 1964) which considers crime as a

social function that occurs as a result of anomie and the subsequent breakdown of social bonds between a person and their community. Durkheim identified that human misconduct was not due to the individual but the group and their social organisation (Zembroski 2011). Strain theory (Agnew 1992, 2012) describes how the strain between a person's goals and their means to achieve them result in resentment and frustration which leads them to utilise criminal means to achieve success. When people have negative experiences, and especially where they perceive these situations as unfair, they may commit crimes as a way to resolve the negative emotions that these strains cause (Shadmanfaat et al. 2019). The theory views crime as a direct result of differential opportunity and assumes that people are naturally law abiding unless forced into crime by experiences in society. Conflict theories see crime as a result of people feeling socially irrelevant and subsequently becoming socially dangerous; crime reflects the conflicts that exist between social, economic and political interest groups (Black 2014). Spitzer (1975) refers to certain groups of society as 'social junk' and 'social dynamite', pushed to the margins of society who then learn to play the role of the criminal.

**b. Cultural.** These theories consider crime as a result of cultural conflicts between the dominant culture and sub-cultures whose values differ. This cultural conflict continues from one generation to the next through cultural transmission (Adler and Adler 1989).

**c. Interactionist.** These theories view crime in terms of the interactional forces between people. Theories examine the roles of peer groups and family influences, and are concerned with how people come to define themselves as criminal. Social Control theory (Hirschi 1969) considers why people do not commit crime and explains that when an individual feels bonded to society they will not violate the rules. Crime occurs when social bonds such as commitment, involvement, belief, and the 'keystone' (Cho and Lee 2018) attachment are weakened or broken. Having strong social bonds reduces the likelihood of offending while weak social bonds have the opposite effect. Other theories include differential association (Sutherland 1974) and labelling theory (Becker 1963), which suggests that there is an element of self-fulfilling prophecy when it comes to the label of criminal; people develop an identity consistent with the label placed upon them. Becker suggests that rules, and laws, are created by those with power, and subsequently enforced on those people without it (Burke 2019).

Although there are some criminologists who consider crime purely from the sociological perspective (sociological traditionalists) and those who consider alternative perspectives that sit outside of sociology (multidisciplinary specialists), there is increasing

acknowledgment that perhaps a true understanding of crime calls for not just acknowledgement of different fields, but integration (Helfgott 2008). Interdisciplinary approaches and their importance will be considered in the following section.

### **The importance of Interdisciplinary Criminology**

Eskridge and Butyrkski (2019) state that for criminology to develop further as a science, an interdisciplinary approach will be necessary; they stress that active interaction of scientists from different branches is essential and will enable a new understanding of crime. Although theoretical integrations have often been criticised for generating conflicting conjectures (Krohn and Eassey 2014), recent research has seen competing theories used in an integrated approach to good effect (Cho and Lee 2018; Jones and Pridemore 2019). Interdisciplinary generalists state that criminal behaviour is sufficiently complex that most theories are able to offer some element of explanation as to why crime occurs. Two of the key criminological theories - Gottfredson and Hirschi's General Theory of Crime (1990) and Sampson and Laub's Life Course Theory (1993) straddle different perspectives (social, psychological and biological) which illustrates the need for recognition of multiple fields. It is highly unlikely that any single theory can provide a comprehensive explanation for why a crime occurs. As Helfgott (2008, p.50) states, "*multiple theories can be used to explain criminal behaviour with recognition that no single discipline is capable of offering 'the answer'*". All criminological research fundamentally aims to reduce criminality, and one way to improve this is to increase interaction between different perspectives, and strengthen interdisciplinary connections (Eskridge and Butyrkski 2019).

### **Gender, Age and Crime**

Kudlac (2010) states that historically and cross culturally there is no more consistent a relationship than that between men and crime. As Rock (2012, p.51) reinforces, "*apart from age, no other demographic feature at present so powerfully discriminates between offenders and non-offenders*". DeLisi and Vaughn (2014) describe gender as the fundamental correlate of crime and Groombridge (2016) describes crime and sport as two of the most gendered activities in society. Despite this, there are those who believe that the gender gap in crime is decreasing and point to reasons such as the liberation of women from traditional roles or a generalised reduction in tolerance towards crime and violence in general (Estrada et al. 2017). Fundamentally, men have long dwarfed women with regards to crime statistics, and as Kruttschnitt (2013) states, in absolute terms they still do. Any apparent closure of the gap between men and women is more likely to be due to changes in enforcement activities rather than clear changes in the behaviour of women (Steffensmeier et al. 2005; Schwartz and Rookey 2008; Feld 2009). Within the



UK, the difference between the levels of crime in men and women is significant, men account for approximately 75% of those arrested for crimes, and make up 95% of the prison population, and these proportions have been consistent for the past five years (www.gov.uk). Put simply men are twenty-two times more likely to be imprisoned for a crime than women. Statistics are not dissimilar for other countries – in the US although women comprise 51% of the population they are arrested for only 18% of all violent crimes.

Ioannou and Vettor (2008) reveal that two findings within studies of crime stand out above all others, firstly that the preponderance of offences are committed by men, and secondly that the majority of these offenders are in their mid-teens. Age is described as one of the most robust correlates of crime, and the connection between age and crime is one of the most enduring relationships throughout criminology (Rocque et al. 2015). DeLisi and Vaughn (2014) describe the ages of fifteen-twenty as crime-prone spanning years and explain that in general terms age is inversely related to criminal activity with younger people being excessively immersed when compared with older generations. Crime tends to peak rapidly in the late teenage years and declines rapidly after this point, and consistently as individuals move through adulthood (Sweeten et al. 2013). Examples of this 'age-crime curve' have been found in samples that span across ethnic groups, nationality and throughout history (Piquero et al. 2003, 2007; Farrington et al. 2013).

## Existing Research on Sport and Crime

*“On the one hand sport is the context for that which is bad in us and society—sleaze, corruption, fraud, violence and aggression—and at the same time is a model for that which is good and the panacea of social ills” (Jupp 1996, p.4).*

### Sport and the athlete

Sport is both a psychological and physical experience borne by millions around the world (Luzzi and Chow 2020). It is enjoyed by the widest possible spectrum of people (Kang 2009) and crosses the boundaries of culture, age, gender and status (Luzzi and Chow 2020). Sport occupies a prominent place in contemporary society and culture and is an international phenomenon (Jarvie 2006); sporting practices can be found in numerous permutations within every culture (Kang 2009). Described as part of social and cultural 'fabric' (Jarvie 2006), sport is viewed as a fundamental component of many cultures and societies (Battente 2020).

Once described as a 'conceptual enigma' (Thomas 1976), sport encompasses complex layers of meaning for those involved (Harwood et al. 2021). Sport is notoriously hard to define as Klein (2017, p.2) identifies “Sport is everywhere, and for many, everything...”

*But what is sport? How do we define this thing that we all seem to know about and talk about?". An agreed definition of sport is difficult to present, and as Laker (2002) explains while most people have a collective understanding of sport, each person applies a personal definition, and it means a different thing to different people.*

Sport is widely supported by governments around the world due to its' perceived social benefits (Jarvie 2006) and is believed to create a 'common language' which transcends cultures (Laker 2002). There exists a significant amount of anecdotal and empirical evidence for the claim that being involved in sport is beneficial for participants (Ewing et al. 2002). The benefits of being involved in sport range from those impacting the individual and also those that benefit society such as social integration, development of social relationships, enhancements in social capital, and reductions in crime (Block and Gibbs 2017; Brosnan 2020). There are also clear health benefits of being physically active, Sport England predicted that if an additional one million people participated in sport just once a week, £22.5 billion could be saved on health and associated costs (Armstrong and Hodges-Ramon 2015).

The personal benefits of sport are well evidenced, with those participating in sport demonstrating increased happiness (Huang and Humphreys 2012), improved social skills (Taylor et al. 2015) and better future income prospects (Dewenter and Giessing 2015). Those involved in sport are believed to show higher levels of self-esteem and social connectedness (Armstrong and Oomen-Early 2009), with 'in group' membership and community recognition increasing self-confidence (Smith and Whiteside 2021). Sport acts as a means to develop a sense of belonging (Dukic et al. 2017; McDonald et al. 2017) and build social connections (Allen 2003).

Sport is promoted as a tool that fosters social integration (Burrmann et al. 2017) and provides those involved with opportunities to share common experiences, to be supported and to support others (Allen 2006). Involvement in sport satisfies an individual's need for psychological connection (Allen 2006) creating interpersonal relationships and results in the formation of strong bonds of allegiance and loyalty in teammates (Pappas et al. 2004). Athletes have been seen to perform better when team members are highly interdependent (Coleman et al. 2021) and strong team cohesion results in higher levels of commitment (Mercurio 2015) and increased likelihood of athletes displaying normative group behaviours (Carron and Eys 2012). Individuals who form strong sporting bonds, and positive friendship dimensions, are more likely to continue to play sport (Ullrich-French and Smith 2009) and athletes who feel bonded are more likely to enjoy their sports (Weiss and Smith 2002). Ultimately, the positive

bonds experienced by athletes result in high levels of enjoyment, happiness and satisfaction (Smith 2003; Gunnell et al. 2012).

### **The Negative Side of Sport**

While the benefits of sport are supported in the literature, Forbes et al. (2006) identify that there has been clear scrutiny of the previously uncritical promotion of sport as a purely prosocial activity. While participation in sport clearly has its advocates, there are those who question its positive impacts, and until recently the assumption that participation in sport is always positive has largely gone unchallenged (Engelberg and Moston 2020). Participation in sport is evidently used to address a wide range of social problems (Bailey 2005; Coalter 2007; Tacon 2007) however, Muller et al. (2008) conclude that there is limited support for the assumption that sport can act as a social panacea. Sport is described as a 'potent force' for both good and bad in the world (Jarvie 2006). Schwery and Cade (2009) challenge the assumption that sport is the 'best' solution for all individuals, and explain that although there is potential for sport to aid personal development and enhance life experiences, there are also clear dangers and risks that need to be taken seriously.

Critcher (2000) observes that those leading and playing sport may not always promote the pro-social values that sports are proclaimed to bestow. Utting (1996) explains that not all sports are actually characterised by fair play or, most relevantly for this thesis, the absence of any criminal associations. Crosset (1999) acknowledges that sport often teaches people to behave in certain ways however, these are not always positive. He identified that through sport people are encouraged to ignore pain, hurt others, and hide their fears. Some athletes may even be encouraged to accept pain and injury as fundamental aspects of their sports, and as worthwhile manifestations of what it is to be an elite athlete (Pike and Scott 2014). Although people are largely free to participate in sport according to their own volition, Caruso (2011) questions the voluntary nature of some sports participation, and states that in some cases it can involve coercion, threat, aggressive behaviour, and extreme competition. Sport is regularly extolled for enabling the development of positive values and interpersonal skills, but a number of authors question how viable sport is as a mechanism to deliver these values. Christiansen (2010, p.95) states, "*in reality sport proves to be anything but moderation. It is excess and transgression rather than restraint and modesty. In sport the focus is not on what is morally good but on the best performance*".

Crabbe (2000, p.381) identifies the specific negative connotations of sport: "*drug-taking, violence, corruption, cheating, racism, homophobia, intimidation, sex scandals and other*

*forms of criminal behaviour have become part of the very fabric of media representations of sport*. Coubertin (2000) describes sport as a place where there is freedom of excess. While he describes this in positive terms – that athletes flourish in such an environment – this excess may lead to negative behaviours. In Ekholm's (2013) review of the sport and crime prevention literature it was identified that in some cases, far from reducing criminality, it was in fact sport that was a responsible factor in the generation of crime. Armstrong and Hodges-Ramon (2015) term sport as a 'nexus' for criminal activity, and describe the assumption that sport is a simplistic solution to any anti-social or criminal behaviour as 'naive'; they identify that sport may ultimately serve as an introduction to criminal and ethically questionable behaviours.

### **Prosecution of Athletes**

Research has consistently suggested a disparity when comparing the treatment of athletes and non-athletes in terms of arrest and prosecution rates. Despite allegations that criminal activity by athletes will result in swifter and higher arrest rates (Benedict and Klein 1997) in an attempt by police to not appear to be giving preferential treatment, the early findings of Purdy and Richard (1983) suggest that athletes are consistently treated differently when caught committing criminal offences, and this has received further support. Crosset (1999) criticises sporting institutions in the US for their inability to hold athletes accountable when they commit criminal offences, and he went further to suggest that this failure extended to the court system when it came to prosecution and sentencing.

Despite some suggesting that there are higher rates of certain criminal offences in sporting communities than non-sporting communities, a study by Benedict and Klein (1997) demonstrates a striking difference between prosecution rates of athletes when compared to national crime statistics for the same offence. They examined the cases of 217 athletes reported to the police for a felonious sex crime and discovered that in contrast with the national rate of 54% of arrests for rape resulting in conviction, only 24% of the athlete sample was successfully prosecuted. While prosecution rates for such offences are notoriously low, this represents a significant difference between the sporting and non-sporting communities. One reason for this disparity offered by Benedict and Klein (1997, p.91) is what they term the "*jock safety net*", which refers to the significant resources made available to athletes in the form of finances, respectable advocates such as coaches and agents, and accessibility to good legal provisions. Otto (2009) reveals discrepancies in sentencing rates within the athlete world as a whole, finding that 56% of the professional athletes examined were subject to some form of prison sentence, whereas only 32.5% of collegiate athletes received jail time. This suggests that the 'jock

safety net' may be more effective at different times of an athlete's career. Zajda (2011) considers the lack of criminal charges that follow on-pitch violence even if this violence did not occur in the course of play. He identified that athletes who assaulted other athletes were afforded more latitude when it came to prosecution, and that within the USA not once has a hometown athlete been prosecuted for a game-related offence.

More recently, Withers (2015) considered the rates of domestic violence and sexual assaults occurring within the sports of baseball, American football and basketball, and found that over a five-year period only one athlete was convicted out of sixty-four reported crimes. She suggests that professional athletes are rarely charged with offences, even when there is evidence against them and if cases do progress to court, athletes are seldom found guilty. Withers (2015, p.378) concludes by stating, "*we value professional athletes for their aggressiveness and brute strength and, without consequence we have created a class of individuals who are above reproach when these characteristics present outside of the game*".

In June 2016, there was uproar when the sentence for a Stanford student found guilty of sexual assault was dispensed. Brock Turner, an elite swimmer, was given a six-month prison sentence; the maximum sentence for his offence was fourteen years imprisonment. The judge has subsequently been criticised for this light sentence, with the prosecution observing that initial reports into the case consistently cited the defendant's athletic prowess alongside the offence he had committed. A petition was created by Change (2016) calling for a review into the judge, which garnered wide spread support (over 800,000 signatures). It stated that "*Judge Persky failed to see that the fact that Brock Turner is a white male star athlete at a prestigious university does not entitle him to leniency*". This example contributes to a public perception that the judicial system offers preferential treatment to celebrated athletes (Benedict and Klein 1997).

### **Sport and Crime Reduction**

As identified by Yar (2014) one of the most popular dimensions of sport and crime research is that which considers sport in its role as diversion from deviant or criminal activity. Many authors have made links between active participation in sport and reduced criminal behaviour (Coalter 1996; Nichols 1997, 2004, 2007; Hartmann and Depro 2006) and most recently Brosnan (2020) identifies links between sport participation in the community and reduced rates of both property and violent crimes. Within prisons sport has been shown to have a positive impact on mental health, preparation for release, general life and culture, and on encouraging desistance from crime (Lewis and Meek 2012; Meek and Lewis 2013, 2014; Woods et al. 2020). Mahoney and Stattin (2000)

suggest that those who are involved in structured sporting activities are less likely to offend or be involved in anti-social behaviour incidents. Abbot and Barber (2007) support this notion of structure, arguing that young people involved in activities that lack structure are at the highest risk in terms of engaging in young offending, and they are the most likely to have a higher number of deviant peers.

A number of reasons are offered for the apparent salutary role of sport in crime reduction – as individuals are involved in sport it is believed that their self-discipline and self-esteem improves (Ewing et al. 2002) and that they no longer feel the need to engage in anti-social behaviours that previously served to boost their image (Nichols and Crow 2004). Sport can offer a direct diversion from offending, provide opportunities for self-control, improve personal fitness and mental health, reduce boredom, develop cognitive competences, expose individuals to positive role models as opposed to deviant peers, provide natural excitement, enhance employment opportunities, and act as a cathartic release of aggression (Spreitzer 1994; Nichols 1997,2004; Morris et al. 2004; Smith and Waddington 2004; Dunning 2005). Sport can provide a sense of belonging (Schwery and Eggenberger 2003; Kunz 2004) and those who advocate its crime reducing potential observe that being physically active can have moral and redemptive merits (Armstrong and Hodges-Ramon 2015). Sport can be utilised as a 'hook' to engage individuals and provide them with behaviourally modifying opportunities and supportive relationships (Nevill and Poortvliet 2011).

A number of authors highlight that the evidence of sport programmes in crime reduction is far from conclusive (Utting 1996). Armstrong and Hodges (2015) echo the comment of Robins (1990, p.26) that those supporters of crime reduction programmes are "*propelled by a sort of aggressive optimism*", and state that policy tends to be based on isolated successes rather than firm evidence. A number of programmes focus on individuals already involved in crime, therefore it is not clear how much of a contribution sport makes in stopping crime from occurring in the first place. Crabbe (2000) questions the amount of available evidence to support sports programmes in their crime reducing role, and while many positive conclusions have been drawn, empirical evidence about the specifics of how and why these programmes work and how enduring the effects become is difficult to find. The results of studies into sport participation and crime levels tend to be ambiguous, and there is limited definitive evidence (Brosnan 2020), as most studies tend to focus on exclusively men or women, or feature small samples making generalisability difficult (Vermillion 2007). Hartmann and Massoglia (2007, p.485) conclude that "*despite its long-standing popular appeal, the idea that athletic activity is a deterrent to crime and delinquency suffers from a distinct lack of empirical support*".

Not only have authors questioned the amount of empirical evidence available to show that sport can have a deterrent influence, they have also suggested that involvement in sport may have the opposite effect. Quinn (1995) states that while sporting activities can have positive effects, they can also serve to enhance negative learning experiences and as a result increase the risk of delinquency, particularly in youths. A number of authors suggest that involvement in sport may expedite and promote antisocial behaviour (Hartmann & Massoglia 2007), with sport potentially acting as a risk factor for aggressive and illegal behaviour (Burton and Marshall 2005). Stansfield (2017) goes as far as to state that sport fails as a social control measure. Davis and Menard (2013) found that while studies considering general criminal activity may illustrate a protective influence of sport, studies that consider specific types of illegal behaviour (such as sexual aggression) show that participation in sport tends to lead to an increase in that specific nefarious behaviour.

Authors have suggested that the early optimism associated with sport as crime prevention was premature (Hartmann and Massoglia 2007). While there is evidence of sporting programmes and crime prevention outcomes, it is important that authors avoid making the simple assumption that sport 'works' (Groombridge 2016). It may be important to consider the specific nature of participation and the type of offending behaviour that is being examined (Davis and Menard 2013) before drawing firm conclusions about the preventative nature of sport and criminal activity. Sport clearly has the potential to contribute to crime prevention, but sport is not a 'cure all'; the roots of crime need to be understood rather than targeted solely by the provision of sport (Ekholm 2019).

### **Athletes and Criminal Activity**

Jackson et al. (2006) describe crime as a natural function of society, and as such criminal incidents will occur in all facets of society, including sport. Athletes, like others in society, commit crimes. Teitelbaum (2005, p.12) states that sports heroes have been known to act in ways that have considerably damaging consequences and explains that among the many athletes that succeed there are also "*gifted athletes who lose it: lose their perspective, lose their balance, lose their appropriateness*" and commit crimes. There is a body of research into the criminal activities of athletes with a great deal of focus on the collegiate system in the US. This area of research considers what Yar (2014) identifies as the potential predisposition of athletes towards criminal or anti-social behaviour with some authors being as bold as to state that being an athlete makes it more likely for an individual to commit a crime (Kudlac 2010).

There have been a number of investigations into the criminal behaviours of athletes particularly in the US (Benedict 1998, 2004) but also in the UK (Smith and Stewart 2003) and Australia (Wilson et al. 2008). The results of these have largely shown a disproportionate number of athletes committing crimes (Engelberg and Moston 2020). Results of these studies as a collective appear equivocal, with some suggesting that athletes are more likely to commit crimes than non-athletes (Chandler et al. 1999; Kudlac 2010), some that the relationship between sport and crime is dependent on the type of offence committed (Caruso 2011; Veliz and Shakib 2012) and others that continue to promote sport's crime reducing qualities (Hartmann and Depro 2006). Research conducted to date has a focus primarily on the activities of male athletes, with very limited reference to the behaviour of female athletes. The majority of research focuses on the following three main types of crime perpetrated by male athletes: violent crime, violence against women, and sexual violence/sexual aggression. As will become evident, while the forthcoming content is important in order to set the context of what is understood about sport and crime, a considerable number of the studies included are dated. (The reasons for this will be covered further in the 'Limitations of Previous Research' section (p. 53) later in this chapter.)

## **Violent Crime**

The issue of violence in sport has long been acknowledged (Parent and Fortier 2018); and it is recognised that many sports actively encourage aggression and violence in athletes. Messner (1990, p.203) refers to 'bodies as weapons' in sport and states that:

*"in many of our most popular sports, the achievement of goals (scoring and winning) is predicated on the successful utilisation of violence - that is, these are activities in which the human body is routinely turned into a weapon to be used against other bodies, resulting in pain, serious injury, and even death".*

He notes that in some sports (particularly contact sports) violent behaviours are viewed as occupational imperatives that athletes need to display in order to be competitive in that sport. Although Coakley and Pike (2009) argue that the origins of violence in sport are diverse and that there is no single source, Terry and Jackson (1985) view aggression in athletes as a learned behaviour that develops in a culture that not only reinforces but models violence through the behaviours of coaches, team mates, governing bodies, referees, fans and the media. Crosset (1999) supports this notion of athletes learning to be violent via coach and teammate influence. For some it is the apparent need to conform to a violent sport ethic that results in athletes seeing aggression and violence as natural, 'normal' elements of their sport (Young 1993). This level of normality can help athletes to avoid feelings of guilt when they display negative behaviours in an environment that



condones violence and views it favourably (Winlow et al. 2001). The normalisation of violence may also account for the ways in which some athletes appear to push legal boundaries with apparent 'impunity' (Armstrong and Hodges-Ramon 2015).

Although violence can cause damage to other people (Jamieson and Orr 2009), for some athletes intimidation and violence are seen as part of the game (Shields 1999). For others, the need to display behaviours that are considered the norm results in violence manifesting itself in what Groombridge (2016) refers to as 'overconforming deviance'. He notes that it is inevitable that being an athlete in an environment where violence is seemingly condoned and, for some, encouraged, there will be implications for an athlete's wider behaviour. Coakley (2001) finds that some athletes admit that their involvement in violent sport influences their behaviour off the field.

The direct link between participation in sport and violent behaviour away from the sporting arena has been made by a number of authors. Bredemeier et al. (1986) found that participation in contact sports was linked to greater aggressive tendencies and Forbes et al. (2006) discovered that participation in aggressive high school sports leads to increased interpersonal violence during college. Kreager (2007) also found a connection between participation in both American football and wrestling, and the demonstration of violent behaviours. Koss and Gaines (1993) found a stronger link with violence in 'revenue producing sports' whereas Crosset et al. (1996) make the distinction between contact and non-contact sports finding that the majority of reported assaults concerned athletes in contact sports such as basketball, American football and ice hockey.

While there have been studies into many different sports and violent offences committed by athletes, there is a significant amount of research into ice hockey, with researchers acknowledging the unique position of ice hockey as a lens through which to view a sporting culture. For example, Silverwood (2015, p.5) acknowledges the unique nature of ice-hockey and the violence displayed by players: "*there are no other circumstances within the UK where a bare knuckle fist fight would occur in full public view without drawing the attention of the police or the authorities*". Despite fighting being illegal in terms of the rules of the game, violence in ice hockey appears to be a condoned act that is accepted by players, fans, owners and officials (Silverwood 2015). Pappas et al. (2004) explains that the socialisation into ice hockey is different than for other sports as fighting plays a pivotal role in competition. This proclivity towards violence has been found to be apparent even within youth and pro-junior teams (Weinstein et al. 1995). Further, Bloom and Smith (1996) found links between involvement in ice hockey and

approval of violence off the ice. They discovered that those athletes participating at a higher level were less likely to disapprove of violence and to behave violently in other sports, than those playing at a lower level, or than non-athletes. Pappas et al. (2004) discovered that interpersonal aggression both on and off the ice was a common feature in the lives of ice hockey players.

Despite some authors drawing clear parallels between violence in sport and displays of violence away from the arena, there are some words of caution against making an assumption that the two are indelibly linked. A number of authors note that there is little empirical evidence of a link between athlete violence on the field of play and outside the sports environment (Benedict and Klein 1997; Young 2000). For some the link is weak (Koss and Gaines 1993), and in some studies, it is not evident at all (Schwartz and Nogrady 1996; Caron et al. 1997). Leal et al. (2016) found that contrary to the popular opinion that there is a violence problem in the NFL, arrest rates are lower than those of the general population, and empirical data does not support these beliefs (Stallings and Ward 2017).

Sport as a culture is reflective of the wider society within which it sits. Young (1993) argues that any links between involvement in sport and violence outside of sport simply mirror the problems of violence in society; violence in one area of life is often highly connected with violence in other areas (Fagan and Browne 1994). Caruso (2011) examined the link between sport participation and three types of crime (property crime, violent crime, and juvenile crime). While sport impacted negatively on the other two forms of crime, there was a positive association between sport and violent crime. These findings are caveated by Caruso who states that violent crime tends to emerge from social activities. Therefore, while these findings showed a link with sport, it is likely that these levels of crime could be apparent in any form of social activity. Caruso's findings tend to support Paccagnella and Grove (1997) who conclude that despite numerous media reports about the violent behaviour of high-profile athletes, there is actually very little empirical research that can provide a defining link between participation in sport and violent crime. Gage (2008) suggests any link could be explained simply by the fact that more violent sports attract more violent people with pre-existing aggressive tendencies; therefore, these individuals would display these attributes regardless of the sport they play. It is clear that while evidence exists for some examples of athletes displaying violent tendencies outside of sport, it is difficult to argue a conclusive link. Pappas et al. (2004, p.291) offer a concluding remark: "*what remains unclear however, is whether athletic participation – in particular, the violent strategies learned in sport – contributes to the*

*likelihood that athletes will be violent in interpersonal relationships*". This can also be true of violence within other non-sporting situations.

## **Violence against Women**

Crosset (1999) states that within the 1990's no social issue in sport received more media attention in the USA than violence against women; Forsdike et al. (2020) describe it as a global epidemic. Continued media interest has led to what Forbes et al. (2006) refer to as a 'common belief' that athletes are more likely than men in other areas of society to behave violently towards women. There is a clear body of research that concentrates on the dominance of violence against women in sports settings, in addition to a proclivity towards violence endorsing attitudes among athletes (Dyson and Flood 2008; McCray 2015). Given the overall shift in public awareness of, and concerns about, domestic violence, and the increased reach of the media afforded by the continually evolving internet (Hunton 2012), cases of domestic violence involving sport stars have started to receive significant media attention. The vast majority of cases refer to men. However, the arrest of US soccer player Hope Solo, and the allegations made against her in 2014 (charges were dropped in 2018), and the case of Brittney Griner and her wife Glory Johnson in 2015, highlighted that domestic violence is not solely the preserve of men. Domestic violence cases have led to public and professional concern about the potential link between sport and violence towards women (Forbes et al. 2006). It has been suggested that one consequence of involvement in the aggressive, hyper-masculine and violent world of sport may be an increased level of violence towards women (Coakley 2002) with sport described as a 'breeding ground' for domestic violence offences (Sonderlund et al. 2013). However, as with general links to violence, there are concerns regarding the strength of this association (Messner and Stevens 2002).

In their study of ice hockey players, Pappas et al. (2004) identify a culture which displays a lesser regard for women. Forbes et al. (2006) also discovered features within athletes playing highly aggressive sports that could be connected with aggression and violence towards women. Liston et al. (2017) note that sporting environments enable violence against women to arise both directly and indirectly due to the imbedded violence endorsing attitudes and behaviours of athletes. It is suggested that women involved in sport tend to be more tolerant of such attitudes and that sexual harassment is prevalent in sport (Engelberg and Moston 2016) and may even be considered the norm (Australian Sports Commission 2001). The condoning of violence against women, in addition to rigid gender roles and stereotyped constructions of masculinity and femininity, are believed to be among the key drivers of violence against women (Liston et al. 2017) and it appears that sport does little to prevent this from occurring.

Despite studies suggesting a link between involvement in sport and crimes of this nature there are many who dispute this link between the masculinity of sport and violence towards women as too simplistic (Benedict 1998). Boeringer (1996) states that no study into athletes' violence towards women has provided significant results on male athletes being more violent towards women than non-athletes. Crosset (2000) and Messner and Stevens (2002) agree, and argue that not all studies have identified a clear link between athletic team membership and violence or aggression against women. Studies into dating aggression in younger age groups (DeKeseredy and Schwartz 1998; Kann et al. 2000) have acknowledged that aggression against women tends to emerge much earlier than college age (the sample that the majority of studies in this area target), therefore simply attributing aggression towards women to involvement in sport is too crude. McPherson (2002) warns against making generalisations about the sporting community and stresses that men displaying violence and aggression against women is a societal problem which, like other problems in society, is displayed through sport.

### **Sexual Violence/Sexual Aggression**

With violent offences against women by athletes gaining attention in the media and academia, another significant area has emerged: the suggestion that there is a relationship between participation in sport and sexually violent/sexually aggressive acts. Within the US two distinct campus populations have emerged as being 'high-risk' when it comes to committing sexually violent acts: fraternity members and athletes (Sawyer et al. 2002). Jamieson and Orr (2009) devote a whole subsection in their book to 'sexual abuse and violence: the surfacing of criminal complaints against athletes'.

A number of studies have identified statistically significant relationships between athletic participation and sexual aggression in US college athletes, with several citing that athletes are more regularly involved in these types of offences than non-athletes (Johnson 1991; Moore 1991; Frintner and Rubinson 1993; Chandler et al. 1999). Berkowitz (1992) conducted a review of gang rapes by college students between 1980-1992. Of the 24 rapes investigated, twenty-two were committed by members of either fraternities or athletic teams. Koss and Gaines (1993) contend that while alcohol consumption was highly correlated with sexual aggression, being an athlete was also positively linked. Although they question the low response rate and validity of their methodology, they conclude that participation in sport resulted in increased sexual aggression and this link between athletes and sexual assault was most significant in revenue generating sports. Boeringer (1996) considered a number of categories of sexually aggressive behaviour in athletic and non-athletic men and found that athletes

reported higher percentages than non-athletes in all areas. 60% of the athletes questioned reported at least one occasion of using verbal coercion to obtain sexual favours, 28% reported using drugs and alcohol to gain sexual favours, and 15% reported using actual physical force. Forbes et al. (2006) state that there is empirical evidence of a link between participation in sport by college men and dating aggression/sexual coercion. They considered different elements of dating aggression in forty-seven men who had been involved in aggressive sports while studying at high school, and subsequently at college. In comparison to the non-sporting control group they found that those men engaged in more sexual coercion and physical aggression to partners, caused more physical injuries to partners, and displayed greater levels of sexism and hostility towards women. They emphasise that their sample was taken from a college with no athletic scholarships or athletic dorms with very little support for sport across campus, thus emphasising that the link between sport and sexual aggression is not reserved just for professional athletes or those attending high level sporting universities.

Studies have consistently suggested that college athletes are over represented when it comes to incidents of aggressive and violent sexual behaviours on campuses (Pappas et al. 2004). Frintner and Rubinson (1993) discovered that despite the athletic population of a US university comprising just 2% of the university population, 21% of sexual assaults and 18% of attempted sexual assaults were attributed to athletes or members of other campus clubs. Crosset et al. (1996) went further and examined twenty universities and found that again, despite athletes making up a fractional percentage of the student population (3%) they were directly responsible for 19% of the sexual assaults reported to Campus Judicial Affairs Officers. Most recently Foubert et al. (2020) discovered that student athletes, and members of fraternities, were more likely to be involved in sexual assaults than other men on US college campuses. Some suggestion for these skewed figures is offered by Dershowitz (1994) who claims that athletes, given their high profile and popularity, are often the targets of false rape claims. Although it does not account for the disparity in figures it is important to note that US college campuses are notoriously dangerous locations when it comes to sexual assaults, Fischer et al. (2000) report that around a quarter of college women describe being sexually assaulted during their time at college.

Sanday (1981) studied rape within tribal communities and found that cultures that display a higher tolerance for violence also have higher incidents of rape. Sanday (1990) uses the term 'rape culture' to explain gang rape within certain college fraternities. Although she is critical of the way some have adapted her concept of rape culture to organisations (Sanday 1996), she suggests that when men become emotionally bound together in

groups that accentuate physical dominance, they often express this sense of devotedness by showing disregard for women. Pappas et al. (2004, p.306) found support for this notion during their research into ice hockey players and their attitudes towards women, one athlete was quoted as saying:

*“I think that date rape is prevalent among the jock culture. There are things that are not violent but they just seem kind of wrong that guys do in terms of how they relate to women – off ice. They treat women like objects – sexual objects. They talk about them as if they aren’t there, as if they (the athletes) were in the locker room talking...and don’t care what they say at all because they think they are still going to have sex or whatever. Things like that machismo group mentality, that locker room mentality, comes out in off-ice behaviour”.*

The endorsement or acceptance of rape myths is also a key feature of sexual aggression towards women (Lonsway and Fitzgerald 1994) with studies suggesting that those who show a higher level of acceptance and endorsement are more likely to be involved in sport (Boeringer 1999; Sawyer et al. 2002; Forbes et al. 2006). Most recently Walton-Fisette (2018) states that collegiate athletics can be an environment that perpetuates a ‘rape prone culture’.

A number of studies have examined the link between competitiveness and involvement in sexual aggression. Both Smith and Stewart (2003) and Caron et al. (1997) claim that men who are more competitive are more likely to display sexually aggressive tendencies. Caron et al. (1997) suggest that although athletes show higher levels of competitiveness than non-athletes there is no significant difference between the two groups in terms of sexual aggression. They point out that it is important to consider that the competitive nature exists outside of sport.

It is argued that a social environment rather than specific individual characteristics provides the impetus for many sexual offences (Geis 1971). Given the characteristics of many sporting environments, it is unsurprising that academics have made the links between sport and sexual offences. Caron et al. (1997) note that the fact that a large number of athletes are accused of rape does not mean they are committing a disproportionate amount of rapes in comparison to the rest of society. They call for the characteristics of sexually aggressive individuals to be examined, and not just whether they participate in sport. Jackson (1991) identifies no significant difference in the likelihood of an athlete committing rape when compared to a non-athlete, but when someone with a high profile is accused, they simply receive more attention. Smith and Stewart (2003) considered athletes at a major UK university; they examined the differences in levels of sexual aggression, hostility toward women, competitiveness, and rape-supportive attitudes in ninety-eight contact sport athletes, ninety-four non-contact

sport athletes, and ninety non-athletes. They conclude that athletes do not have a greater inclination to commit sexual assault than non-athletes, and that any speculation of a link between athletes and sexual assault in the media is likely to be an oversimplification. Jackson et al. (2006) support this conclusion, stating that previous deviant behaviours are far more reliable indicators of a propensity towards sexual violence than involvement in sport. They suggest that those who indulge in sexually deviant acts are rarely strangers to deviance. It is likely that they will have been previously involved in different criminal acts, and sexual deviance serves as an expansion of the deviant acts they are prepared to commit. Leonard (2006) casts further doubt on studies that claim a disproportionate number of male athletes are involved in sexual offences, explaining that findings are often based on arrest statistics rather than focusing on who is actually charged with, and guilty, of an offence.

### **The Role of Sporting Masculinity**

A considerable number of authors who have written in the area of sport and crime make direct links between offences committed by athletes, and the negative behaviours displayed within sport, with a particular focus on the tendency of sport to promote and encourage male hegemony. Hegemonic masculinity refers to a set of social norms that influence how men live their everyday lives and tend to be built on the premise that men should be powerful, physically strong, and stoic (Arxer 2011). Connell (2005) states that these ideals form a benchmark that men are continually measured against. Gender norms emphasise traits such as aggression and power as valuable and male (Fleming et al. 2015) which clearly has the potential to translate into violent behaviour (Brown et al. 2018).

Dunning (1999) describes sport as a masculinity validating experience which serves as an outlet through which to demonstrate power and physical prowess. Sport enables athletes to embody traditional masculine qualities such as power and strength and exhibit violence legitimately. Sport is considered to be a very important aspect of the lives of men and boys in particular (Flood 2011) and offers men the opportunity to construct their image of what it is to be a man. For some, the masculine socialisation process inherent in sport is held primarily responsible for displays of violence on and off the field of play (Terry and Jackson 1985). The ideals of sport and masculinity create an environment where in many cases violence is not only accepted, but encouraged (Messner 1990), with coaches and parents feeding the tolerance of sports violence, as aggression is viewed as a way to prepare for success in a man's world (Fine 1987). In many sports, violence is integral, and actions that would ordinarily constitute assault in everyday life, are a fundamental part of the sporting contest (Jackson 2016). For some athletes,

violence will be viewed as a way to demonstrate masculinity and meet the gender expectations of the group, and to gain respect from others (Coakley 2001; Connell 2005), with athletes possessing stronger levels of traditional masculine ideologies showing a stronger inclination to fight than other athletes (Weinstein et al. 1995).

Forbes et al. (2006, p.450) provide support for the 'unflattering characterisation' that sport serves as a training ground for sexism, misogyny and violence (Benedict 1998; Benedict and Yaeger 1998; Messner and Stevens 2002). They state that "*sports are a product of a patriarchal society with deeply engrained sexism and misogyny. Those countless boys who have been admonished not to 'throw like a girl' have received a minor lesson in baseball and a major lesson in misogyny*". Researchers have identified that violence against women is trained through sport (Crosset, 1999), supported by athletes (Curry 1991, 1998, 2000) and encouraged (Messner and Sabo 1990; Nelson 1994; Benedict 1998), and that hyper masculinity is the strongest predictor of sexual aggression among athletes (Murnen et al. 2002). Godenzi et al. (2001) suggest that all male groups such as sports teams promote values associated with sexual aggression that athletes then feel compelled to accept. The intimidation of women serves as an opportunity to demonstrate male dominance (Connell 2005; Brown et al. 2018). The concern is that the objectification of women and admiration of violence associated with aggressive team sports lend themselves to an environment where mistreatment of women is seen as acceptable. Sanday (1996) draws concerning parallels between the promotion of such values in sport and those values that exist in rape-prone societies or institutions. While clearly not every man involved in sport will display these values or tendencies, the support of traditional hegemonic views could be seen to be a significant contributing factor to offences against women committed by athletes.

### **Athlete Offences and the Role of Alcohol**

A significant and enduring body of research demonstrates a consistent link between alcohol consumption and a broad range of crime (Joksch and Jones 1993; Graham and West 2001). It has been shown that increased alcohol use leads to greater rates of crime including property damage (Wilkinson and Livingston 2012), disturbance (Kypri et al. 2008), and including violent offences (Lipton and Gruenewald 2002; Gruenewald et al. 2006; Mazerolle et al. 2012). Allen and Jacques (2013) make the distinction between alcohol crime (offences that are inextricably linked to alcohol such as drink-driving) and alcohol-related crime – offences not defined by alcohol but where alcohol has a clear influence. Goldstein (1985) describes crimes involving an intoxicated offender or victim as psychopharmacological crimes. Alcohol is the most prevalently used drug among the



athlete population (O'Brien and Lyons 2000), therefore the role of alcohol in offences committed by athletes cannot be ignored.

Given the social nature of sport, alcohol is often present in sporting environments, which places athletes at a potentially higher risk of developing alcohol related problems than members of the general public (O'Brien and Lyons 2000). Lisha and Sussman (2010) conducted a review of studies which consider the relationship between participation in sport and alcohol consumption. Although they acknowledge a number of studies that identified an inverse relationship between participation and alcohol consumption (Elder et al. 2000; Thorlindsson and Bemburg 2006), they conclude that in general alcohol use is increased among athletes when compared to non-athletes. It has been reported that between 80-88% of intercollegiate American athletes (where most of the studies into sport and crime to date have been conducted) regularly drink alcohol (O'Brien and Lyons 2000; Green et al. 2001).

Research suggests that binge drinking is also rife within sporting communities (Martens et al. 2006). Binge drinking is classified as five or more drinks in a row for a man, four for a woman (Brenner and Swanik 2007). College athletes are significantly more likely to have binge drunk in the last two weeks than non-athletes, while the national average for students is 44% it is suggested that approximately 60% of male and 50% of female college athletes self-report binge drinking behaviour (Wechsler et al. 1997; Leichter et al. 1998; Nelson and Wechsler 2001). Athletes are more likely than non-athletes to be involved in risky activities related to alcohol consumption including drink-driving, risky sexual behaviours and an increased likelihood to be involved in fights (Nattiv and Puffer 1991; Nattiv et al. 1997; Dumas et al. 2017). Young men aged between 18-24 have been shown to have an increased likelihood of problem drinking (Thorley 1985). This is also the age group where sport participation is the highest (Jamieson and Orr 2009) and also when criminal activity is most prolific (Kudlac 2010). Findings suggest that the culture of sport itself is often associated with excessive alcohol consumption (Kwan et al. 2014). Athletes may choose to drink excessively in a bid to adhere to the norms of their team (Grossbard et al. 2009), in an effort to establish a 'sportsman identity' (Clayton and Harris 2008), or as a form of reward for their hard work or athletic endeavours (Pitts et al. 2019).

Levels of drinking among athletes has been found to differ according to gender, type of sport and level played (Pate et al. 1996; Peretti-Watel et al. 2002; Ford 2007). Brenner and Swanik (2007) examined the drinking habits of 720 male (54%) and female (46%) college athletes at three different levels of university (Division I, II and III). They found

that 75% of participants reported high-risk drinking at least once in the past two weeks, and male athletes reported drinking at a significantly higher level than female athletes (81% vs 68%). High-risk drinking was more prevalent among higher division athletes and finally those athletes involved in team sports reported more high-risk drinking than those individual athletes (84% vs 57%). The levels of drinking reported by team sports indicates that heavy alcohol use by athletes is likely a social phenomenon (Brenner and Swanik 2007), potentially due to athletic identity and athletes emulating the behaviour of teammates and other athletes (Thombs and Hamilton 2002). Nattiv et al. (1997) state that athletes involved in contact sports consume more alcohol more frequently than those in non-contact sports. Pappas et al. (2004) refer to the self-medicating effects of alcohol for athletes as a way to handle the stresses of sport. Stress-related drinking and the use of alcohol as a coping mechanism for sport related anxiety have also received academic support (Marcello et al. 1989; Tricker et al. 1989; Lisha and Sussman 2010).

In terms of offences, a link is made between an athlete's consumption of alcohol and violent offences. Pappas et al. (2004) report that players directly associate their use of alcohol with their violent behaviours. Alcohol can impair judgement, reasoning and communication and has been associated with either committing violent acts, or helping to excuse them (Crowell and Burgess 1996; Benedict 1998). Gustafson (1986) describes alcohol as a socially sanctioned aggressive solution for men to utilise and Messerschmidt (1993) views it as a means to demonstrate masculinity. Kudlac (2010, p.25) views alcohol as a potential catalyst for athletes: "*increased alcohol use by athletes, some who are prone to aggression already, may provide the added spark toward crime*". Excessive alcohol use in male peer groups has been identified as a contributory factor to sexual violence against women (Koss and Dinero 1988) and Koss and Gaines (1993) claim that when alcohol use was controlled, the relationship between athletic membership and sexual aggression was eradicated.

### **Available Explanations of Athlete Criminality**

*"Many of the most important theories of criminal justice discuss tendencies in criminals that would seem apparent to anyone who is an athlete" (Jamieson and Orr 2009, p.158).*

The literature offers numerous explanations for why an athlete may commit a crime. These range from somatotype to specific application of criminological theory, and will briefly be explored in the following sections.

## **Historic Explanations of Crime and the Athlete**

The application of criminal theory to the context of sport has generally focussed on why involvement in sport is positive in terms of reduction of deviant behaviours however, some authors have considered the application of criminal theory to the more negative sides of sport in order to offer an explanation for athlete's negative behaviours.

Early research into a link between involvement in sport and crime focussed on factors such as body and personality type. On a simplistic level, it was believed that the body of an athlete could be linked with criminal behaviour (Kudlac 2010). The link has been made historically between mesomorphs and those who commit crimes; a more masculine body type has been found to characterise the average criminal (Hartl et al. 1982). Mesomorphs are believed to have less restraint and higher levels of impulsive self-gratification (Sheldon 1949) and to be more domineering and inclined to display higher levels of physical activity (Glueck and Glueck 1956). This early application attempted to provide a reductionist approach to athletes and crime. Eysenck (1996) describes how extroverts and high psychotic scorers (factors linked to criminality) are likely to take up sport and excel as they seek sensory stimulation and are more accepting of the pain experienced in sport.

## **Criminological Theories used to Explain the Links Between Athletes and Crime**

Atkinson and Young (2008) and Davis and Menard (2013) identify a number of key criminological theories that can be used to explain the positive and negative consequences of being involved in sport. Social Control theory and Life Course theory can be applied to explain the positive effects of sport. In terms of Social Control theory, it has been suggested that involvement in sport can increase a person's social bonds to society; by being committed to a sport they are tied to something and unlikely to want to jeopardise this. Agnew and Petersen (1989) also claim that sport reduces interest in criminal activity, and the opportunities for nefarious activities are reduced because of the time that sport takes up (Burton and Marshall 2005). Jackson et al. (2006) support Life Course theory and state that the group affiliation that athletes experience can act as a protective factor against involvement in crime. Involvement in sport can be viewed as a positive life event which according to Life Course theory can shape future behaviour and potentially reduce the likelihood of offending.

Strain theory can be applied to sport in both a negative and positive way. Sport can act as a means to overcome strain, as a cathartic safety valve and as a behavioural coping strategy (Atkinson and Young 2008). However, it can also be applied in terms of relative

deprivation. When an athlete is not as successful as their peers (subjectively or objectively), or fails to achieve a positively valued goal, it is likely that they will experience negative strains, even if they are performing well (Davis and Menard 2013). The real issue occurs when an athlete perceives their treatment as unfair, and has a perceived sense of injustice. Frustration and resentment could encourage an athlete to adopt illegal means to secure the success they believe they deserve.

Differential association theory can also be applied in negative and positive terms. As Sutherland (1974) suggests, a great deal of behaviour can be learned from significant others. Athletes may experience learned aggression (Smith 1983) or other negative behaviours that may increase the likelihood of committing criminal acts, particularly if negative behaviours are encouraged or revered in that environment (Atkinson and Young 2008). The opposite is also true: if negative behaviours can be learnt, so too can positive ones, and these coupled with a desire to continue committing to sport (as touched upon in control theory) may act as protective measures against criminal influences.

### **Suggested Causes of Criminal Behaviour in Athletes**

Previous research into athletes and crime has resulted in a number of reasons being suggested as to why athletes specifically may find themselves involved in criminal activity.

**a. Cultural Spill over Theory.** Baron et al. (1988) refer to Cultural Spill over theory to explain the more a culture endorses violence in a 'legitimate' setting, the more likely it is that this violence will be transferred to other spheres of life where violence is less accepted (Kudlac 2010). Pappas et al. (2004, p.304) found evidence of this crossover of violence in their study of ice hockey players: "*They make demands on athletes to be tough because they want to see it, it (aggression) automatically carries over... if you're paying a guy 3 million dollars a year to knock somebody's block off, do you expect him to turn it off?*". Forbes et al. (2006), Yar (2014) and Groombridge (2016) all note that by rewarding aggression and violence within sport, and affording it gallant status, there is a very real risk of this behaviour transferring to 'off field' activities. It could be considered common sense (Woods 2011) that athletes who become accustomed to using violence and physical intimidation within their sports, revert to these behaviours when dealing with conflict outside their sports (Armstrong and Hodges-Ramon 2015). This theory clearly does not apply to those athletes involved in non-violent sports who subsequently commit crimes.

**b. Terminal Adolescence.** For some the likelihood of athletes committing crime is associated with their emotional growth. Teitelbaum (2005) claims that some athletes are so indulged that they maintain a state of 'terminal adolescence', never growing up because they don't have to. Athletes may develop unrealistic views of themselves, and Teitelbaum identifies features such as self-centeredness, insensitivity to the needs of others, and a sense of invincibility that is commonly seen in adolescents as being features of some athletes. House (1989) describes this as 'the jocks itch', whereby athletes do not mature into adults, and behave at thirty in the same way that they would have at thirteen. Ortiz (2004) terms the effect 'spoiled athlete syndrome'. This stunting in emotional growth may be due to limited access to life experiences outside the athletic world. Teitelbaum (2005) believes that this results in athletes being highly susceptible to temptation, just as adolescents can be. By being sheltered in their sporting world, some athletes may find it hard to identify social boundaries (Kudlac 2010).

**c. Special Population.** Atkinson and Young (2008) argue that athletes can be led to believe they occupy a unique place in society, a 'special population' of people who are socialised into believing that their behaviours and transgressions will be accepted by those in positions of authority. This hubris can lead to the athlete overestimating their standing in society and believing that they are beyond reproach (Coakley and Donnelly 2005; Teitelbaum 2005). Both Robinson (1998) and Kissinger (2009) suggest that this tolerance of behaviour from athletes may also emerge from the communities around them who are prepared to accept and rationalise the deviances of athletes who are somehow protected by the special status they are afforded. Hartman and Massoglia (2007) and Jamieson and Orr (2009) argue that this sense of privilege and entitlement can lead to athletes viewing themselves as being above the law. This is supported by Armstrong and Hodges-Ramon (2015) as well as Kudlac (2010, p.24) who states, "*from the first time they show athletic prowess they are held less accountable for their actions and some start to believe they can get away with anything*".

**d. Ego and Superiority.** An athlete's ego may lead them to defy law enforcement (Jamieson and Orr 2009), encouraged by their sense of superiority and privilege (Groombridge 2016). Teitelbaum (2005, p.102) describes a toxic athlete profile: "*a triad of grandiosity, entitlement and arrogance*" that leads some athletes to be empowered enough to challenge the law (Jamieson and Orr 2009).

**e. Narcissism.** Teitelbaum (2005) suggests that an exaggerated sense of self-importance and entitlement can be prevalent in athletes, which may result in them displaying elements of a narcissistic personality. This is supported by Meek (2014) who

explains that the self-esteem developed through playing sport can lead to narcissism. Groombridge (2016) highlights that narcissism, which is often seen in offenders, is repeatedly linked to anti-social characteristics such as low empathy (Watson and Morris 1991), aggressive reactions to threat (Bushman and Baumeister 1998) and exploitativeness (Campbell et al. 2005).

**f. The Thrill-seeking Nature of Athletes.** As highlighted in the cultural perspective of crime, one of the suggested reasons for crime to be committed is a search for excitement (Ferrell 1999). Blackshaw and Crabbe (2004) believe that deviant behaviour in sport is evident purely because it makes the heart beat faster. This is supported by Hartmann and Massoglia (2007) who attribute the link between sport and the specific offence of drink-driving to the thrill-seeking, hyper physical nature of sport. Jamieson and Orr (2009, p.161) make clear links between thrill seeking behaviour within sport and criminal activity off the field of play:

*“Rushes and buzzes can be exhilarating for the athletes. Risk and the deviancy of their actions along with the thrill of trying not to get caught off the field seem to be very similar to making a dangerous and illegal play on the field and getting a thrill from the official not calling the penalty”.*

**g. The Transient Nature of Sport.** Some athletes will commit offences after their athletic careers are over. As Teitelbaum (2005, p.30) highlights, *“many of today’s heroes do not fare well tomorrow. While some are able to adjust to retirement, many flounder”.* Although many athletes retire and never commit criminal offences, some fail to prepare for a life outside sport, emotionally and financially, and may utilise criminal means to regain control. House (1989) makes links between difficult transitions and terminal adolescence in that many athletes appear unable to absorb the fact that in terms of their sporting career they will be ‘over the hill’ before most of their non-athletic peers have even settled into a career.

**h. Focus on Results.** It has been claimed that there is a tendency in sport to ignore criminal behaviour for the sake of results. Kudlac (2010) emphasises that the inclination of high-level sports teams to look past criminal behaviour does nothing to deter athletes from committing crimes.

**i. Ghetto Loyalty.** It has been suggested that some athletes’ involvement in crime stems from their inability to break away from negative influences, or from a desire to not be separated from old friends. Dohrmann and Evans (2007) use the term ‘ghetto loyalty’ to describe how athletes from impoverished backgrounds feel obligated to remain committed to old friends from home.

**j. Self-destruction.** Some athletes' fall from grace can be attributed to self-destructive behaviours off the field such as drug and alcohol abuse, which will sometimes expose them to higher risk behaviour and, for some, criminal connections (Teitelbaum 2005).

**k. The Negative Influence of Bonding, Loyalty and Group Cohesion.** Snyder (1994) examined the case of nine varsity athletes from a major US university. All were actively involved in sports teams with seven of the athletes forming part of the same swim team. Six of the athletes shared a home and the other three were frequent visitors. Over a two-year period they collectively committed dozens of burglaries and stockpiled around \$50,000 worth of electrical equipment and other property, the majority of which was stored in a rented facility. In terms of the amount stolen, they fitted the profile of professional burglars, but their behaviour in storing the property rather than attempting to sell it made the crimes all the more confusing. The investigating officer described their behaviour as "*an addiction, it was a group thing plus the excitement to see if they could get away with it*" (Snyder 1994, p.237). After examining case files and interviewing a number of the athletes, Snyder offers four explanations for the behaviour of the athletes: flawed character traits; alcohol use; peer pressure; the quest for excitement – an athlete was quoted as saying "*the danger itself was thrilling*" (Snyder 1994, p.241). Snyder demonstrates that although this was an isolated case, it reveals a great deal about the lives of varsity athletes, the way they bond, and their influence relationships. He believes that in this case, the elements of sport that are so routinely celebrated, namely loyalty and group cohesion, actually promoted deviant behaviour. Hughes and Coakley (1991) claim that the bonding that occurs in sport needs to be considered when examining deviant behaviour.

Some of the above suggestions for athlete criminality are based on assumption, others on evidence. All contribute to understanding why athletes may commit crime, but none stand out as a primary reason, and studies to date have failed to focus on the athlete's own explanations, or accounts, of their behaviours.

### **Limitations of previous research**

When considering the relevant literature, it is evident that there appears to be a stagnation of research into athletes and crime over the last fifteen years (McCray 2015). There are some studies from this time (see Sawyer et al. 2002; Murnen and Kohlman 2007), but momentum has clearly slowed. It is suggested, however, that recent calls by the Office of Civil Rights in the US for universities to take more ownership of

investigations into, and sanctions of, criminal acts by students (particularly sexual offences) will invigorate this research area and lead to more modern findings (McCray 2015). Additionally, a great deal of previous research into offences committed by college level athletes in the US was quantitative in nature, which creates its own limitations and gaps. The question is rarely posed to athletes, 'why did you commit a criminal offence?'. Specific details of offences committed by athletes are also rarely addressed in the literature. Koss and Cleveland (1996) identify a number of methodological concerns with studies in this field. They consider the sampling strategies to be too reliant on convenience sampling and often too small in size to be truly representative. Koss and Cleveland (1996, p.181) state that in too many cases, "*qualitative richness has not been matched by quantitative rigor*", once again highlighting a gap in qualitative examinations of athletes who commit crime. Others have questioned the very notion of examining the subject of athletes committing more offences than non-athletes. Jackson et al. (2006, p.72) are very disparaging of studies in this area and state that even with a dearth of reporting of offences researchers have "*managed to ferret out*" enough information to present offences occurring on college campuses by athletes as an issue worth consideration by researchers, crime analysts and social organisations. Leonard (2006) believes that cases of athletes committing crimes have been 'sensationalised', and that there are serious flaws in claims of an epidemic of crime (particularly with regards to violent offences against women) within the athlete population (Lapchick 2003).

A further limitation which may explain the variations in the findings of studies into sport and crime may be the way in which athletes (and crimes) are grouped together as a homogenous group rather than considered individually (Crosset 2000; Humphrey and Kahn 2000). Adams-Curtis and Forbes (2004) emphasise the importance of avoiding blanket assumptions when considering the psychological characteristics of a sample rather than simply its identity as a group of athletes; athletes vary in type significantly from sport to sport and teams will vary too dependent on their cultures, leadership, and experiences and how these affect their behaviours. Sawyer et al. (2002, p.24) urge against the tendency to view athletes as a 'monolithic population' and stated that "*like any group or community, student athletes should not be lumped together as a single entity with presumed identical attitudes and behaviours*". Perhaps, as Kudlac (2010) suggests, it is more important to recognise who identifies as a 'jock' and who doesn't rather than who is an athlete or not.

Jarvie (2006) emphasises that an understanding of sport is essential if we are to truly understand the social world, and in order to do this sport must be viewed in context. As such it must be acknowledged that while not a weakness, in terms of the literature



considered throughout this thesis, the focus is undoubtedly on sport in the global North. It must be noted that geographical, cultural, legal, economic, and political contexts could have an impact on the reasons athletes commit crimes, and research to date does not overtly address this. Much of the research to date originates from a small number of countries, where sport is viewed in a particular way, therefore findings cannot be inferred into all contexts.

## **Conclusion**

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of elite male athletes who commit crimes, and shine a light on a previously unheard collection of narratives. This narrative review demonstrates how research into sport and crime has developed over time, and highlights that there remains much to explore in the area of elite male athlete criminality. The area of sport and crime is undoubtedly complex and we are yet to fully understand the reasons behind athlete criminality.

This review demonstrates that the field of criminology is extremely complex and presenting a comprehensive overview of criminological theory is a demanding task. Crime theory exists in distinct perspectives, and many of these could be applied to the criminal behaviour of athletes although the likelihood of one theory providing a clear answer for a multifaceted nature of athlete criminality is unlikely. Fortunately, there is increasing evidence of an interdisciplinary approach within criminology, which will enable different, and at times competing, theories to be used in an integrated manner to offer an explanation for criminal behaviour.

It is apparent that previous research has considered the many positives that sport has to offer its participants, but also that there is an emergence of research into some of its more negative outcomes. There is a body of evidence linking athletes and increased alcohol consumption, and correlations made between this and criminal behaviour. Additionally links have been made between the male hegemony that exists in sport and offences committed by athletes. The majority of existing literature focuses on sport in its crime reduction guise, rather than considering sport as a potential contributory factor to crime. To date, most research focusses on frequency of arrests with a focus on three main types of crime committed by male athletes (violent crime, violence against women, and sexual violence/sexual aggression). There is a heavy reliance on research conducted in the USA, and there is currently no overall picture of the extent of criminal activity within the UK elite sporting community.

It is evident through the examination of research that while a number of key criminological theories have been suggested as explanations for the positive and negative consequences of being involved in sport, further research is needed. While authors have offered potential explanations of why an athlete may commit a crime, the evidence to support these suggestions is lacking, and studies have consistently failed to consider asking athletes themselves to account for their actions. Current research provides a limited understanding of why crimes occur in the athlete population, and no research into the experiences of elite male athletes who commit crimes has been conducted.

It is envisaged that the findings from this study will provide an in-depth insight into the criminal experiences of elite male athletes and identify circumstances or conditions that could be altered to prevent criminal activity in the future. The findings and conceptual framework will be utilised to enhance theoretical understanding of athlete criminality, and enable practical implications to be pursued.

## Chapter 3: Methodology

### Introduction

The following chapter presents a qualitative methodology designed to enable a transparent and responsive approach to understanding the experiences of elite male athletes who commit crimes. The purpose of the chapter is to provide a clear rationale for the methodological choices made during this research project, and to demonstrate how data were collected and subsequently analysed. The theoretical underpinnings of the study are explored, as are issues of trustworthiness, ethical considerations, and limitations of the study.

### Research Philosophy

If science is a systematic quest for knowledge, then the philosophy of science forms the roots underpinning this quest (Ponterotto 2005). It is suggested that a person's philosophy of science will determine the research principles an individual adopts, and the methodological decisions they make (Ponterotto 2002, 2005, 2010). Science is an active process (Sparkes 1989) and as an individual I will engage in the process via a personal frame of reference which takes into account the assumptions I make regarding the nature of truth and reality (Sparkes 1992). This frame of reference is referred to as a research paradigm (Markula and Silk 2011), and can be defined as "*a set of views about the social world*" (Sparkes 1989 p.135). A paradigm is essentially a world view and highlights what the researcher considers important, legitimate and reasonable (Patton 2002). The paradigm provides the umbrella for the researcher under which fall their views of reality (Ponterotto 2005) and provides the researcher with parameters (Markula and Silk 2011).

Research paradigms are essential in order to set the context for research, providing the researcher with a "*thinking framework*" (Wayhuni 2012 p.69) and guiding them in their assumptions (Denzin and Lincoln 2018). Different paradigms lead researchers to ask different questions, advance different research designs, collect data in varying ways, analyse their data differently, consider alternative ways to represent findings, and finally assess the effectiveness and quality of their research against varying criteria (Sparkes and Smith 2014).

The literature on paradigms can appear daunting and unwieldy and as Aspinwall (2006) notes, the complexity surrounding them can be an unattractive distraction to undertaking research. Holloway and Freshwater (2007, p.973) are critical of the term paradigm and

believe its overuse has resulted in it becoming devoid of meaning: “*it has almost become obligatory, a buzzword when we want to sound academic*”. It is not my intention to discuss the legitimacy of paradigms, instead I hope to present my paradigmatic lens and identify how this informs the current research.

Situated within the concept of a paradigmatic lens are the researcher’s assumptions. Ontology and epistemology are to research what Grix (2004) describes as “*what footings are to a house*”; they form the foundations to the whole structure. Ontology refers to the nature of reality and being, the realm of being (Humphrey 2013). Epistemology is the study, and acquisition, of knowledge, and how this can be communicated to others (Cohen et al. 2007). Axiology refers to the role and place of values in the research process, the realm of values (Humphrey 2013), and rhetorical structure signifies the language and presentation of the research. Finally, methodology identifies the process and procedures of the research. Based on Guba and Lincoln (2005) and Ponterotto (2002) Table 3.1 summarises the basic assumptions of the interpretive paradigm, and to set the context, it also includes the polar opposite paradigm, positivism.

Table 3.1. Paradigmatic assumptions of Positivism and Interpretivism

Item	Positivism	Interpretivism
Ontology	Naïve realism – ‘real’ reality but apprehensible. One true reality	Multiple, equally valid, and socially co-constructed realities. Ontological relativism.
Epistemology	Dualist/objectivist; findings true. Detached researcher role.	Subjective, highly interactive (or transactional), symbiotic researcher-participant roles; potency of interaction uncovers deeper meaning and insight in participant’s lived experiences; dialogical.
Axiology	Researcher values have no place in the research, must be carefully controlled.	Researcher value biases are inevitable and should be discussed at length and bracketed
Rhetorical Structure	Third person, objective, and scientific, detached.	First person; relying extensively on participant voices e.g. quotes; emotive prose
Methodology	Experimental/ Manipulative, careful manipulation of variables and control of confounds, only quantitative methods.	Naturalistic, highly interactive, uncovering embedded meaning through words and text (hermeneutical); qualitative.

(Source: Adapted from Ponterotto 2002, p.397 and Guba and Lincoln 2005, p.193)

## Interpretivism

Interpretivism, also known as constructivism, is seen by some as a “*response to the over-dominance of positivism*” (Grix 2004, p.82). Operating around the belief that truth and reality are created, not discovered (Rehman and Alharthi 2016), interpretivism assumes that there are multiple, co-constructed realities, and emphasises the goal of

understanding lived experiences from the participant's perspective (Schwandt 1994, 2000). Reality is deemed to be subjective, and influenced by situations (Ponterotto 2005) and the goal of research is to discover both meaning and develop understanding (Benner 1994). Within interpretivism, the researcher-participant relationship is highly interactive (Ponterotto 2010), and the researcher is viewed as the co-creator of knowledge and interpreter of lived experiences (Smith and Sparkes 2016). Sparkes (1992, p.32) encapsulates the essence of the interpretive paradigm:

*"The interpretive paradigm is informed by a concern to understand the world as it is, to understand the fundamental nature of the social world at the level of subjective experience. It seeks explanation within the realm of individual consciousness and subjectivity, within the frame of reference of the participant as opposed to the observer of action. It sees the social world as an emergent social process which is created by the individuals concerned".*

Interpretivism can be viewed as an alternative to the diametrically opposed positivist paradigm (Ponterotto 2005; Humphrey 2013). Positivists view the world objectively, and assume that human beings can be studied like any other entity (Humphrey 2013) with reality existing independently of humans (Rehman and Alharthi 2016). Although positivism can enable a researcher to discover causal relationships between phenomena, interpretivism offers the researcher the scope to understand situations from the perspective of the participant (Belk 2007). While the interpretivist paradigm has received criticism for being 'soft', non-generalisable, and lacking objectivity (Grix 2004) it is in fact associated with strong levels of internal validity and researcher reflexivity (Humphrey 2013). Interpretivism focuses on the way in which people make sense of their subjective reality (Holloway and Wheeler 2010) and enables the researcher to explore the meanings through which their realities are created.

The interpretivist paradigm is identified as providing the foundation and anchor for qualitative research methods (Ponterotto 2005) and offers opportunity for studies that are small in scale but sound in quality (Humphrey 2013). The social phenomena studied is understood "*through the eyes of the participants rather than the researcher*" (Cohen et al. 2007, p. 21). Data analysis is inductive with theory arising from data collection, not positioned as a driving force of research (Grix 2004).

Situated within the interpretative paradigm is the social constructivist perspective (Smith 1999). Described as the watchword of the interpretivist epistemology (Lincoln and Guba 2000) social constructivism involves the rejection of objectivism and the acceptance of ontological relativism (Guba and Lincoln 2005). In order to be consistent with the goals of social constructivism, and the recognition and acceptance of multiple realities, I adopted an emic and idiographic approach to my research (Sparkes 1992). Emic refers

to those constructs that are unique to the individual (Ponterotto 2005), exploring the insider perspective of the participants (Morrow 2005, 2007). Idiographic research centres on understanding the research participant as a unique and complex being (Ponterotto 2005) and highlights the need to get close to them and explore their detailed background and life history (Sparkes 1992). In adhering to an idiographic approach, the current research focussed on a small number of participants, and as such asserts knowledge claims about only a few individuals (Morrow 2007).

### **Adopting a Qualitative Approach**

It was essential that the approach adopted for data collection was reflective of the interpretivist paradigm, and aligned to the epistemological and ontological approach of the research. Qualitative research involves an interpretivist, naturalistic approach (Denzin and Lincoln 2018) and validates and privileges the voice of the participant (Davidson 2003). This research approach is focussed on investigating social life in process, and involves studying phenomena in their natural settings, interpreting experience in terms of personal meaning. The interpretive practices within qualitative research make the world more visible (Denzin and Lincoln 2018). Qualitative research is inductive and requires the researcher to set aside their assumptions and give the data primacy, as opposed to deductive research, it starts with a research question rather than a hypothesis. Data naturally emerges from the 'insider' perspective within qualitative research, and is both idiographic and emic in nature.

Qualitative researchers view the social world as fluid and consider people as active agents, constructing the worlds in which they exist. Researchers attempt to understand phenomena in real-world settings and do not manipulate that which they study (Patton 2002); qualitative research locates the observer in the world and as such is a situated activity (Denzin and Lincoln 2018). Qualitative research is focused on describing 'real-life' and evidence is distinctive, rich, complex, and exists on many levels (Holloway and Freshwater 2007; Junninen 2008). Qualitative researchers are both scientists and 'artists' who capture, translate and represent reality in order to develop insights into lived experience (Holloway and Freshwater 2007; Smart 2010).

At the heart of qualitative research lies a concern for subjectivity and authenticity of human experience (Silverman 2013), as Holloway and Freshwater (2007, p.973) describe, "*it illuminates different corners of research areas*". Qualitative research provides insight into the uniqueness of situations within a particular context (Tinning and Fitzpatrick 2012) and enables researchers to "*delve into complexities and processes*" (Marshall and Rossman 1999, p.57). Qualitative research enables us to understand the

intricacies of social experiences, and provides insights into behaviour, perspectives and experiences, all of which are key to this study. Importance is given to interpretation and recollection of experience, and qualitative research allows us to make sense of and interpret phenomena (Holloway and Wheeler 2010; Denzin and Lincoln 2018).

Social scientists generally exist within one of two communities, or three if mixed methods research is considered as the third research paradigm (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie 2004), conventional or reformed social science, and tend to show allegiance to one more than the other (Polkinghorne 2007). Qualitative research enables exploration of areas that had traditionally been avoided: "*the reformists, who include narrative researchers, posit that evidence, such as personal descriptions of life experiences, can serve to issue knowledge about neglected, but significant areas, of the human realm*" (Polkinghorne 2007, p.472).

Aside from differing underpinning assumptions, the major difference between the social science communities lies in what counts as sufficient evidence to answer the research question in hand. Quantitative research can provide essential descriptive data and is effective in giving answers to *what* happens, but lacks the ability to probe meanings and choices (Duke 2002), and in terms of this research, give insight into *why* something has happened. As Silverman (2013) explains, methods are tied to, and appropriate for, particular research questions, rather than one approach being 'better' than another; the value of both qualitative and quantitative, is dependent on theoretical finesse and methodological rigour (Silverman 2013). In this study, where the reasons behind athletes committing crimes formed the key focus of the research, it was important to utilise an approach that enabled attitudes and values to be explored within a specific context (Junninen 2008); quantitative research tends to provide generalised quantification and is difficult to apply to subject-specific settings (Fox et al. 2014). A qualitative approach was utilised within this thesis as an understanding of 'how many' athletes have committed crimes would not go any further in exploring 'why' these events occur, or how the experience affected the athlete. While knowing how many crimes were committed by athletes would provide useful and informative data, the real insight lay in exploring their experiences (Junninen 2008). Although quantitative methods could have been used to explore some of the 'why' questions, I felt a qualitative approach would provide a fuller examination of crime. As Hochstetler and Copes (2016, p.498) assert, "*qualitative researchers can explore interpretations or observations implementing greater fluidity, mutuality, and depth of interaction with participants than those who analyse official records or conduct surveys with quantitative goals*".

Qualitative research has a number of advocates who promote its suitability for gaining detailed and rich data based on emotions and experiences (Silverman 2005; Luton 2010). Qualitative research is flexible (Walliman 2004) and enables exploration, discovery and interpretation of experiences that interlink behaviours and actions (Barendrecht 2010). McGivern (2009) states that qualitative research allows participants to express themselves and add depth to research. By giving participants voice, they are truly represented (Holloway and Freshwater 2007; Mazzei and Jackson 2009).

Although as an approach it is highly suitable for the current research, qualitative research is not without its critics. Qualitative research is not a precise science, as human beings are not always predictable or rational (Holloway and Wheeler 2010), and given the methods adopted within qualitative research, bias is often a concern. While giving 'voice to the voiceless' is hailed as one of its' benefits, for some this approach has been romanticised (Lather 2009) and the sentimentality associated with it is identified as one of the sins of qualitative research (Shank 2005; Holloway and Freshwater 2007). Mazzei and Jackson (2009) suggest that voice is too often indulged and assumed to provide a truthful account of experience. Value is often placed on the kinds of research that can produce knowledge claims focusing on cause and effect relationships that can be generalised to populations (Shavelson and Towne 2002), and for some qualitative research cannot do this unless it is combined with other methods (Polkinghorne 2007). It can be argued however, that the worth of any research lies in its ability to answer the research question, and knowledge claims depend upon the quality of the evidence produced, as Polkinghorne (2007, p.476) explains:

*"It is my position that what makes for a valid knowledge claim is dependent on the kind of claim that is made...If the claim is that a person's story describes the anguish that the person has experienced about a personal rejection, then I also look to the supporting evidence and argument given by the researcher".*

### **The relevance of qualitative research to a study of elite athletes and crime**

Qualitative research is particularly appropriate to the exploration of crime and criminal journeys, and to understanding what behaviours lie at the centre of criminal actions. As Holloway and Wheeler (2010, p.3) emphasise, "*researchers use qualitative approaches to explore the behaviour, feelings and experiences of people and what lies at the core of their lives*".

In order to gain a full insight into criminal behaviour, Gadd and Jefferson (2007) advocate theorising with real participants and examining particular cases in detail. They argue that examining specific cases is unavoidable if any understanding is to be gained about the complex processes involved within crime. Lincoln and Guba (2000) note that the full



information about a concept is stored within its parts, a principle that is essential in the study of any criminal activity. Despite not being the dominant methodology within criminology, qualitative research serves a crucial role in the understanding of crime (Hochstetler and Copes 2016). Helfgott (2008) argues that the dominance of quantitative criminology has left a void in the examination of criminal behaviour, and he advocates the development of qualitative methods to help tell the complete story of crime.

Despite early research within the sport field being dominated by quantitative research (Hunger et al. 2003), the use of qualitative inquiry has become progressively more popular and is now recognised as a legitimate sphere of scholarship (Kerry and Armour 2000; Smith and Gilbourne 2009; Smith and Sparkes 2016). The use of qualitative research within sport, particularly sport psychology, has increased rapidly since the 1990s (Culver et al. 2012) and is now flourishing (Smith and McGannon 2018). This is evidenced in the increase in qualitative studies and books being published, and the increased number of conferences and workshops focused on qualitative inquiry (Smith and McGannon 2018).

Part of the reason for the rise of qualitative inquiry within sport is due to traditional quantitative approaches being too limiting, particularly when examining lived experiences (Eisner 1997). Qualitative methodologies allow researchers to explore the ways in which athletes perceive, create and translate their worlds (Munroe-Chandler 2005). By providing insight into an athlete's subjective reality (Bain 1995), the lives and experiences of athletes can be further understood (Gould et al. 1992; Munroe et al. 2000). By its very nature as a social, cultural, political and economic cauldron, sport is a rich area of qualitative investigation (Jones et al. 2012). Brustad (2009, p.112) points out as follows:

*“Sport is an entirely human endeavour. Our involvement in sport and physical activity is full of personally and socially generated meanings as our participation occurs in interaction with other individuals in various social and cultural contexts. Qualitative researchers in sport and physical activity have an essential role in uncovering the meaningful nature of this involvement”.*

The aim of this research is to explore the experiences of athletes who commit crimes, and in order to do this it was essential to describe, understand and interpret their experiences as opposed to trying to predict or provide generalisations. Holloway and Todres (2003) state that ‘goodness of fit’ between the research topic, methodology, collection of data and the presentation and analysis of data is essential for the success of a research project, and this was heavily considered when a qualitative approach was selected. The approach and methods used within research should be focussed on the precise task at hand (Silverman 2013), and it was the potential of qualitative research to

accomplish the research aim and illuminate the experiences of athletes that underpinned the adoption of a qualitative methodology. Qualitative research also enables the researcher's experiences to become a resource (Holloway and Freshwater 2007), and given my experiences within both sport and criminology, and the fact that there is currently minimal understanding of the experiences of crime within athletic populations, choosing an approach that focused on connotation over measurement was a natural decision.

## **Narrative Research**

Qualitative researchers have a multitude of methodological avenues to take, each of which will elucidate the world in a different way (Denzin and Lincoln 2018). My choice of method was influenced by my research aim. As Miles and Huberman (1994) record, knowing what it is that a person wants to discover inevitably leads them to the question of how they can obtain that information. As a social scientist, I am committed to understanding the world from the point of view of the participant and therefore inclined to utilise methods that enable me to 'unfold' the meaning of their lived world (Kvale 2006). When discussing the value of interviewing offenders, Junninen (2008, p.66) states, "*in my opinion, the research could not have been conducted by any other methods*", and I share this sentiment. Narrative inquiry enabled me to gain detailed insight into a phenomenon within a specific social context (Chase 2005). If sport is to be considered as a social institution, then in order for it to be fully understood it needs to be explored in ways that encourage the effective investigation of a person's experiences, and examine the influence the institution has on their lives. The study of participants' personal lives and stories has historically been described as the 'perfect' type of sociological material (Thomas and Znaniecki 1927), and I considered narrative inquiry to be the ideal tool to utilise in order to explore the personal stories of athletes who have committed crimes.

Narrative psychology focuses on the ways in which people organise their lives and how they bring order to their experiences (Willig 2008), therefore narrative inquiry can be considered as being both a research method and a way of conceiving and connecting psychological and social phenomena (Papathomas 2016; Carless and Douglas 2017). Narrative research permits the exploration of the meaning of these social phenomena, and examines how life events effect people's interpretations and understanding of themselves and others (Polkinghorne 2007). Described as an economic summary of a person's life experiences (Bluck and Habermas 2000), narratives enable 'thick descriptions' of human societies to be obtained (Presser 2009).

In simplest terms, narrative research is the study of stories (Polkinghorne 2007). These stories are omnipresent, featuring in every age, every place and every facet of daily life (Barthes 1977). Storytelling is a basic human need and has been apparent since the dawn of mankind (Pappathomas 2016); as Cobley (2001) identifies, wherever there are humans there will also be stories. Whether the need to tell stories is inherent in humans, or culturally acquired (Polkinghorne 1995; Holloway and Freshwater 2007) the fact remains that humans possess the urge to story their experiences (Myerhoff 2007). People tell stories about themselves and others constantly, and stories serve as an integral part of everyday conversations (Polkinghorne 2007). People are described as 'storytelling animals' (MacIntyre 1981) and it is the narrative nature of people, and this process of telling stories that many believe make us human (Munro Hendry 2007; Holloway and Freshwater 2007). Stories enable us to make sense of our lives and make clear connections between experiences, actions and aspirations (Presser and Sandberg 2015); we know the world through the stories we tell (Presser 2009). People lead storied lives (Smith 2010), and as Presser (2009, p.177) states, "*it is, in fact, difficult to imagine a serious contemporary study of people and culture that does not entertain at some point the role of stories in producing or dismantling people's troubles, actions and artefacts*". Narrative inquiry provides a method for these stories to be told and analysed academically (Munro Hendry 2007).

Narratives are sometimes referred to as 'life stories' or 'life history' although they do not serve to describe a person's entire life. Instead a narrative will draw selectively on a person's lived experience (Presser 2009) and specific aspects of a person's life (Chase 2005). Emphasis within a narrative is placed upon moments of being (Tamboukou 2008), highlighting the content or themes that the individual chooses to adopt or omit (Miller 2000): it is after all *their* story. Although the terms narrative and life story are used interchangeably (Chase 2005), people do not tell narratives, they tell stories (Frank 2000).

Narratives explain one's self to oneself, and the creation and reproduction of stories is believed by many to be a fundamental part of creating, developing and maintaining identity (Bruner 1990; McAdams 2001; Carless and Douglas 2008; Riessman 2008). Narratives not only enable people to understand their lives with regards to their current situation (Alea and Bluck 2003), but also enable people to 'rewind time' and re-evaluate historical actions (O'Connor 2015). Regardless of whether they are used to examine the present or the past, narratives serve to create the conditions for further stories to emerge (Tamboukou 2008).

Defining narrative inquiry is difficult; there are a wide variety of definitions (Tamboukou 2008), and it is argued that any attempt to provide a definition will not be complete or definitive (Riessman 2008; Smith and Sparkes 2009). Papathomas (2016, p.39) describes narrative inquiry as a “*curious social artefact*” and explains that as narratives are so familiar to us, it is difficult to provide a coherent definition.

Smith and Sparkes (2006) state that narrative inquiry does not offer a singular perspective and should instead be viewed as an on-going and plural enterprise. Perhaps, rather than trying to tie narrative inquiry to a common definition, it is better to consider the key features universal to narratives. Narratives routinely contain a plot, a problem or complicating event, a cast of characters and an evaluative conclusion that all connect to create a coherent eventful story that serves as more than just a simple account (Holloway and Freshwater 2007; Smith and Sparkes 2009; Silverman 2013; McAlpine 2016). Plots within narratives are essential in providing meaning to experience (Ricoeur 1986). By organising events into an order, a person is able to make sense of their experiences. As Jarvinen (2001) points out, to describe a life is to explain a life. Plot and character combine to provide personal and social elements of a story, and can give meaning and identity to the person telling the story. The characters included in a narrative are essential and as Papathomas (2016, p.41) observes, “*narratives do not only contain character, they reveal character, or, more specifically, they reveal identity*”.

Narrative inquiry pays ‘special attention’ (Polkinghorne 1988) to plot, character and events, and how they contribute significantly to the production of the ‘whole’ story (Tamboukou (2008). With these common features in mind, Freeman (1997, p.395) offers a useful delineation of narrative inquiry and describes its practice as “*a reconstructive one; it is a project of exploring lives in their various modes of integration and disintegration, formation and de-formation, and, on the basis of what is observed, piecing together images of the whole*”. By considering a person’s story, narrative inquiry enables us to gain insight about the world and people’s experiences of it (Hinchman and Hinchman 1997).

Narrative inquiry as a distinct qualitative approach, has gained in ascendancy in both psychology and sociology over the past thirty years (Presser 2009). This increase in narrative research, the ‘narrative turn’, occurred around the mid-1980’s and resulted in a small but significant upsurge of research (Papathomas 2016) focusing integrally on people’s stories (McGannon and Smith 2015). The increased focus on narrative research occurred as a direct result of discontent, and a loss of faith, in the ability of positivist science to provide effective insight into the human condition (Polkinghorne 1988). Social

scientists needed a method that offered an alternative to the control and prediction of positivist methods, and enabled them to develop a deeper understanding of issues that were personally, culturally and socially complex (Papathomas 2016). Although narrative inquiry is sometimes described as emerging (Phoenix and Smith 2011) and alternative (Tsang 2000), its place within the social sciences is now a *fait accompli* (Jones 2003) and its use as a method is flourishing (Chase 2005). Narrative inquiry has a vital role in the exploration of social life (Presser 2009) and enables the merger of “*interdisciplinary analytic lenses, diverse disciplinary approaches, and both traditional and innovative methods*” (Chase 2005, p.651).

Narrative inquiry follows an interpretivist process that prioritises subjective meaning (Lillekar 2003). Narrative inquiry originates through a set of theoretical assumptions (Smith and Sparkes 2009) and is characterised by both ontological relativism – that truth is relative to the individual, and all points of view are equally legitimate - and social constructionism – that knowledge is created by a person’s interactions with society. The assumptions of narrative inquiry clash with the positivist paradigm where the focus is on discovering an objective reality (Angen 2000) however, Munro Hendry (2007) suggests there is a danger of narrative inquiry blurring the lines between interpretivism and positivism through the reification of stories. In order to avoid confusion, and maintain narrative inquiry’s place as an interpretivist process, stories should not be reduced to objects, and should be explored as both products of the human psyche and cognition (Koskinen et al. 2011) and a vehicle for a person to share their experiences with others.

There is a significant body of support for the use of narrative inquiry, and the role of personal stories in exploratory research (Greenwood and Levin 2006; Polkinghorne 2007; Stringer 2013). Advocates of narrative inquiry detail the quality of the data it can produce; rather than skimming the surface of life, narratives offer rich, embodied insights into people’s lived experiences and can illuminate a person’s life course over time (Douglas and Carless 2009; Carless and Douglas 2017; Carless et al 2014). Narratives serve as the “*creative and artful construction of coherence and consistency*” (Presser and Sandberg 2015, p.8) and provide insight into the human condition (Polkinghorne 2007). By translating experiences into words, narratives provide rich detail and place the participant’s experience at the centre of the research (Holloway and Freshwater 2007). Miller (2000) describes the ability of narrative inquiry to transcend the barriers of both individuals and time, which enables it to be used effectively as a method to explore both historic and current experiences. Narratives enable people’s emotions, thoughts and interpretations to come to the fore, and allow visible emotions to be shared with others (Chase 2005; Holloway and Freshwater 2007). Narrative inquiry allows for unique and

enlightening stories to be heard (Jones 2003), and in contrast to other qualitative methods reduces the instance of 'fractured texts' (Riessman 1993), instead offering a 'Gestalt' view of a person's experience (Holloway and Freshwater 2007). It is the promise of offering a complex and comprehensive picture of personal and social life (Munro Hendry 2007), and its ability to engage diverse audiences (Carless and Douglas 2017) that often draws social scientists to narrative inquiry.

In addition to narrative inquiry's ability to produce valuable and insightful data, there are also significant benefits to be derived from the process of telling stories, which also in turn serve to enhance the quality of those very stories people tell. As a method, narrative inquiry focuses on the perspectives and perceptions of people (Holloway and Freshwater 2007), and enables the individual to be the expert of their own story. By 'capturing experiences' (Munro Hendry 2007) narratives act as tools for retrospective meaning making, and enable people to make sense of and order past events and experiences (Chase 2005; Holloway and Wheeler 2010; Polkinghorne 2007); as Carless and Douglas (2017, p.307) explain, "*telling stories about the events of one's life is a primary way through which meaning is created and communicated*".

Far from simply discharging the contents of their head (Silverman 2013), telling their story enables a person to organise, structure and understand their experiences, potentially giving them the opportunity to legitimise their behaviours (Holloway and Freshwater (2007). Through exploring their own narrative, a person is afforded the opportunity to make links between their sense of self and others in the world around them (Bruner 1986; Caverero 2000). The benefits of narrative inquiry enable the researcher to heed the principle of beneficence (Tisdale 2004) and promote good within their study (Beauchamp and Childress 2013) by minimising harms and maximising benefits.

The process of telling a story forces a person to adopt a reflexive stance and look back on past events from their current situation (O'Connor 2015). By indulging in self-contemplation, a person is able to start to understand how they reacted to events within their past and gain an alternative perspective on their responses and actions (Carless and Douglas 2017; Holloway and Freshwater 2007). Undoubtedly certain events will offer greater personal meaning, and more opportunities for lessons learned (McAdams 1985), but for some the sheer act of narrating a significant personal experience will expedite a positive change (Chase 2005). Telling their story may give a person the time and opportunity to attribute blame, responsibly or praise to others (Kellas and Manusov 2003) in a way they would never have been able to with an alternative method.

Narrative inquiry is especially effective when exploring complex and subjective experiences (Woike 2008), but particularly when examining intentions and patterns of reasoning; areas particularly important when considering the thought processes involved in committing criminal acts. Telling stories can serve as a cathartic act (Frank 2000; Pennebaker 2000) and can be particularly useful for understanding traumatic or challenging events (Papathomas 2016). By enabling a person to create distance between themselves and a difficult event, storytelling can act as a coping strategy (Holloway and Freshwater 2007) and have a positive effect on physical and mental health (Pennebaker 2000); as Holloway and Freshwater (2007, p.707) state, “*summarising and organising the experience might help participants to understand it better, to store it and ‘move beyond it’*”.

In addition to their cathartic and coping effects, narratives may be freeing experiences, leading to personal emancipation (Rosenwald and Ochberg 1992). Individuals are able to take, or regain, control of their own stories and define their own experiences, giving them a degree of influence over the process and subsequently empowering them (Elliot 2005; Holloway and Freshwater 2007). Narrative research can give voice to marginalised people, or those whose stories would never ordinarily be heard (Munro Hendry 2007); the process of ‘naming silenced lives’ is one of the primary aspirations of narrative inquiry (McLaughlin and Tierney 1993).

While narrative inquiry has the clear potential to provide insight into the realm of human experience, as a method it also has limitations and clear threats to its validity (Polkinghorne 2007). Described by Smith and Sparkes (2009, p.281) as a “*lengthy and messy process*”, as a method it was originally dismissed as soft, unscientific and non-generalisable (Papathomas 2016). Munro Hendry (2007) in particular raises a number of concerns about the ‘seductive’ nature of narrative inquiry and the way it dissects and dehumanises people’s experiences; she questions the power that narratives have been given and believes that far from providing illumination, the process of constructing narratives reduces experiences to a set of events, thus erasing key elements of our lived experiences. Polkinghorne (2007) identifies a number of potential weaknesses within narrative inquiry and states that narratives are often a product of co-creation between the researcher and storyteller, and are significantly impacted by the culture in which they are immersed (Carless and Douglas 2008). It is undeniable that stories are told with an audience in mind and, in order to maintain social desirability, are tailored to those who will hear them (Polkinghorne 2007; Presser and Sandberg 2015). People’s memories are selective (Skultans 1998) as are the details they choose to reveal, obscure, or omit,

and stories may be entirely reflective of what a person feels their audience want to hear (McLeod 1997).

A significant weakness of narrative inquiry surrounds the fact that the language used by an individual may not always mirror their actual experience – they may not have the capability to fully describe what happened. The capacity to interpret experience is dependent on language (Presser and Sandberg 2015) and people may lack the language and reflective ability to truly articulate their experiences. Flaws may also lie in the intent and capabilities of the researcher, as they bring preconceived ideas of where they want a person's stories to fit and must therefore constantly avoid the pitfall of imposing their own narratives on another persons' story (Munro Hendry 2007).

By far the biggest area of concern with narrative inquiry, surrounds the perceived truth of stories. Britzman (2000, p.30) describes the possibility of accurately recounting any personal experience as "*contested territory*", and critics of narrative inquiry query whether stories are ever accurate enough to be analysed, or merely simply distorted memories or projections (Polkinghorne 2007). Despite these queries, narrative researchers are well armed to defend these concerns, as Papathomas (2016, p.37) accurately explains:

*"First, narrative researchers are interested in personal truth ahead of objective truth, because for them 'objective truth' does not exist. Narrative scholars therefore seek out personal experience stories not in spite of their subjectivity but because of their subjectivity – subjective narrations illuminate the many versions of reality that co-exist".*

Narratives are actively created (Chase 2005) and are more focused on the versions of self, reality and encounters that a person describes, than on viewing them as a substantive account of a way of life (Wieder 1975). As a narrative researcher, a healthy suspicion of the veracity of a story is natural, but the focus of narrative inquiry centres on personal meaning and not necessarily on the description of fact.

The question of, and the importance of truth, is influenced by the way in which a researcher views the narratives they collect. Scepticism around narrative inquiry comes from those who view narratives as recalling experiences (Presser 2009) however, the reality is that narratives can be viewed in a number of different ways. Ricoeur (1986) described three ways of conceptualising the relationship between narrative and experience. The first considers narrative as an objective representation of experience, an *absolute truth*, or historical record (Presser 2009). This perspective is reflective of the concerns highlighted previously, and quite understandably calls into question the accuracy of narrative if they are to be viewed as documenting what actually happened in



a person's life. The second view however, considers narratives as *subjective interpretations* of experiences, as tools to document what happened to a person, but through that individual's subjective lens. Narratives therefore, act as a 'signpost' of what has happened, and describe not necessarily the absolute truth but a person's perspective and reactions (Burgess and Akers 1966). This view of narrative, as a rendering of events, is particularly relevant to those who study crime, as Presser (2009, p.183) explains, "*most criminologists acknowledge that it is interpreted circumstances rather than 'real' circumstances that are consequential*".

This perspective is most relevant to my study: I never took my participants' narratives at complete face value or considered them as completely true representations. I followed the advice of Lieblich et al. (1998) and viewed each story as being constructed around core events, but at the same time acknowledging that there was considerable scope for individual creativity and selection in how participants interpreted and described these events.

Both the objective and subjective views of narrative assume that life exists independently of narrative description (Presser 2009). The third perspective considers narratives as *shaping experiences*, and considers the distinction between narrative and experience as indistinct; people's subsequent behaviours are influenced by the way in which they interpret narratives. Presser and Sandberg (2015, p.5) explain this further, "*the human capacity to interpret experience depends upon language. People's verbalisations thus affect their behaviour by affecting what they are able to think*".

Within criminology, the shaping perspective is termed 'constitutive' and describes how narratives produce experience even as experience produced narratives (Presser and Sandberg 2015). The constitutive view of narrative provides the fundamental underpinning to Narrative Criminology, a strain of qualitative criminology that uses narratives as the 'root metaphor' for understanding the meanings of criminal actions (Hochstetler and Copes 2016). Advocates of narrative criminology maintain that narratives are vital in order to understand criminal actions (Sandberg 2016) and to consider the bigger picture of a criminal situation (O'Connor 2015).

### **The importance of narrative inquiry to a study of elite athletes and crime**

Some authors have overlooked the method of narrative inquiry as a means to develop a greater understanding of the idiosyncrasies of the world of sport, giving no more than a cursory glance in a narrative direction (Eklund et al. 2011). However, there have been important advances within narrative forms of knowing in the field of sport and exercise

studies (Papathomas 2016). Within the field of sport research, numerous academics have adopted narrative inquiry (Denison and Winslade 2006; Leahy and Harrigan 2006; Jowett and Frost 2007; Carless and Douglas 2008; Smith 2010), which is supported by Smith and Weed (2007) who, alongside a number of other authors (Sparkes 2002; Gilbourne 2006; Sugden and Tomlinson 2007), advocate the use of 'tales' in sports. Sparkes (2002) emphasises that narrative inquiry is a tool to assist in the process of both representing and interpreting the experiences of sports people. Smith and Sparkes (2009b, p.3) state that narrative inquiry is a medium through which we can explore the lived experiences of "*what is out there in society*", and believe that it can "*lift the veil of conventionality from people's eyes as stories subtly raise different and sometimes troubling questions about the necessity and desirability of conformable and familiar practice within sport and exercise settings*".

Narrative inquiry has significantly informed research into areas of sport and physical activity (Carless and Douglas 2010; Douglas and Carless 2015) and is seen as an ideal method to investigate the lives and experiences of athletes: "*by attending to the interplay of structure and agency, we learn how individuals negotiate their identity, morality, and behaviour within their particular life context*" (Carless and Douglas 2017, p.307)

Aspden and Hayward (2015) acknowledge that for much of the twentieth century, narrative exploration of crime existed as a 'shadow' process, running concurrently alongside other forms of criminological methodology. The inclination to overlook stories generated by offenders has changed (Agnew 2006). The place of narratives within the study of crime are vital as they can provide essential information about the etiology of criminal behaviour, and the subjective and intricate experiences of offending (Presser 2009). Narratives provide an invaluable way of looking at significant aspects of a person's life, particularly events that are traumatic such as crime (Chase 2005); Presser (2010, p.431) describes them as the "*very best data with which researchers might retrieve the meanings that people give to their own violations*".

Critics of first-person offender narratives question the value of stories of real crime; they dismiss the need to understand the motives and lives of offenders and instead believe criminologists should focus their time on understanding ways to prevent crime (Aspden and Hayward 2015). Concerns lie in the ways in which narratives can distort the true causes of offending behaviour (Presser 2010) and some question the value of examining stories when the past cannot be changed: "*he saw, he took, and he left. He won't give it back*" (Felson and Boba 2010, p.3). Nevertheless, there is no doubt, however, that narratives can provide insight into the sequence of events leading up to the commission

of a crime, and can help shed light on the social processes involved in criminal activity (Maruna and Copes 2005). Yar (2014, p.13), an advocate of the power of storytelling within the criminological context, states that narratives can provide “*a powerfully social vehicle for ‘connecting’ with others and challenging their preconceptions about the deviant self*”.

As alluded to previously, narratives may possess a cathartic and remedial function which is particularly useful for those who have committed criminal acts (Goffman 1971). Narratives enable offenders to understand the consequences of their own actions (Chase 2005) and can improve the likelihood of them being able to change their behaviours (O’Connor 2015). Narrative inquiry is clearly relevant to the study of both sport and crime. As Poletta (2006, p.11) states stories can “*integrate lives, entertain, illustrate, instruct, envision alternatives, comfort, dramatize, help people live with contradictions, and grasp temporality*”.

Narrative inquiry was used in this thesis to enable athletes to tell their stories, and to make sense of (for most) a life-altering experience. It was felt that narrative inquiry would enable the athletes to explore their patterns of reasoning and intentions, and provide an opportunity for the motives behind their criminal actions to be fully examined. Narrative inquiry enabled me to explore the personal experience narratives (Creswell et al. 2007) of athletes, and gain understanding of their criminal experiences recounted in single or multiple episodes. This approach enabled participants to share their personal stories of committing crimes through personal accounts of their life stories, significant moments during their athletic careers, and the specifics of their criminal activities. Given the fact that access to such a specific and niche sample was extremely difficult, using a method such as narrative inquiry enabled me to focus less on how many participants I was able to speak to, and more on the value of the stories they had to tell. As Chase (2005) reinforces, any narrative is significant given the insight and embodiment they can provide. For me, the most important feature of narrative inquiry was that it provided me with a unique and privileged opportunity to gain even the smallest of insights into an important group of people whose voices have never been heard before. As Jones (2003, p.69) eloquently states:

*“Perhaps the most any approach to the knowing of others can produce is a fleeting consciousness of what it is like to bump into their furniture, their own ‘selves’ through the stories they construct via the illusory imagination of narrative. These illusions are like the shapes one sees in the clouds. The trick is to capture the illusion before it escapes from the memory”.*

One of the many reasons I chose to utilise narrative inquiry in my study was due to the types of life events that can be explored with this method, and how these types of events

linked with the aim of the research. Pillemer (1998, 2001) identifies four types of events, and McAdams (2001) latterly added a further two (see Table 3.2). Despite there being clear overlaps, each of these types of events had relevance to this study. For example, originating events could refer to the start of an athlete’s sporting career, or the start of their criminal activities, whereas turning points can be linked to the events leading to the commission of a crime (Elder 1985). Crime involves acts that go against the boundaries of what is legally permissible in society, therefore a criminal will have an altered belief system even if that is only momentarily, and these alterations may be due to anchoring events. Redemption narratives have been linked to both offenders (Maruna 2004) and athletes (Papathomas 2016) who use their position as a ‘wounded storyteller’ (Langellier 2001) to construct a pro-social identity based on their resilience and heroism.

Table 3.2. Life events used in the construction of narratives

<b>Originating events</b>	These events denote the beginning of a career path and as such contribute in shaping later outcomes in a person’s life. These types of events often induce strong emotions.
<b>Turning points</b>	These events result in a person revising the direction of their life. These events can be epiphanal (Denzin 1989) rather than tangible, and like originating events, these events are linked to future goals and motivations (Ligon et al. 2008).
<b>Anchoring events</b>	These events often help create the foundations for a person’s belief system, and provide the boundaries of what types of actions are valued and what should be avoided.
<b>Analogous events</b>	These events occur when a current circumstance triggers a memory of a similar event from the past. These events serve to remind a person how or how not to act depending on previous experiences and outcomes (Schank 1990).
<b>Redemptive events</b>	These negative events are subsequently viewed positively and can guide future decisions. They may provide people with the belief that negative situations can be ‘turned around’ to have favourable outcomes (Ligon et al. 2008)
<b>Contaminating events</b>	These events describe those experiences that appeared to be positive at the outset but that later went wrong unexpectedly. As a result of them being previously positive they can serve as strong reminders of disappointment and failure.

(Source: Adapted from Pillemer 1998, 2001 and McAdams 2001)

## Elite Interviewing

The term ‘elite’ is traditionally used to refer to those people whose abilities and qualities mark them out as superior within a group. The ‘best of their kind’, elites are often viewed as the most powerful or talented people in society (Collins English Dictionary 2018). Elite people are considered to be superior in quality or skill and elite athletes are no different. The term elite has been used to describe athletes who have played sport for a certain amount of time (Gladwell 2009), attended top level competitions such as the Olympics (Grant and Schempp 2013), inter-varsity athletes (Steiner et al. 2010), members of national squads (Bertollo et al. 2012) and professional athletes (Jordet and Elferink-

Gemser 2012; Swann et al. 2015). Chi (2006, p.22) discusses the benefits of studying elite athletes and advocates the use of small samples of exceptional athletes, and an examination of their *absolute* expertise, to gain insight into the athletic world they are a part of: “*this approach studies the remarkable few to understand how they are distinguished from the masses*”.

The literature suggests that interactions with elites in general need to be considered differently from interactions with other members of society (Welch et al. 2002). A small but emerging area of social science research explores the intricacies associated with interviewing elite participants (Duke 2002; Harvey 2011; Mikecz 2012; Lancaster 2017). An important area of qualitative research (Boucher 2017), elite interviewing as a method aims to fill the gap (Desmond 2004) in our understanding of a group of people considered by many to be superior as a result of their power, talent or privileges (Hornby et al. 1983). In many instances, very little is known about the world in which elites exist, and by studying them researchers are provided with a unique opportunity to understand the worldview of influential people (Delaney 2007) who often have access to exclusive information that is not readily available to the public (Mikecz 2012).

The conduct of elite interviewing is not without its critics, with disparagement centering around the subjective and superficial use of the term elite (Woods 1998; Smith 2006). For some, frustration lies within the attention that elite interviewing receives in terms of the need for specific considerations when interviewing an elite sample, with critics suggesting that all interviews are rife with problems, not just those that focus on talented or powerful people (Smith 2006). Fundamentally however, elites should be interviewed, and elite interviewing conducted, when the research questions suggests so (Welch et al. 2002).

There has been much debate around the contentious issue of defining elites within the context of elite interviewing. As Rice (2010, p.70) states, “*many commentators have pointed out that elites are as difficult to define as they are to access*”. For some the lack of a comprehensive definition of elite is a weakness of this form of research (Welch et al. 2002; Swann et al. 2015). The term elite, unless clearly defined at the outset, can vary in meaning across contexts (Parry 1998; Harvey 2011), and is perhaps overly simplistic if used to mark a dichotomy between the powerful and the powerless (Smith 2006). Given the lack of a conclusive definition, scholars have tended to shape their definitions to match the nature of their participants (Harvey 2011) and have primarily focussed on the social position of the elite in relation to the researcher, or typical person in society (Stephens 2007). Welch et al. (2002) recommend that the identification of a

clear, working definition of elites needs to occur as a starting point in elite research. For the purposes of this research, elites are viewed as those with close proximity to power (Lilleker 2003), who demonstrate particular professional expertise (Burnham et al. 2004; Morris 2009), who hold, or have held, a privileged position in society (Richards 1996), and who possess an ability to exert influence (Harvey 2011).

The principles of elite interviewing can be applied to my sample of elite athletes for numerous reasons. Elite athletes often find themselves occupying a unique position in society, highly revered, they can be seen by many to constitute a 'special population' of people (Atkinson and Young 2008). Ostrander (1993) notes that many elites are used to having others defer to them, and believing that what they think matters to other people (Lancaster 2017), and this sense of entitlement is often prevalent in elite athletes (Teitelbaum 2005).

I interviewed a relatively small, but powerful group of 'in the know' athletes (Mikecz 2012), where the focus of the interviews was on the unique insight that they possessed (of both crime and being an elite athlete). In accordance with the definition utilised in this research, the interviews were of importance given the position and influence of the participants, the extensive knowledge that these elites possess (Swann et al. 2015) and the privileges that they are, or were, afforded (Welch et al. 2002; Delaney 2007; Rice 2010). The elite interviews provided a unique dataset for analysis, offering a rare opportunity to understand the experiences and world views of those who have had significant influence, and power, in their athletic fields.

Elite respondents will often agree to be interviewed as they have something to say (Berry 2002), be that to project themselves in a positive light, to publicise an alternative version of events, or to shift another's interpretation of them (Ball 1994); all of these may have been true of my elite sample. Elite status changes over time (Harvey 2011), and while some of the elite athletes I interviewed no longer have influence in their sport, they are still powerful in terms of knowledge, ability, privilege and, for some, their degree of public recognition.

### **The challenges of elite interviewing**

The act of 'researching up' (Desmond 2004) can pose a variety of different challenges from those encountered when studying less powerful individuals (England 2002). In addition to the time-consuming and costly nature of elite interviewing (Welch et al. 2002), working with a sample of elites can generate a number of key issues that must be considered by scholars; each of these issues was addressed in the current research.

Difficulties tend to congregate around access (both physically and psychologically); the issue of asymmetry of power in interviews; rapport, trust and credibility; and the maintenance of emotional distance (Welch et al. 2002; Mikecz 2012). As Lancaster (2017, p.93) aptly observes:

*“A variety of challenges associated with researching elites have been documented in the literature, ranging from difficulties with gaining access to the suggestion that elite participants may seek to exert too much control over the research and manipulate dissemination processes”.*

### **Access (physical and psychological)**

The viability of any qualitative research hinges on the willingness of a participant to speak with an interviewer (Mikecz 2012) and despite the visibility of elites, the possibility of actually gaining access to them is one of the key issues within elite interviewing (Laurila 1997; Delaney 2007). The success of any research into elites is dependent on the ability of the researcher to gain access, and this success will contribute directly to the nature and quality of the data obtained (Shenton and Hayter 2004). As Mikecz (2012, p.482) explains, *“whereas locating elites might seem relatively easy due to their high visibility, getting a foot in the door and obtaining their personal accounts of events can be very challenging”.*

Despite access being described as the most pressing research concern in elite interviewing (Shenton and Hayter 2004), there are those who believe that difficulties in gaining access to elites have been over exaggerated (Ostrander 1993; Delaney 2007; Lancaster 2017). Both Smith (2006) and Taylor (2004) emphasise that while access does present some challenges, other marginalised groups can be just as hard to locate and access as elites. Although there is some contention regarding the degree of difficulty in accessing elites, there seems some consensus that success in accessing elites is dependent on the use of tailored techniques and strategies to maximise access opportunities (Smith 2006; Delaney 2007). In reality, access needs to be negotiated before each interview commences (Mikecz 2012) and difficulties in access will be dependent on who and what is being researched (Delaney 2007).

Access to elites can be particularly challenging due to the many barriers that stand between the researcher and elite participant. Hunter (1995) explains that the existence of barriers is one of the reasons for the lack of research into elites as they have the power to protect themselves from intrusion. The establishment and existence of barriers is the very thing that sets elites apart from the rest of society (Laurila 1997; Welch et al. 2002; Shenton and Hayter 2004), and contributes to defining them as elite (Herz and Imber 1995). These barriers can act as shields, protecting elites from the scrutiny of the public,

and from the intrusive nature of research (Duke 2002). By establishing barriers, elites are able to protect and control what is known about them, and this puts them in a position to potentially manipulate research results (Bradshaw 2001) by controlling the dissemination of information. The majority of elites are surrounded by protective gatekeepers who control a researcher's access (Mikecz 2012).

The literature provides a number of recommendations for researchers in order to increase their chances of gaining access to elites (Morris 2009). The key recommendation, which was utilised within this study, involved obtaining an influential 'sponsor' to endorse the research (Welch et al. 2002) and ensure that participants could see approval from a source they know and respect (Ostrander 1993). Experts in the area of elite interviewing emphasise the importance of drawing attention to a researcher's institutional affiliation, professional credentials and personal connections (Welch et al. 2002; Rice 2010; Lancaster 2017).

In order to access my sample, I heeded the advice of elite interviewing specialists and prioritised establishing a network of gatekeepers, and gaining each participant's trust (Thuesen 2011). Due to the niche nature of my inclusion criteria, participants occupied both elite status and represented a minority group within the athletic population, therefore gaining initial access was always going to be a significant challenge. I encountered resistance from the majority of gatekeepers I approached and most tended to be fiercely protective of their athletes, feeling that discussing a sensitive subject, such as criminal activities, may be a negative experience for them. Gaining the endorsement of an influential 'sponsor' was initially problematic as they required multiple reassurances from me that the research was ethical and beneficial. Eventually however, I was able to gain traction through the support of the Dame Kelly Holmes Trust who were content to put me in touch with athletes and allow me to use their endorsement. I understood that it was important to ensure participants were aware of my own professional credentials and that they were part of an ongoing and important research project (Delaney 2007) however, just as Rice (2010) encountered, the elite participants were far less interested in my position as an academic than they were in my athletic, and military, career. Duke (2002) stresses the importance of developing a 'street sense', which requires the researcher to demonstrate personal knowledge and a clear connection to the world that they are exploring (Hirsch 1995). As such, my experiences as an athlete, and also as a Military Police Officer who had an awareness of the criminal justice system, often took primacy in our conversations prior to, and after, interview. I was also mindful of the demanding time schedules that elites often face (Mikecz 2012) so I made it clear at every stage that



I could be available to fit around their schedules to maximise access opportunities (Delaney 2007).

### ***Asymmetry of Power***

The concept of power is extremely contentious (Few 2001) and is understood to be an effect of social influence (Allen 2003). The issue of power imbalance is often a key element of any discussion around elite interviewing (Boucher 2017), and presents researchers with a number of practical challenges. An elite group is assumed to possess significant power and influence in society as a consequence of their wealth, privilege or knowledge (Hunter 1995). Power is a consideration in all interviews, it exists at all levels (Herzog 1995) and can result in complex and unstable relationships between an interviewer and interviewee (Pile 1991). However, in general it is assumed that power in interviews falls in favour on the academic who has experience in engaging in convoluted conceptual discussions (Welch et al. 2002). Within elite interviews, the power balance is different and this is evident from the very outset, beginning at the access stage (Welch et al. 2002); it can be most visible in the unequal power relations that exist between elites and academics (Rice 2010). Given the status of elites, the balance of power is often assumed to be in favour of the elite (Burnham et al. 2004). Researchers lack power (Leech 2002; Bygnes 2008) as elites possess the knowledge desired, and are able to control their responses by resisting particular outcomes (Boucher 2007). The elite may also be perceived as 'doing a favour' to the researcher (Herod 1999; Mikecz 2012) by agreeing to provide unique insight that is needed by the academic to address their particular research question.

Elites will often take control (Burnham et al. 2008; Harvey 2011; Boucher 2017) and dictate the direction of the interview process. As Delaney (2007, p.215) points out, "*problems of control arise more frequently in elite interviewing than in other types of interviewing because when you interview elites, there can be many clear markers that you are, in fact, the 'status subordinate'*".

Concerns about power asymmetry are based on the assumption that elites will naturally transfer the power they possess into the interview setting (Smith 2006), but this will not be the case for all elites. While an elite presents a considerable contrast to an unknown academic who poses no threat to the elite's status (Schoenberger 1992), steps can be taken to ensure that the academic does not default to the position of 'supplicant' (Cochrane 1998). It is essential that any power differentials are navigated and minimised to ensure that a successful working relationship between the elite and the researcher, upon which the quality of qualitative research depends, can be developed (Kvale 1996).

Although Desmond (2004) argues that an asymmetrical relationship is inevitable regardless of the strategies the researcher implements, Mikecz (2012) believes that the researcher can directly influence the success of interviewing elites by taking direct steps to reduce status imbalance. In order to reduce the perceived status gap, Ostrander (1993) encourages researchers not to avoid uncomfortable or inappropriate questions, even if they may stray across the boundaries of good etiquette, or elicit emotional responses. Researchers must take measures to enhance their credibility in the eyes of the elite, either by stressing their own human capital through academic or professional credentials (Hunter 1995; Welch et al. 2002) or as previously mentioned utilising 'street sense' (Duke 2002) to directly appeal to the kind of connections and knowledge base that actually matter to the elite.

Rice (2010) explains that for the academic researching elites, the power differential can act as both a *constraint* and an *enabler*. Delaney (2007, p.215) encourages researchers to use any apparent 'status subordinate' to their advantage:

*"I have no problem assuming the role of someone who needs to learn something (after all that is the essence of interviewing). In fact, being a status subordinate can be turned to an advantage in that it allows you to say in a very non-threatening way, 'I don't really understand that, can you explain'".*

Although for some, gender is negatively associated with power (Ortbals and Rinker 2009; May 2014), with women running a greater risk of being patronised by elite men (McDowell 1998), there is some evidence to suggest that being a woman can actually be advantageous. Women may be more likely to be perceived as lacking power themselves, and viewed as harmless and non-threatening, particularly if they do not occupy senior positions within their own organisations (Walford 1994; Duke 2002). Although it is impossible for me to know if my gender, or seemingly 'junior' status as an academic, improved my access to my elite sample, on several occasions athletes remarked after the interviews that they had 'almost cried' or 'really opened up to you there', and were often taken aback by how comfortable they felt talking with me.

In order to negotiate the power asymmetry that existed between my elite sample and my status as a researcher, I accepted that power was context dependent (Lancaster 2017), and would shift and change depending on both the nature of the athlete's experiences, and the varying nature of my relationships with them (Duke 2002). As recommended by Ostrander (1993) all interviews took place in neutral, public settings, which as well as meeting the requirements of the Bournemouth University Ethics Panel, meant that the elite athlete was not in their own social space which could have reinforced their position of power (Fitz and Halpin 1994). The positionality of the researcher is essential, not only

when trying to gain access to an elite, but also when attempting to establish and maintain rapport with them (Mikecz 2012). Welch et al. (2002) advocates utilising the position of an 'informed outsider', and I was mindful of this as I attempted to maintain a neutral standpoint but with clear knowledge of the athlete's inside world. Smith (2006) encourages researchers to be reflexive and accept that both positionality and power will shift throughout each elite interview; I was aware that my positionality would evolve during interviews as I responded to their personalities and stories, and that essentially, I would be 'reproducing' myself throughout (Valentine 2002). By emphasising different elements of my experience, and my position, I was able to use 'self-positioning' (Rice 2010) to lessen the gap between the elite athletes and myself. I attempted to utilise what Rice (2010) terms as 'elasticity of positionality' to adapt to the differing attitudes of the elites I interviewed, and reduce any power asymmetry that existed between us. McDowell (1998, p.2138) explains how this notion of stretching, and adapting, the way we present ourselves to the elite, enables a researcher to minimise power differentials in varying ways:

*"In some interviews I seemed to fall into the classic male-female pattern, for example with an older charming but rather patriarchal figure I found myself to some extent playing dumb; with an older and extremely fierce senior woman I was brusquely efficient, with other women I was sisterly in the sense of the same age – same position, with some of the younger men I was super-fast, well-informed, and definitely not to be patronised".*

### ***Rapport, Trust and Credibility***

Mikecz (2012, p.482) emphasises, that "*gaining access to elites is hard enough; gaining their trust and building rapport with them is even more difficult*". Establishing rapport with an elite is critical, if the most is to be made of achieving access to such a hard to reach sample. The social skills of the researcher are of vital importance in determining the success of an elite interview (Healey and Rawlinson 1993); rapport is especially crucial in contexts where a person may express emotions and vulnerabilities that may have previously not been conveyed or explored (Carless and Douglas 2017). Within the process of attempting to build rapport with an elite, it is important to demonstrate in-depth knowledge of the research area in order to enable trust to be established between the researcher and the elite (Laurila 1997; Mikecz 2012). Demonstrating knowledge can also help act as a defence should the elite try to patronise the researcher, or flex their status (Healey and Rawlinson 2002). A number of authors advocate letting the elite know how vital their contribution is to the research, and how the study would not be complete without their insights (Laurila 1997; Delaney 2007). Flattery is important but not so much so that it becomes obviously sychophantic (Richards 1996). Ensuring that questions posed to elites are presented in personal terms and are adapted to the individual's

experiences can demonstrate the researcher's interest and engagement, and ensure elites are more likely to speak freely (Thomas 1995; Laurila 1997).

Importance is attached to the thorough preparation of an elite interview (Berry 2002; Harvey 2011; Thuesen 2011), and affords the researcher an opportunity to show how seriously they take the opportunity to interview the elite (Zuckerman 1972), thus gaining respect (Harvey 2011). Although I prepared for each interview as completely as possible to maintain credibility, I was aware at times that despite attempting to provoke insightful responses, I was met with a 'party line' and what felt like a 'canned response' (Mikecz 2012), as if their answers were to some degree rehearsed. For some of the athletes I interviewed, this was not the first time they had told their stories, some had become accomplished at presenting their version of events as they attempted to reconstruct their careers'. At the very minimum, elements of their story would have been told before, if only to a Police Officer. Given this, I followed the advice of Thomas (1995) who advocates 'recalibrating' the interview and either rephrasing the question, or shifting to a different area of exploration completely when it felt like responses were less natural.

### ***Emotional Distance***

Given the status that a number of elites possess, and the influence they have on those around them, it is unsurprising that researchers may also be drawn to them personally. Some elites possess high levels of charm and in some cases, are extremely articulate about their experiences (Duke 2002). Researchers need to be mindful that they do not fall into the trap of automatically assuming that the elite knows better, or more, than them. Ostrander (1993) highlights that researchers can be in danger of displaying a form of Stockholm Syndrome, and defer their judgement when facing a powerful elite. Delaney (2007, p.215) describes the 'seduction' of interviewing an elite:

*"There is something seductive about interviewing those with great...power and success... You enter someone's life for an hour or two, you may speak as 'relative equals' (if you overcome the status subordinate problem) and it is easy to come out of an interview thinking... 'that was amazing to interview someone like that'".*

Given the elite status of the athletes I interviewed, I can identify with the notion of being 'star struck' or 'starry eyed' (Delaney 2007) and in a position where I began to contemplate defending their criminal actions. While I do not believe I was particularly 'seduced' by my participants, I knew who each was prior to interview, and in the case of one athlete, was initially in disbelief that I would have the opportunity to interview someone as high profile as him. Maintaining emotional distance was a conscious process, partly due to the nature of the power and influence that the athletes possessed,

but also given the sometimes graphic, or harrowing, nature of the content they were sharing with me.

## **Sampling and Participant Profile**

In terms of inclusion criteria, I focused on two areas: involvement in sport and criminal activity. At the beginning of the project I set the playing level parameters utilising the concept of serious leisure Stebbins (1992). However, after gaining access to a high-profile gate keeper who enabled me to contact elite level athletes, I concentrated on an elite sample. This enabled me to utilise the principles of elite interviewing. It was clear at the outset of the study that obvious distinctions needed to be made in terms of crime, deviance and harm. For the purposes of clarity, I decided that the focus would be on those athletes who had clearly broken the law. While deviance, and to a certain extent harm, are important considerations, it was essential that I only focused on 'spent' offences and the most logical way to do this was to use the rule of law as my guide.

The finalised criteria were identified following the review of the initial body of research, and feedback from the Bournemouth University Ethics Panel:

1. Athletes should be over the age of eighteen;
2. Athletes should be either participating or should have participated at an elite level (national, international or professional) within their sport;
3. Athletes should have committed a criminal offence for which the punishment involved, or exceeded, a police caution.

A non-probability purposive sampling technique was used. This technique is essentially strategic, and involves the researcher sampling on the basis of identifying people who are relevant to the research questions (Bryman 2004) and who will provide information that could not be obtained via other sources (Gratton and Jones 2010; Holloway and Wheeler 2010). The use of purposive sampling was based on logical grounds (Silverman 2013), to ensure I only interviewed athletes who would contribute to answering the research question. After initial contact was made, snowball sampling was then used by utilising contacts to establish links with other relevant participants. Once I had obtained their trust (Mikecz 2012), athletes recommended or suggested other athletes who they felt would meet the criteria of the study and offer important insights. Penrod et al. (2003) support the use of snowball sampling in research where participants are not easily accessible or where anonymity is important. Snowball sampling has been identified as a useful approach for the study of deviance and crime, particularly when examining sensitive subjects with hard to reach individuals (Carter and Carter 2007).

In order to gain access to participants I was assisted by a number of agencies who acted as gatekeepers. Given the nature of the sample it was vital that I was as proactive as possible in terms of contacting gatekeepers. Not all of my efforts resulted in participants however, all agencies I approached were positive about the research area, and attempted to provide me with willing participants. (A list of these agencies, and how I interacted with them, can be seen on request however, it is not included in this final thesis).

Narrative research often results in small sample sizes, and can even be focussed on one individual (Chase 2005). Despite small numbers, large volumes of data can be generated by effective narrative inquiry (Wengraf 2001). Qualitative research concentrates on the quality of the data produced and the ability of researchers to access in-depth information about the lives of a few people within their own cultural and social contexts (Sears 1992). Flyvberg (2004) explains that even a single case can be used to test a general rule, and thus a sample can be representative of a population regardless of size. As Jones (2003, p.63) states, "*what may have been lost in not using a method with the potential for larger numbers of subjects, so producing large data sets, was more than compensated for by the method's capacity for deep and meaningful case studies*".

A smaller sample size can prevent the generation of too much data which would result in only superficial analysis being conducted (Morse 2000). Sample sizes of as few as six participants can be effective in providing illuminating information, providing that those participants are knowledgeable about the phenomenon being explored (Romney et al. 1986; Morse 1995). What is most important is that each participant is an expert in the area, and able to answer the questions put to them to increase understanding (Junninen 2008); each of the athletes I interviewed was the 'expert' of their own story.

The research was not focussed towards any particular sport. The research was also not initially directed towards a specific gender however, it is important to consider the context of the research – female participants within criminological studies are notoriously difficult to obtain, so much so that it is not uncommon for criminologists to utilise exclusively male samples (DeLisi and Vaughn 2016). Ideally the number of women interviewed would have been proportionate to the number of women committing crime in the UK (approx. 25%) however, this was not possible. Despite best efforts to interview female athletes who met the inclusion criteria, the sample for this research

was comprised exclusively of male athletes because no female athlete agreed to participate.

## Overview of Sample

An overview of participants in the current study can be seen in Table 3.3:

Table 3.3. Overview of Sample

Name (pseudonym)	Gender	Current age	Sport	Age at time of offence	Nature of offence(s)
Archie	Male	45	Football	21, 27	Offences against the person – assault. Drug offences – possession.
Billy	Male	24	Boxing	22	Offences against the person – assault. Offences against property - criminal damage.
Charlie	Male	44	Football	18	Major driving offences – dangerous driving; driving without insurance.
Dougie	Male	40	Boxing	18	Offences against property – criminal damage (vandalism); theft.
Ethan	Male	25	Rugby Union	20	Offences against the person – Grievous Bodily Harm.
Finn	Male	38	Football	21, 23, 24, 28	Drug offences – supply of drugs; possession of drugs with intent to supply; importation.
George	Male	34	Football	18, 19, 20	Offences against property – theft
Harry	Male	45	Rugby union	26, 38	Offences against the person – assault Major driving offences – driving while under the influence of alcohol
Isaac	Male	29	Pro skating	19	Offences against property - criminal damage. Drug offences –possession of drugs.
Joshua	Male	48	Non-contact team sport	40	Drug offences – supply of drugs; possession of drugs with intent to supply; importation.

## Conducting the Interviews

Interviews are one of the most, if not the most, common sources of qualitative data (King 2004; Munroe-Chandler 2005). Holstein and Gubrium (1995) estimate that around 90% of all research within social science utilise interviews to some extent. Interviews enable the elicitation of experiences, and permit emotions, ideas and opinions to be explored (Newmann 2000). In line with the nature of narrative inquiry, this research utilised in-depth narrative interviews to explore the athletes' experiences. In-depth interviews allow

participants to express themselves at their own pace and in their own words (Brewer 2002) providing them with greater voice and reducing the influence of the interviewer (Denzin and Lincoln 2018). Narrative interviews enable the traditional 'interview machine' question-answer format to be avoided (Denzin and Norman 2001), allowing the interviewer-interviewee relationship to evolve into one that closer resembles a narrator and a listener (Chase 2005). Narrative interviews enable us to consider how lives have developed over time, rather than providing a 'snap-shot' of multiple lives at a fixed moment in time (Carless and Douglas 2012). Within the field of crime, and exploring criminal incidents, where participants are required to remember the past (Kvale 1996) and explain their actions, in-depth narrative interviews may be particularly suitable and have some therapeutic side effects; Colbourne and Sque (2005) identify that these types of interviews may be beneficial to participants after traumatic experiences.

When interviewing elites, time is often limited, and while a researcher will wish to fully utilise their opportunity to gain as much as possible from the interview, highly structured interviews tend to limit potential knowledge generation (Brustad 2008). While entirely unstructured interviews permit flexibility and spontaneity (Mason 2002), when interviewing elites even a moderate degree of structure will enable the interviewer to cover the main areas of investigation, while still allowing the participant to bring up content that they believe is important (Duke 2002). This research utilised in-depth, loosely semi-structured interviews to explore participant's stories. In keeping with the guidance of Hochstetler and Copes (2016) each interview stuck to a loose interview guide but gave the participant the freedom to discuss any area they wished.

### **Interview Structure and Approach**

Getting an interview 'right' is important (Morris 2009) and the success of an interview is invariably effected by the skills of the interviewer (Klenke 2008). Delaney (2007) stresses the importance of being prepared for an interview, and thus maximising opportunity, as such each interview within this study was designed to encourage deep levels of conversation. Each interview began with an initial general question that was broad enough to elicit a long story (Holloway and Wheeler 2010). Using a single narrative-inducing question, such as "Tell me about yourself" (Carter and Carter 2007), or in this case "Tell me about your sport", enabled an early opportunity for a prolonged, uninterrupted narration (Jones 2003). By developing an initial question that invited the athlete to tell their story (Chase 2005), I was also able to use that time to build up my own confidence in the situation, and develop trust with the athlete (Mikecz 2012). The initial question also enabled the athlete to talk about their sporting experiences in as



much depth as they wished, enabling some degree of rapport to be established before a sensitive topic was explored.

The approach of Jovchelovitch and Bauer (2000) was utilised to aid in the construction of the interview plan. In line with in-depth, narrative interviewing it was my aim to allow the participants to control the interview with limited interruption from myself. Participants were encouraged to speak freely and simply take me through their journey. Interviews in this study were designed with a focus on three key areas: before the criminal incident, the incident, and after the incident – but athletes were free to speak about any area they felt contributed to their story. The open nature of the interview allowed participants to direct their own story and experience, which was essential to enable deep and rich data to be generated. I utilised a small number of open-ended questions (Silverman 2005) and while the participants all recollected their experiences in different ways, I asked the following core questions at some point during each interview:

1. Tell me about your sport?
2. Can you describe any sporting 'highs' during your career?
3. Can you recall any sporting 'lows'?
4. Can you tell me about the event that brought you to the attention of the police?
5. Were you aware of your decision making at that time?
6. What impact did the criminal incident have on you?

With the exception of these core questions, I focused on the approach that the fewer questions I asked, the more likely it was that I would extract deeper meaning from the athletes' stories (Morrow 2005). I consistently attempted to assume the position of a reflective and passive participant while the athletes told their stories (Jones 2003). All interviews were conducted face-to-face with the athletes in order to obtain as detailed responses as possible (Sturges and Hanrahan 2004) and lasted between 58 and 113 minutes.

As with many qualitative approaches, narrative inquiry is a subjective process, Holloway and Wheeler (2010) state that narrative interviews can be significantly affected by the relationship between the participant and the researcher, reinforcing the need to ensure that an effective rapport is established and that preconceived ideas formed by the researcher are kept from the participant when hearing and responding to their stories. Before conducting each interview, I ensured that I spent time with the participant in order to develop rapport, which is key to the success of research (Suzuki et al. 2007).

It is clear that the act of interviewing is a craft (Thuesen 2011) and an interviewer must be prepared to adapt their style to make the participant feel comfortable (Harvey 2011). While preparation is clearly important, flexibility is essential as people, and stories, can be unpredictable (Chase 2005), especially when discussing sensitive issues such as criminal activity. Interviews are essentially co-created, a joint production between the narrator and the listener (Chase 2005). As such Polkinghorne (2007) warns against simply producing what an interviewer expected to hear. It is the interviewer's task to empower the interviewee, encouraging them to explore their own experiences while at the same time reacting positively to unexpected elements of the narratives (Polkinghorne 2007). Emotions need to be managed by the interviewer (Thuesen 2011) and are central to the conduct of interviews (Ezzy 2010). I was very aware of the extreme nature of some of the crimes that the athletes were describing, and as such followed the guidance of Dunlap et al. (1990) who encourage the adoption of a demeanour of acceptance and interest, showing no reaction to shocking details. As part of my preparation for each interview I ensured I 'read up' on each of the athletes, and was aware of certain elements of their story prior to interview. It was essential that I was able to shelve that knowledge, and try to maintain a degree of outward neutrality (Ball 1994).

One of the criticisms of narrative inquiry is that interviewers often fail to truly listen to people (Munro Hendry 2007). If they cut a person off, or fail to allow them to finish speaking, they are unlikely to gather enlightening stories. Interruptions can be seen as intrusions, and a show of power over another (Boucher 2017). To truly enable the gestalt nature of a person's story to be heard, non-interruption is essential (Jones 2003). I was very aware of the importance of attentive listening, and minimal interruption, and wanted to make sure I left the interview with as much understanding as possible of the athlete's experiences, and of their views (Delaney 2007).

### **Specific Areas of Consideration within the Interview Process**

Given the nature of the sample, and the area of research, there were a number of areas that required additional thought when preparing for the interviews. It was essential that these areas were considered so that they did not limit the research.

#### ***The Sensitive Nature of the Research***

Interviews can be emotional experiences, regardless of the sensitivity of the content being covered. Smith (2006) explains that despite the status of elites, they are not immune to feeling vulnerable in an interview setting, which recalling experiences can exacerbate (Neal and McLaughlin 2009). I was conscious that I was asking athletes to discuss highly emotive, sensitive and personal subjects, and on a few occasions,

participants discussed how emotional the interview had made them. In order to demonstrate empathy, and ensure the participant was comfortable, I made sure I acknowledged that I understood when I asked a question that may have been awkward, or difficult for them to answer (Ostrander 1993). Additionally, Richards (1996) recommends placing difficult questions in the middle of the interview which enables rapport to be built prior to that level of exploration. I made sure that there was enough time during the interview to talk in detail once the criminal incident had been explored.

### ***The use of Silence***

While the use of silence in an interview can encourage a participant to reveal further, more detailed, information (Berry 2002), it can also be viewed as a form of power in an interview setting (Boucher 2017). Harvey (2011) refers to the fine balance that needs to be achieved with silences. I felt that using silence as a tool would erode any rapport I had built, and I was very aware of avoiding any techniques that could be interpreted as manipulative. Given my previous experience, I was also aware of the use of silences within police interviews, so I wanted to make sure that this was an entirely different experience for participants.

### ***Memory and Time Delay***

As all participants were asked to recollect an incident, or incidents, that occurred in their past, it was important that I considered the impact of this time delay on the veracity of their stories. Historical memories have limitations, and this can be particularly true in the case of athletes asked to reflect upon their careers. As Palmer (2016, p.172) notes, *“misty memories of halcyon days gone by – that is, of an athlete’s star rising rather than falling – also play a part in distorting a linear account of the life of an individual”*. Interviewees may also be selective in terms of the memories they present, and the stories they tell may be grounded in self-serving motives (Mikecz 2012). It is clear however, that within narrative inquiry, there is an acceptance that stories will change and evolve over time (Presser and Sandberg 2015). As O’Connor (2015, p.174) states, there is no *“once-and-for-all life story”*. How we understand an event and how we choose to recall those experiences will alter over time. Participants may well get facts wrong and their memories will be challenged (Lillekar 2003); however, within narrative inquiry, the focus is on the creation of meaning (Morris 2009), rather than the accuracy of the recalled events. Most importantly for this research, it is believed that people tend to have clearer memories of those events that are unusual, emotive, and that have significant consequences (Brewer 1986). Regardless of the accuracy of our memories, we use these recollections to re-construct our past and connect these events to our present and future (Holloway and Freshwater 2007): we essentially make sense of our past from the

perspective of the present (Garro 2000). When I first began the interviews, I was frustrated by the way the participants would 'bounce' from one subject to the next. I was hoping for events to be presented in a chronological order, but learned to accept that this is not how people reproduce memories.

### ***The Limitations of Language***

Polkinghorne (2007) identifies a number of areas of concern surrounding the disjunction between the experiences of participants, and the language they use to describe them. He believes that for research to attain a level of confidence, these areas must be considered, and efforts made to limit the distance between experience and description. Firstly, participants may be limited by their own abilities to explain and capture their experiences. Polkinghorne (2007) encourages the use of figurative language to aid participants; I encouraged the use of tools such as similes and metaphors, where possible, throughout the interviews. Participants need to be given time to reflect on their experiences, in order to describe them effectively, as such I was aware of ensuring I gave them the space to do this without rushing their answers. People may be resistant to show self-exploration of their own feelings to a stranger, partly due to the lack of rapport and trust, but also due to their concerns over social desirability. Given the nature of the issues we were discussing, this was very important within the current research. Polkinghorne (2007) echoes the guidance of Dunlap et al. (1990) above, explaining that demonstrating a lack of judgement is positive in ensuring that participants use the language they truly wish to, in order to describe experiences.

### ***Self-presentation***

Polanyi (1985) explains that the teller of a story will 'recipient design' their narrative; each story is told for a particular audience, and for particular purposes; Chase (2005, p.657) describes narratives as "*socially situated interactive performances*". It was important that I was realistic, and understood that the participants would want me to view them in a certain way, and that for some, telling their story could be a method of 're-shaping', or 're-creating', themselves in a different way (Holloway and Freshwater 2007; O'Connor 2015). I was aware that to a certain extent, I would largely be able to access what Goffman (1959) referred to as the 'front stage', the athletes' 'official' story, but it was my job to try and explore the content that they would ordinarily keep 'behind closed doors'. Given the high-profile nature of some of the participants, they had told their stories in different fora previously.

### ***Believing Criminals***

One of the greatest challenges of any interview is to try and gain an honest account from the person being interviewed (Mikecz 2012), and it is particularly important within this study to acknowledge the background of the participants being interviewed. Offenders are used to explaining themselves, and as such reconciling multiple versions of themselves (McKendy 2006). For many, offenders' narratives should be viewed suspiciously, as they may be strategically pitched and as such inauthentic (Presser 2009) though the same is true for many people who view an interview as a chance to alter a person's opinion of them.

Given the scepticism that exists around the accounts of offenders, it is essential that the nature of narrative inquiry is considered. While it pays to maintain a healthy suspicion of any story, concerns around truth are to a certain extent benign when it comes to narrative inquiry. Narratives are, in their very nature, stories, they do not represent objective truth, instead focusing on personal truth (Papathomas 2016), and may be best considered as a 'guide to behaviour' rather than a true account of what really happened to a person (Presser 2009). Narratives are interesting because of their subjectivity, and whether consciously or not, we all create personal myths (McAdams 2001). Narratives are a way for a person to present themselves (Presser and Sandberg 2015) rather than a substantive account of life (Wieder 1974). Presser and Sandberg (2015) explain that regardless of the purpose of the story, the story has consequences for the person telling it, and those listening to it – absolute truth is therefore not essential. Within narrative inquiry 'historical truths' are not as important as 'narrative truths' (Spence 1982). As Polkinghorne (2007) explains, stories provide evidence for personal meaning, not for factual occurrence of events. The most important element of any narrative is how the teller sees themselves (Jones 2003).

Regardless of the nature of the individuals I was interviewing, it was essential that I trusted in their stories. Munro Hendry (2007) encourages narrative researchers to keep faith in the stories they are told, accept them as true (Holloway and Freshwater 2007), and replace suspicion or doubt with trust. There is a danger that in approaching stories with scepticism, a researcher will view their participants as simply subjects who are 'exploited' for academic outcomes (Holloway and Freshwater 2007). In moving away from focusing on the truth of an experience, I was able to concentrate on the versions of the self that the athletes presented, and the reality of their experiences for them (Chase 2005). Fundamentally, whether their accounts were true or not, I tried to focus on what the stories meant to each athlete. Presser and Sandberg (2015, p.4) point out that "*whether offenders' stories are seen as potentially fictional or as offering a unique*

*vantage point on truth, the implication is the same: narrative is epistemologically subordinate to experience”.*

## **Data Analysis**

The analysis of data can be considered the most complex and cryptic element of qualitative research (Thorne 2000) and it demands a critical outlook in order to honestly capture the voices of participants and ensure their experiences are represented as authentically as possible (Mauthner and Birch 2002). Junninen (2008) describes the two phases of qualitative analysis, firstly simplifying observations and secondly, solving the mystery. Within narrative inquiry, the collection of the data is considered the first of two performances, with analysis and interpretation forming the second (Polkinghorne 2007). In its most simplistic form, analysis involves bringing order to data and organising it into patterns or categories in order to observe relationships (Brewer 2002). Narrative analysis can be viewed as a creative production which is less constrained by rules, and involves comparing stories from participants with the literature (Polkinghorne 2007). Using the literature to illuminate findings in this way utilises thick description (Jones et al. 2012) making insights more vivid. The researcher strives to become the ‘enlightened academic’ (Hay 1997) and attempts to find meaning in areas that the participant doesn’t (Morris 2009), as Chase (2005, p.664) explains:

*“During an interview, both narrator and listener are interested in developing the fullness and particularity of the narrator’s story, but when it comes to interpreting, the researcher turns to how and what questions that open up particular ways of understanding what the narrator is communicating through his or her story”.*

The process of analysis is non-linear and depends upon the researcher working in a systematic, orderly and structured fashion (Holloway and Wheeler 2010). The research process is iterative and time consuming, and requires the researcher to repeatedly move back and forth between collection to analysis in order to refine the questions they ask of the collected data (Holloway and Wheeler 2010).

Qualitative researchers need to be accountable, and responsible for their interpretations and the data they choose to present (Holloway and Freshwater 2007). It is essential that they ensure they represent their participants and stay true to their stories without imposing their own narratives (Munro Hendry 2007). Researchers need to ‘do justice’ to the original narratives (Czarniawska 1997) and ensure that any theory presented grows out of the collected data (Junninen 2008). Analysis should be suitably transparent to ensure that the reader is able to retrace the steps taken by the researcher and judge the conceivability of their interpretation (Polkinghorne 2007). Narrative inquiry rejects the

assumption that there is a singular truth therefore researchers accept ambiguity and do not seek irrevocable acceptance of their claims (Polkinghorne 2007).

### **Thematic Analysis**

Thematic analysis was used to explore the narrative data in the current study, with the focus on the content of the story, rather than how it was told (Riessman 2008). Described as a method for “*identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data*” (Braun and Clarke 2006, p.79), thematic analysis involves reconstructing the participants’ interpretations into themes (Jones 2003) in order to accurately represent their accounts’ (Holloway and Wheeler 2010). A theme can be described as “*a patterned response or meaning*” (Braun and Clarke 2006, p. 82) and involves both interpretation and integration of data (Nowell et al. 2017). The researcher has flexibility within identifying themes, but it is important that those which address the research question are prioritised (Braun and Clarke 2006). While thematic analysis has been identified as an effective analytic tool for novice researchers (Braun and Clarke 2006, 2012; Clarke and Braun 2017; Nowell et al. 2017) it is more important that it meets the goals of the research in question (Kiger and Varpio 2020). In terms of the current research, thematic analysis was considered particularly suitable as it is an effective method when seeking to understand experiences and behaviours (Braun and Clarke 2012). Thematic analysis can be used across epistemological frameworks and is effective with varying sample sizes (Kiger and Varpio 2020). It is considered an effective method when adopting the interpretivist perspective as it can demonstrate how a social construct develops (Joffe 2011) and enables underlying deeper themes to be examined within the data (Kiger and Varpio 2020). Considered valuable for examining the thematic similarities and differences between narratives provided by a number of people (Smith and Sparkes 2005), Ezzy (2002) describes how thematic analysis is able to create perceptions of rich data and offer widespread themes to enable sense to be made of the area of study. Pertinently for the current study, the importance of a theme is not automatically reflective of its’ frequency within the data (Braun and Clarke 2006; Nowell et al. 2017); it focusses on the unique nature of human behaviour rather than common properties (Chase 2005).

Braun and Clarke (2006) emphasise that although there are many benefits of thematic analysis, it is essential that the previous literature is thoroughly explored before data collection commences to ensure that researchers can have a comprehensive understanding and knowledge of the discipline. Braun and Clarke (2006) identify six phases in the process of conducting thematic analysis, as outlined in Table 3.4. This has emerged as the most adopted method within this form of analysis (Clarke and Braun 2017), and was followed in the current study in order to maintain a logical and systematic

approach. These phases are recursive, not linear (Kiger and Varpio 2020) and I revisited each step a number of times as the themes emerged.

Table 3.4. Phases of Thematic Analysis

Phase	Description of the Process
1. Familiarising yourself with the data	Transcribing data, reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas.
2. Generating initial codes	Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.
3. Searching for themes	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.
4. Reviewing themes	Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (level 1) and the entire data set (level 2), generating a thematic map of the analysis.
5. Defining and naming themes	Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names of each theme.
6. Producing the report	The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis.

(Source: Adapted from Braun and Clarke 2006, p.87).

The first phase required me to become familiar with the entire data set (Braun and Clarke 2006), and I repeatedly read the transcripts in order to become immersed in the data and appreciate its significance (Swann et al. 2015). I ensured that I listened to the voices within each narrative (Chase 2005) directly after each interview was transcribed, enabling initial analysis to occur prior to the data being broken up and coded (Daymon and Holloway 2011). Transcription was conducted using a transcription pedal as soon after the interview as possible. I also ensured that I made comments about the mood or tone of the participants. In order to ensure I didn't risk misunderstanding by moving too quickly to transform the story into text (Frank 2000), I took time over the second phase by scrutinising the transcripts repeatedly. Kiger and Varpio (2020) describe this process of coding as a way of organising the data at a granular level. Phase three involved me examining the codes in order to identify themes, thus capturing something important about the data in relation to the research question (Braun and Clarke 2006). Braun and Clarke (2012) explain that if analysis is viewed as a house, emerging themes represent the walls and the roof, with codes as bricks, and this process of identifying themes is fundamentally interpretive (Kiger and Varpio 2020). Varpio et al. (2017) acknowledge



that themes do not simply emerge from data, but are constructed by the researcher who considers how codes interact with one another.

Throughout each phase I ensured that I kept detailed notes of my rationale and thought processes enabling me to organise my thinking and reflect on the decisions made. Nowell et al. (2017) emphasise the importance of keeping reflective notes which enable researchers to make connections between themes, and also serve to provide an audit trail. Phases four and five demonstrated the recursive nature of the process and required me to be reflexive and view the data critically, whilst always ensuring the participants' stories did not become lost. It was important that each of the final themes contributed to the overall research question (Braun and Clarke 2006). King (2004) views Phase six as a continuation of the analysis ensuring that the final findings section moves beyond simply describing the emergent themes. Braun and Clarke (2006, 2012) emphasise the importance of the final findings chapters demonstrating not only how the researcher has interpreted the data, but also why these themes are important.

The thematic analysis conducted identified five emergent themes from the data: the sporting experience; the criminal experience; the impact of external influences; the role of drugs and alcohol; and finally, the journey. Themes were then broken down into sub-themes. Throughout the findings chapters, I utilised existing theory to provide meaning and explanation for the criminal experiences of the participants. By amalgamating descriptions, analyses and interpretations I attempted to establish the full picture and enable the complete story to be told from the viewpoint of participants (see Shipway 2010) and also myself as the researcher. Table 3.5 illustrates the thematic framework produced through analysis and interpretation. The emerging themes and sub-themes represent the participants' experiences, and share with the reader their stories of crime. No one theme carries more relevance than another, and each was determined by an interpretation of the data during analysis.

Table 3.5. The Thematic and Sub-Thematic Framework

Theme	Sub-theme	Chapter	
The Sporting Experience	Starting Sport	5	
	Positive Sporting Experiences		
	Being an Athlete		
	Aggression and Violence		
	Negative Sporting Experiences		
	Stopping Sport		
The Criminal Experience	Talking about Crime	6	
	Justifying Crime		
	Committing Crime		
	The Impact of Crime		
	Being Punished		
The Impact of External Influences	School Experiences	7	
	The Influence of Friends		
	Family Background		
	Negative Experiences		
	The Role of Relationships		
The Role of Drugs and Alcohol	Misuse of Drugs	Taking Drugs	8
		The Impact of Drugs	
		Dealing Drugs	
		Stopping Drugs	
	Misuse of Alcohol	Abusing Alcohol	
		The Impact of Alcohol	
		Stopping Alcohol	
The Journey: Turning my Life Around	This was Meant to Happen	9	
	A Changed Person		
	Life is Better		
	Gaining Positives		
	Reflection and Regret		

### Demonstrating Trustworthiness

It is essential that researchers consider the validity of the findings they have produced. By paying attention to the validation process, a researcher is more likely to be able to convince others that their claims provide an understanding of the human realm under investigation (Polkinghorne 2007). Within qualitative research, validity can be seen to refer to 'truth', and an acceptance of the degree to which the evidence represents the social phenomena being explored (Hammersley 1990). Researchers need to consider if their evidence and arguments are plausible, credible, and ultimately trustworthy (Polkinghorne 2007); as Angen (2000, p.380) explains, "*validation in qualitative research is a judgement of trustworthiness, or goodness, of a piece of research*". Researchers are obligated to demonstrate due diligence (Choudhuri et al. 2004) and by illustrating the

trustworthiness of their findings, and transparency of their processes, they are able to ensure the integrity of their discoveries (Cope 2014).

Trustworthiness enables confidence to be gained in the data collected, the interpretation of that data, and the methods utilised (Polit and Beck 2014). While experts agree trustworthiness is essential, there is however, considerable dispute over the terms and criteria that best constitute and assure trustworthiness (Jones et al. 2012; Leung 2015). Despite the lack of consensus surrounding the criteria of trustworthiness, I felt it essential to utilise some form of guidance to ensure I adopted appropriate strategies to promote trustworthiness within my research. Lincoln and Guba's (1985) approach to trustworthiness is widely accepted by qualitative researchers (Connelly 2016) and was adopted in this study; they believe that trustworthiness can be achieved by focussing on the following criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

### **Credibility**

The credibility of the research refers to the degree of confidence the reader has in the truth of the findings, and whether the data presented truly represents the information provided by the participants. Credibility is concerned with truth-value, and is believed by some to be the most important criteria to ensure trustworthiness (Polit and Beck 2014). In order to ensure credibility, I utilised the strategy of member checking. By ensuring the participants had sight of the transcripts of their interview I was able check that the generated text was accurate (Welch et al. 2002) and captured the meaning they felt (Polkinghorne 2007), and also gave them an opportunity to clarify any points or expand on what they had initially said.

Despite being identified as the most important strategy to enhance a study's credibility (Shenton and Hayter 2004), member checking is not without its' sceptics. Sparkes (1998) does not consider member checking as validation, instead believing it is simply an opportunity to elaborate on experience, and should thus be considered as additional data (Morrow 2005). Smith and McGannon (2018) go further and state that member checking is ineffective as a strategy to demonstrate trustworthiness. Notwithstanding the concerns surrounding member checking, I did find that the participants responded favourably to the process and I felt it increased the collaborative relationship between us (Williams and Morrow 2009).

### **Transferability**

Although the sample size within this study was small and the participants were unique, it was important that the prospect of transferability to an alternative context, was not

simply rejected (Stake 1994; Denscombe 1998). One of the purposes of this research was to present findings that could be used to aid in the prevention of future criminal activity, thus using the experiences of the athletes to inform those in alternative contexts. I utilised thick description to ensure that a vivid picture could be presented (Amankwaa 2016), as Korstjens and Moser (2018, p.122) explain, “*your responsibility as a researcher is to provide a ‘thick description’ of the participants and the research process, to enable the reader to assess whether your findings are transferable to their own setting*”. The understanding of lived experiences is inherent to the narrative approach, thick description enables the actions, behaviours, words and cultural contexts of people to be truly represented.

In addition to transferability, it was also important that the findings could be applied to a broader population than simply the participants included within this study, and that the potential for generalisability was considered. Qualitative research is, in its very nature, complex, subjective and at times blurry (Alvesson and Skoldberg 2009) however, generalisations are possible from qualitative research, just in different ways to quantitative research. While the current findings were not generalisable in a traditional, or statistical way, the real value was in ensuring that both the breadth and nature of athlete criminality was revealed (Lewis 2014). It was essential that I took appropriate steps to ensure that a sufficient level of naturalistic generalisability (Stake 1978) was achieved.

In order to ensure that the research resonated with the reader’s own experiences, and that the participants’ journeys were recognisable in terms of what the reader had experienced themselves (Smith 2018), I endeavoured to include layers of detail to provide in depth evidence of their journeys. I wanted to ensure that anyone who had participated in sport, could empathise with the participants, and make connections between the athletes within this study and their own lives (Smith 2018). It was essential that as a researcher I remained faithful to the stories I was told, and by presenting rich detail and illuminating descriptions (Polkinghorne 2007) the participants’ voice was preserved.

### **Dependability and Confirmability**

Dependability refers to consistency, and stability of data over time (Polit and Beck 2014). Lincoln and Guba (1985) highlight the strong links between credibility and dependability, if credibility can be established then dependability is likely to also be demonstrated. Confirmability indicates the degree of neutrality of research, and addresses the fundamental issue that the findings presented should represent the concept being

researched, as appose to the feelings or beliefs of the researcher (Gasson 2004). In order to ensure both dependability and confirmability, transparency within the research process is necessary; this was achieved through the use of an audit trail. An audit trail enables the research process to be tracked and repeated if necessary. I combined the audit trail with peer review and ensured I informed my supervisors of all key decisions during the research process. My supervisors acted as 'mirrors' (Morrow 2005) bouncing my ideas back with queries, and also as 'devils advocates' at points to suggest alternative viewpoints and ensure I was being reflexive throughout. The peer review took place regularly throughout the study via both formal and informal discussions (Swann et al. 2015).

## **Reflexivity**

All qualitative research is subjective, and is thus exposed to researcher bias (Morrow 2005). Research biases can be explored and managed through the process of reflexivity (Williams and Morrow 2009), allowing the researcher to enter into an open reflection of their role in the research. Walshaw (2009) explains that researchers cannot exclude themselves from their research, and through the process of reflexivity, they 'perform the self' and are written into the research. A researcher's assumptions can be emotion-laden (Morrow 2005) and significantly influence the course of research, as such personal reflexivity is paramount (Finlay 2002). Reflexivity refers to awareness of the self (Rennie 2004) and can be defined as "*self-critical sympathetic introspection and the self-conscious scrutiny of the self as a researcher*" (England 1994, p.82). Reflexivity is a conscious attempt by the researcher to acknowledge their own involvement in the study and enables them to clearly identify what comes from them and what comes from the participant (Williams and Morrow 2009). By examining themselves, the researcher is able to explore the 'situated self' (Jones et al. 2012), and acknowledge that they too are participants in the research. A researcher's lived experiences and values cannot be detached from the process (Ponterotto 2015) however, by examining their 'conceptual baggage' (Hsiung 2010), the researcher is able to identify areas that may influence the research. The researcher's subjectivity can act as a resource to help them understand their participants (Jones et al. 2012) and can influence how the study develops and is eventually interpreted (Bott 2010).

In order to be as reflexive as possible I utilised bracketing (Morrow 2005); I acknowledged my own assumptions and predispositions and attempted to minimise them to avoid them influencing the research (Husserl 1931). I was aware that my background and previous experiences shape my beliefs about the world and the participants I was studying (Holloway and Freshwater 2007). In order to be able to avoid

biases, it was important that I reflected upon my positionality, and how my background influenced a number of my key decisions both prior to, and during, the research process. In doing this I was able to make a clear distinction between my own experiences and the stories of the participants' (Williams and Morrow 2009).

### **Self-reflective Log**

In order to ensure I reflected upon myself throughout the research process, I maintained a self-reflective log within which I kept an ongoing record of my interview experiences and made note of: any feelings I had following the interview; the ways in which both the participants and I reacted to situations; any concerns I felt needed to be followed up; and any assumptions that I felt were emerging (Jones 2003; Morrow 2005). Following each interview, I would write down my thoughts and impressions of the interview, primarily to ensure that I considered how each session contributed to the overall research, but also to guarantee that elements that did not work could be changed for the next time. The notes I made enabled me to reflect on the relationship I had established with the participant (Cochrane 1998) and how I could improve this in the future, and also to be realistic about the positives and negatives of each interview (Jones 2003).

The self-reflective log was invaluable for a number of key reasons. I realised that on reflection I needed to be better at 'ceding control' (Jones 2003) of the interview, and let the athlete dictate the direction of their narrative. Initially I was so busy focussing on how the participants' stories could fit with what I wanted to find, that I wasn't listening and was in danger of obscuring their real experiences (Munro Hendry 2007). I realised that when the participants 'wandered off' and started to tell a story that I didn't particularly want to hear, that this was actually giving them the voice they needed and allowing them to be the narrator (Chase 2005). Over time I realised that what initially appeared to be 'peripheral' stories, were actually key elements to their narratives. On reflection, I was able to understand how hard some of the participants found it to speak about the details of their criminal offences, I could see how some minimised their experiences (Holloway and Freshwater 2007), whether consciously or subconsciously. The log enabled me to learn from each experience and improve my approach each time; I gained a degree of comfort through practice (Delaney 2007) and the log enabled me to revisit previous interviews as I prepared for the next.

### **Ethical Considerations of the Research**

The nature of social science research, and particularly the narrative methodology utilised within the current study, naturally results in close relationships forming between the researcher and the researched as participants are asked to share experiences (Tisdale

2004). Researchers within the social science realm need to be attentive to the importance of ethics when undertaking research concerning sensitive subjects (Shaw et al. 2019). Research must be socially and morally acceptable (Gratton and Jones 2010) and while the researcher can and must take precautions, Shaw et al. (2019) concede that there is no right or wrong way to conduct research around sensitive subjects. MacNamee et al. (2006) provide a number of areas that should be considered, particularly when working with participants from within the sporting context; all of the following were respected during the current study: the role of the researcher; the risks of completing the study versus the benefits; the necessity of gaining written informed consent; deception; the researcher’s responsibility to participants; issues of relationship and leaving the field; the presentation of participants; anonymity; and how to deal with unforeseen ethical issues that emerge during and after the research study.

Ethical approval for the current study was obtained via the Bournemouth University Ethics Panel, and the ethical considerations discussed at the panel featured heavily during the data collection process. Given the nature of the research area, it was necessary to utilise gatekeepers to access participants at the outset; eventually participants began contacting me themselves. The gatekeepers acted in one of the following ways detailed in Table 3.6 depending on the circumstances, and only those who informed the gatekeeper that they were willing to participate were put in touch with me:

Table 3.6. Gatekeeper Courses of Action

Course of Action 1	The gatekeeper contacted general athletes within their organisation to identify if anyone fitted the criteria. If they did the gatekeeper explained the research by means of an informal briefing sheet to see if they were willing to be involved. Any willing athlete’s details were forwarded to the researcher.
Course of Action 2	The gatekeeper identified eligible participants in their organisation and contacted them directly to explain the research and asked if they would be willing to be involved. Any willing athlete’s details were forwarded to the researcher.
Course of Action 3	The gatekeeper became aware of an athlete within their organisation who fitted the criteria. The gatekeeper contacted them directly to explain the research and asked if they would be willing to be involved. Any willing athlete’s details were forwarded to the researcher.

Rogers et al. (2012) believe that all people are ontologically vulnerable. Given the background of the participants, and the recognition that deviant individuals are

considered vulnerable (O'Connor 1979) it was essential that I stressed informed consent (Tisdale 2004) and maintained the research parameters as dictated by the research panel. It was vital that I was responsive to the participants' welfare (Ten Have 2014, 2015) ensuring I was flexible and reactive in my responses (Hallowell et al. 2005). When discussing sensitive subjects, participants may be susceptible to emotional and psychological distress (Shaw et al. 2019) therefore it was critical that participants knew that they were free to leave the research process at any time, without explanation.

Participants were treated with care at all times, and were informed of the aims of the study and the potential emotional risks associated with discussing their experiences prior to organising a date for the interview. Two participants withdrew consent at the early stages of the interview process, demonstrating that the ethical parameters of the research were being conveyed clearly, and adhered to. On the day of the interview, participants were reminded of the aims of the research, and the structure of the interview was explained; at this stage, they read and completed the Informed Consent Form (Appendix A). The securing of informed consent also enabled me to be completely sure that the participants had not been coerced by the gatekeeper. Participants were informed at the outset of the interview (and through the Participant Information Sheet at Appendix B) that only spent convictions could be discussed and that the interviewer was obligated to report any behaviour that may potentially cause harm to another person.

At times sensitive issues were discussed, and participants became overtly emotional however, none requested that the interview be terminated, or withdrew their consent. I was confident in my ability to recognise signs of distress at an early stage given my previous training, as detailed in Table 3.7:

Table 3.7. Previous Training Completed by Researcher

Qualification	Description
Trauma Risk Management Practitioner	Trauma Risk Management is a trauma-focused peer support system designed to help people who have experienced a traumatic, or potentially traumatic, event. Trauma Risk Management Practitioners complete training allowing them to understand the effects that traumatic events can have upon people.
Neuro Linguistic Programming Practitioner	Neuro Linguistic Programming Practitioners use perceptual, behavioural, and communication techniques in order to enable others to alter thoughts and actions. Techniques include those designed to maximise rapport with others by matching their physical behaviours to improve communication and response through empathy.



Cognitive interviewing (PEACE interview qualification)	The cognitive interview (PEACE) is a questioning technique used by the police to heighten retrieval of information about a crime from an eyewitness or victim's memory.
PACE interviewing	A PACE interview occurs when the interviewee is 'under caution' and is the formal evidence gathering stage in a criminal or regulatory prosecution.

Follow-up contact was conducted after each interview, to ensure the participant was supported and participants were accurately referred to other agencies where needed. It was also essential that I recognised the impact that the interviews had on me, and that in discussing sensitive and distressing experiences there could have been repercussions beyond the research encounter (Jones et al. 2012). Interviewing offenders can be emotionally challenging (Shaw et al. 2019) and it was important that I managed my emotions and accepted that downplaying them would have been unavoidable (Dickson-Swift et al. 2009).

As is common in interviews with offenders, I was directed by the Ethics Panel to conduct my interactions with the participants in a public space to ensure the safety of both the participants and myself (Shaw et al. 2019). Given the sensitive nature of the research, the participant's anonymity was protected at all times and all data treated confidentially. All participants were provided with a pseudonym and additionally given the option to withhold the details of their sports; this measure was only utilised by one participant. The details of third parties mentioned within the interviews were also kept confidential. Recordings were destroyed once transcribed and any transcriptions kept on a password protected device.

### **Limitations of the Research**

Limitations of qualitative research and narrative inquiry have been highlighted throughout this methodology chapter however, this section will focus on the specific limitations of the current study. While efforts were constantly made to increase the size of the sample, the experiences of only ten elite athletes were obtained. That said, given the paradigm to which this research is aligned, a small sample size is not out of the ordinary (Ponterotto 2010). The sampling criteria was intentionally narrow to ensure the research question was addressed and access to elite athletes is difficult via sporting authorities given their reluctance to endorse or support research into an area such as athlete criminality (Engelberg and Moston 2020). The subject matter itself may have acted as a repellent for potential participants, as they may have been fearful of identification or repercussions.

My previous experiences in law enforcement, while beneficial in some ways, may also have created a degree of reticence in potential participants.

Given the nature of the elite sample I interviewed, the onus was on me to be flexible in terms of travel and timings (Mikecz 2012). Athletes were either still competing, or involved in other work (primarily within their sport) that took priority. Given the time constraints it was not possible to conduct multiple interviews with each participant which would have aided the depth and richness of the data (Polkinghorne 2005) however, it is hoped that the principle of 'adequate data' (Morrow 2005) was achieved.

While necessary, the ethical parameters of the study were limiting. As participants were told they could only discuss 'spent' offences, the reality is the participants may have been constrained in how honest they could be for both logistical, and self-protection reasons. When I explained the parameters of the study to one participant he told me, "*don't worry, if I told you everything I did I would go to prison for three-hundred years*". It was essential that all interviews were conducted in public places (in accordance with the BU Ethics Panel), and this in itself presented numerous methodological problems (Shaw et al. 2019). As Mikecz (2012) identified, neutral locations are hampered by noise and interruptions, and this was definitely the case with the current research. At times the noise level had a negative impact on both my own, and the athlete's focus, and transcription took far longer as a consequence. I was also conscious of how aware the athlete would be to discussing their private experiences within the potential ear shot of others however, at times this was unavoidable.

As predicted by Atkinson and Young (2008) who explain that deviance research often proves 'tricky', at points the interviews were difficult, particularly when participants discussed their criminal activity. A number of participants merely stated the offence they had committed rather than examining the act itself. Interviewing people whose lives have been shaped by the criminal justice system, especially given my background, can create tensions (Shaw et al. 2019) and prove challenging.

While the participants attempted to provide full accounts of their experiences it must be acknowledged that testimonies can be distorted or affected by memory attrition (Fasting et al. 2007). Additionally, given the role that substance misuse played in a number of the participants' histories, it is possible that their recollections could be "*unavoidably hazy affairs where memories of the past may compromise the honesty of an account in the present*" (Palmer 2016, p.172). However, while the problem of truth in qualitative research is rooted in issues with memory and perceptions (Jones et al. 2012) the current

study did not seek to uncover absolute truth and instead was focussed on exploring experience and the participants' perceptions of these. Despite the limitations highlighted, great care was taken during the research process to ensure that the integrity of the research was maintained, and honest and thorough accounts of athlete criminality were captured.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has presented the methodology adopted in the current study, and explained the use of an interpretive, qualitative research design utilising an inductive approach to answer the research question. Ten narrative interviews were conducted with elite male athletes in order to create understanding of their criminal experiences. The data produced by the interviews was analysed using thematic analysis and five key themes emerged: the sporting experience; the criminal experience; the impact of external influences; the role of drugs and alcohol; and finally, the journey. The forthcoming findings chapters (5,6,7,8 and 9) provide an overview of each theme and its related sub-themes, and these are discussed using pertinent literature to interpret the findings. Where possible, quotes are included from across the range of participants however, some experiences are more aligned to certain themes than others. The findings chapters feature sometimes lengthy quotes from the narrative accounts in order to ensure the data has primacy, and that the experience of committing crime is presented from the perspective of this elite group.

## Chapter 4: Participant Overview

### Introduction

This chapter provides a brief overview of each of the participants in order to provide context to the stories of the participants. Jones et al. (2012) state that contextualisation in qualitative research is essential in order to position and comprehend the data presented, and it was important to ensure that the participants' stories were told in complete form prior to analysis. A vignette has been included for each participant to ensure that their experiences are not deconstructed (Munro Hendry 2007).

**Archie** is a retired professional footballer who played the majority of his career in the topflight of English football. He started to play football at a young age as an escape from his toxic home environment where his father was an alcoholic and used to beat up his mother. Archie started drinking at a young age and struggled with anger issues. He found that sport provided a release from his home life. He first came into contact with the police at the age of fifteen when he broke into someone's house to steal alcohol and started taking drugs when he was seventeen years old. When he was twenty-one he committed assault on a night out whilst on bail for a previous assault and was sent to prison for two weeks (a few days before he was meant to be representing his club at Wembley). After being released from prison Archie did not stop his drinking or drug-taking and undertook various schemes to evade the compulsory drug testing at his club. He explained that he did not think about the consequences of his actions at the time, but afterwards was very upset about the things he had done and was scared about losing his career. Eventually he was caught and given an indefinite ban and spent 4 months at a drug rehabilitation facility to deal with his addictions. After leaving rehabilitation he played the rest of his professional career with no further incidents. He has now been sober for seventeen years.

**Billy**<sup>3</sup> is a professional boxer who represented England at amateur level and has since turned professional. He started boxing at the age of six. His father was an amateur boxer and when Billy expressed an interest in boxing too, he took him along to the gym. He had his first fight at the age of eleven, and first represented England at age fourteen. When he was twenty-two he was going through a difficult time with his girlfriend and working with a manager he didn't entirely trust but didn't have the confidence to leave. The manager entered him into a fight that he was unsure of and subsequently lost. Billy

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<sup>3</sup> Since our interview Billy has been convicted of a number of offences against a different girlfriend and served a custodial sentence.

felt cheated out of the title fight and became depressed and anxious. He found that after the loss, friends stopped contacting him and he felt alone. Following an incident with his girlfriend he was accused of criminal damage and assault (offences he denied) and told he was not allowed to box until the court case was completed. He decided to take a break from boxing and slipped further into depression. He felt under a lot of pressure having boxed for so long and decided he wanted to live a 'normal' life. Billy started a job and at the end of each week would spend all his money on drugs and socialising; at this time he did not even contemplate a return to boxing. He met an ex addict who became a mentor and managed to bring him back into boxing, and he fell back in love with the sport. At the time of interview he was training full time and preparing for his first comeback fight. He felt the break made him a better person and made him realise who his real friends were.

**Charlie** is a retired professional footballer who was signed to a Premier League club from the age of twelve and began his professional career at sixteen. He began playing football as his father played and he felt that playing football was the natural thing to do. He made his full league debut for the professional team at seventeen. At the age of twenty-two he severely damaged his knee and although he managed to play on for another ten years professionally, he moved further down the leagues and could not regain his Premier League form. In total he played professionally for sixteen years, at least four-hundred times and scored at Wembley age twenty-five. At the age of eighteen he caused a seven-car pile-up whilst driving uninsured. He was prosecuted but the chairman of his club at the time dealt with the situation which left him with the impression that as a footballer he was protected.

Charlie began drinking heavily at the age of thirty-one when he knew he only had one more year left on his contract. By this time his knee was crumbling and at the age of thirty-two the injury forced him to retire. Following his transition from football he found life unbearably hard, his marriage broke down and he had no money. He describes this period of his life as being in blind panic and talks about football being a bubble that burst. Subsequent years have been hard for Charlie, with personal illness, and the illness of his mother, which have led to problems with alcohol and the breakdown of a second marriage. To date Charlie still struggles financially and to find a role for himself in the working world that can begin to only vaguely represent the life he lived as a professional footballer.

**Dougie** is a professional boxer; he is currently injured but hasn't ruled out a return to the sport. Dougie was channelled into sport as a young child by his parents as a way to burn

off excess energy, but when he started to get into trouble in his teenage years, his father took him to a boxing gym. He began boxing at fifteen and went on to represent Great Britain at numerous tournaments; later turning professional. Despite quickly getting involved in boxing seriously and training five days a week, he still socialised with the same group of friends he had before his boxing career. As a result he would fully immerse himself in their activities at weekends, including crime and drug-taking. When he was eighteen he was arrested for theft after his friends stole alcohol from a shop in the West End and Dougie volunteered to go back and retrieve a designer button his friend had dropped. Eventually he broke away from his group of friends as their criminal activity became more serious; many of that group have subsequently spent their lives in and out of prison. Other than the pressure he felt from his peers to be involved in criminal activity, he explained that he got involved due to boredom. He also stated that he was subject to racist abuse as a teenager, and was often illegally searched by police officers, which made him want to rebel against law enforcement. He sees this as a further reason for his involvement in crime.

**Ethan** is a rugby player who, up until the time of going to prison, represented a club in the WRU Championship. He started playing rugby at the age of seven as his father played and he wanted to follow in his footsteps. Ethan emphasised the importance of friendship and the camaraderie he experienced through rugby. At the time of the criminal incident, rugby was going well for Ethan. He had played an away game and then gone out in the evening with his teammates, and they had been drinking on their way back from the game. One of Ethan's teammates was assaulted in a club and he intervened, they were thrown out of the club and the fight continued outside with Ethan chasing the other man and eventually beating him to the ground. When Ethan walked away, three of his teammates continued to attack the man on the ground. Ethan explained that as far as he was concerned, he was sticking up for his friend. Ethan refused to give the police the names of the three other players. He felt they were good players who had something to lose, and that he didn't want to lose friends. Ethan talked about how behaviour on the field of play can transcend to social situations. He was the only person prosecuted for the offence and was therefore held accountable for all the injuries the victim sustained. He was convicted and served a two and a-half month custodial sentence and the remainder of his sentence on an electronic tag. Ethan found that he knew a lot of people in prison as he was sentenced in his local area and although he found the experience mentally hard, he reflected on the time as not being too difficult (his cell mate was an old school friend). When he left prison, he tried to return to his club, but found it hard playing and training with an electronic tag on, at one point he broke his curfew trying to play a

late game. He still plays, but he has dropped down a number of divisions and feels he has since lost his love for the sport.

**Finn** is a retired semi-professional footballer who played for over fifteen clubs (both professionally and semi-professionally) during his football career. By the age of twelve, he was attracting interest from high level clubs and was asked to sign for a Premier League side at the age of sixteen. Around this time Finn started making bad decisions and ended up punching a referee and having to appeal a ban from the FA. He came back from this incident and continued to play but pinpointed this as a key point in his football career. Finn talked about his regrets at not achieving what he should have, but explained that there was no one to blame but himself. Finn reflected on the fact he would turn down contracts from high level clubs for no good reason. Although he was aware of drugs when he was younger, he first got involved in dealing drugs when he was eighteen, and by the time he was nineteen he was involved in harder crime including drug importation from other countries. While playing football abroad he was sent to prison for drug dealing. He served around three weeks but paid to leave the country and was able to keep his time in prison from future employers. Whilst playing for a club in the UK aged twenty-three, he was once again sent to prison for drug offences, but was released on electronic tag after serving three months. At twenty-four while playing abroad again, he was sentenced to twelve months imprisonment and after serving ten months stayed in the country to play football for a semi-professional side.

As Finn's involvement in crime increased his need to play football decreased. He realised he could make more money illegally than through playing football. Finn's involvement in organised crime escalated after this point and he became involved in a 'turf war' over drugs, which made it increasingly hard for him to play football. He finished his last semi-professional game early as he was warned that two men from a rival gang were on their way to the stadium. He played his last game of football at twenty-six and crime became his job. He explained how greed drove him to be involved in crime and also spoke about the excitement of crime. When Finn was twenty-eight, he was arrested for drug offences and sentenced for twelve years as part of a larger police operation into a conspiracy to import drugs. Finn explained that on the day of his arrest he was under surveillance but was arrested for a different offence and describes it as a blessing in disguise. In total Finn spent eight years of his life in prison but it was the long sentence that marked the changing point in his life. After the death of a family member, Finn focussed on educating himself in prison and completed over twenty different courses. Since leaving prison he has been actively involved in helping younger players take a different path than he did and to get the education that he didn't have.

**George** was a youth footballer with a Premier League club. When the focus of football became more serious at his club he no longer enjoyed playing; he described feeling like he had shackles on. George found that he was frequently played out of position in games, as a result of his size, and that he was safeguarded to a certain extent while more physically developed players were brought in to cover the position he would usually fill. When he was sixteen, he was released by his club but continued to play semi-professionally. This coincided with him becoming more involved in music and taking more recreational drugs. George reflected on how being released by his club made him feel about himself, and the role drugs played in coming to terms with those feelings; he felt that he was not physically strong enough, and wasn't enough of a man to be successful in football. By the time George was seventeen, he was physically addicted to heroin, he played semi-professional games whilst physically withdrawing from heroin. He would finish games and take his money to buy more drugs while his teammates socialised. George reflected upon his drug type of choice and how it didn't match his status as an athlete. In the years that followed he became heavily involved in crime to fund his addiction. He reached out to people he had known socially for years who were involved in criminality in order to make money. Although he feels shame about the crimes he committed he reflected on how committing crime made him feel elation and at times camaraderie. Within four years of leaving his professional contract he was in prison. He stopped playing football altogether at the age of twenty-two. George went to prison four times for short sentences and each time was offered drug rehabilitation programmes. The final time he was released from prison he was advised not to return to his hometown and instead went to a facility in a different location but within a month he was once again addicted to heroin and committing crime. When George could no longer feel the numbing effects of the drugs, he was forced to face the reality of how he was living. He self-referred to a rehabilitation facility and has been clean for eight years. Since getting clean he has returned to football and is playing better than ever before. He feels he is a more composed player and doesn't doubt himself physically anymore. He no longer feels the inner conflict of having to leave one side of himself behind anymore.

**Harry** was an amateur rugby player but turned professional when his club was professionalised. He played three seasons as a professional before returning to his amateur status. He joined his club at the age of twelve and stayed playing there until the age of thirty. He felt that rugby suited him; he described himself as a direct, passionate and committed player, but acknowledged that even at a young age aggression was a feature of his personality. He recalled one incident while playing an under-eighteen game when he tackled a player and slid over the touch line out of play, and for no reason hit



the player in the face and knocked him out. He broke into his club's first team at the age of seventeen and around this age started getting into trouble while socialising in town. At the age of eighteen he was encouraged to join the police force by people within rugby; he continued to combine rugby with a full-time career as a police officer. After serving in the police for a number of years he was offered a professional rugby contract and negotiated a sabbatical from the police force. During the next few seasons, he found himself in more trouble, and was arrested twice for fighting in town. Unfortunately, Harry found that he did not enjoy the professional side of rugby. He felt that he was doing something that other people considered impressive but not enjoying it himself. He re-joined the police force and continued to play rugby non-professionally, but was arrested for a brawl outside a pub and subsequently suspended. It was during this suspension that he was arrested and convicted for drink-driving. Harry resigned from the police force as he knew he would be asked to leave and entered a very difficult period in life. Although he was still involved in rugby he wasn't playing and now had a family to support, a criminal record and no job. Fortunately, Harry was inundated with offers of help from the rugby community. Harry emphasised the family nature of rugby and how it had influenced his life. Harry is still heavily involved in rugby and it is still a huge part of his personal and professional life.

**Isaac** is a professional skater who still competes and travels around the world performing in shows and competitions. He described himself as a relaxed, energetic and fun athlete. He stated that is not competitive, but competes due to the love of his sport and for him winning isn't essential. Isaac explained that it is hard to make a living out of his sport but he has managed to have it as a career for many years. Isaac grew up in a violent household and eventually when he was aged seven his family (he, his mum and, sister) were moved to another area. Isaac was sexually abused by a neighbour over a period of time and was significantly traumatised as a result. It was an extreme sport show that introduced him to his sport, and he began to reconnect with others.

Between leaving school at sixteen and the age of nineteen, life was difficult for Isaac. Although he was still competing at the highest level he was distracted by other factors. During this time he started drinking a lot and smoking cannabis and became more involved with friends who were dealing and taking drugs. When he first started smoking cannabis he felt he couldn't tell anyone as he was immersed in a world of elite athletes. Isaac spent a lot of time with older friends whom people had warned him against, but Isaac didn't accept this. The friends he spent most of his time with were locals, not those made through sport. Isaac could not be dissuaded from spending time with his friends. He was frequently involved in criminal activity, but managed to evade the police. When

he was nineteen he had an accident while training because he was hung over and was so affected by the accident that he didn't leave the house for four months. The accident made him realise that his lifestyle was impacting his sport but the isolation he was feeling, and the familiarity of his friends resulted in him immersing himself further into that life. Just before Isaac turned twenty he and a group of friends were stopped by the police for causing criminal damage. The incident quickly escalated and he was arrested and charged with drug possession. He explained that this incident was a catalyst for him to realise something had to change in his life. He was allowed out of police custody to perform in a show, but seeing how his actions could impact on his career made him evaluate his behaviour.

Isaac was able to identify that part of the reason for his self-destructive behaviour was due to him not dealing with the abuse from his past and cutting emotions off. Opening up to people, including his friends, helped him start to deal with the abuse but it was the death of his step-father when he was twenty-two that served as a catalyst for him to make changes and start to deal with his past. Isaac explained that although he doesn't commit crime with his old friends anymore, they fully accept him still. Isaac described how he always had his sport as a focus and this enabled him to make the changes he needed to. Isaac defined his friends within his sport, and from his home, as family.

**Joshua**<sup>4</sup> was an international and professional athlete who started playing his sport as a young boy overseas before later moving to the UK. During his career he often felt as though he did not fit in, and often made mistakes, partly because of his differing background. Joshua reported an issue of corruption in his sport and far from being commended for taking a moral standpoint, he felt he was completely rejected by the sport, and that he had no option but to retire early. He continued to be involved in the sport from afar and launched a professional comeback, unfortunately injury curtailed his return and he was faced with the prospect of his career ending before he was mentally and financially ready. In order to prepare for his comeback he had travelled to abroad to train and found himself without a financial plan, or future career plan. In order to address his financial concerns Joshua reached out to the criminal connections that had existed all his life but that he had never utilised before. This culminated in him being arrested for drug smuggling and receiving a lengthy prison sentence, of which he served six years.

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<sup>4</sup> Joshua asked for an extra level of anonymity as he is identifiable within his sport.

## Chapter 5: The Sporting Experience

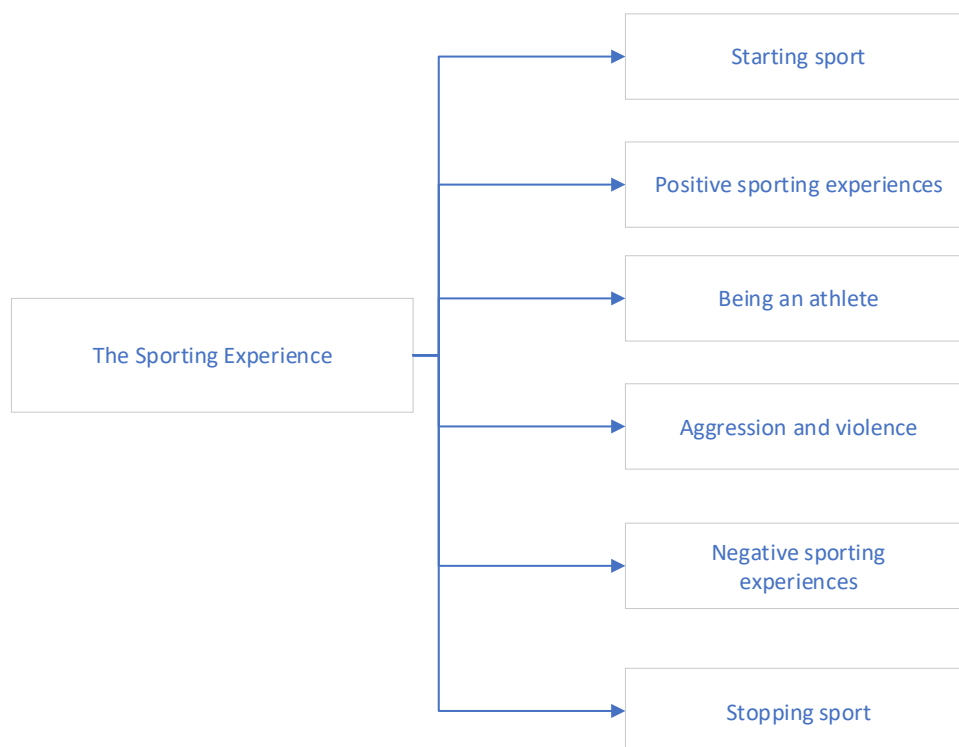
*“It’s made me; it’s shaped me so much” (Isaac).*

*“Playing football was the drug before drugs” (George).*

*“It took me around the world, most of my memories and my enjoyments in my life... have been a consequence of my sport” (Joshua).*

### Introduction

The opening part of each interview involved the participant talking about their sport. This not only gave me a chance to build rapport with them, but also enabled their criminal activities to be set in the context of their athletic career. Participants were eager to discuss their athletic experiences, and I was able to form a picture of how they had navigated their sporting journeys. This chapter explores both the positive and negative sides of their sporting experiences and considers how these experiences may have contributed to their subsequent criminal activity. This chapter also provides an insight into how the participants believe an athlete should behave, and how they identified, and behaved, as athletes. There were six main sub-themes within the participants’ narratives that concerned their sporting experiences:



### Starting Sport

When I opened each interview with the line “tell me about your sport”, the majority of participants described how they came to play their sport in the first place. A number of

the participants discussed how they began playing their sport at a young age, most of them before they began secondary education. Both Harry and Billy started their sports at the age of five and six respectively, with Finn and Archie starting slightly later at seven and nine. Overall the general response from the participants was that their sport had been part of their lives for as long as they could remember.

When it came to clarifying why they began playing their particular sport, a number of the participants spoke about emulating their fathers, or beginning playing because this was a sport that their father had an interest in. Ethan described how he tried to “*follow*” his Father, with George reinforcing this:

*“My Dad played football, so it was always around, it was a very natural thing to do... My Dad played like county football... he was better than average. Yeah so I grew up going all... really watching my Dad play football”.*

Rosenberg (1986) explains that one of the principal agents of socialisation for children of all ages is family, and this can have a significant role to play in relation to sport, particularly with boys. Although girls are also often encouraged to become involved in sport, the importance of sport for boys is often more distinct (Messner 1990). As Messner (1990) states, often boys are urged to become a part of the masculine sporting world because of a male role model such as a father, brother, or family friend, who may have had their own success within the sport. This is particularly clear from Archie’s reason for playing football:

*“My dad liked football so that’s how I got into football... when I was a very small baby he’d take me on a field and we’d play, and that’s how I got into football. Like I said, if my Dad liked something else, I’d have got into that”.*

Although the participants did not necessarily mention that their fathers were their role models, it was clear that for a number of them, that their fathers influenced their sporting choices.

## **Positive Sporting Experiences**

While the participants spoke very freely about the positive sides of their sports, I asked each of them to try and describe their sporting high, or their greatest achievements. These periods of the interviews were often when the participants became most animated, as they reflected on the celebrated elements of their careers. A number of the participants described how their biggest achievements were progressing in their sports at a young age, as Charlie revealed: *“I was really fortunate really cos I was in (name) first team at sixteen... I came on as a substitute when I was seventeen... I made my full debut at seventeen and scored after four minutes”.*

Ethan described how it was the response of the crowd on his first appearance that he remembered most fondly. For him this was a culmination of all the hard work he had put into his sport:

*“They get a pretty big crowd there, so, just the first game, just when you’re warming up on the side-line and then they make the substitution and you go on, bit of a cheer. It’s more like quite emotional really... it’s what you’ve tried to play for the last few years and it all builds up to that one thing really”.*

Similarly, Isaac also spoke about the reaction of the crowd, and how this gave him confidence and a focus for his career. Again, he also alluded to how this experience occurred at such an early stage of his career:

*“So, initially the first ever time I went on a... ramp and had a crowd cheering for me was one of the biggest highs, for me as a young man, as a person it gave me so much confidence and really made me believe in myself and because all these people were believing in me. That was probably one the best moments of my career, being so young in it, it was that that spurred me on to do it. It’s what created like, the ambition as such”.*

For Billy success was represented by a particular title, and for Joshua it was representing England for the first time: *“My career high would be that day... I don’t think it ever gets higher than that, there are great moments going on, but certainly the most significant moment, certainly (sport) wise, was that day...because here I was playing international (sport)”.*

Both Dougie and George spoke about their career highs in terms of an element of their performance. In Dougie’s case, it was a particular fight, whereas for George it was a certain type of goal:

*“I think the biggest high for me... from a personal level was scoring a particular type of goal... one of those rare goals... whether that was me as an individual or a team goal... the high that I would get from that, scoring one of those rare goals... and the adrenaline that came with that”.*

Dougie in particular spoke about winning through adversity, and how much success he associated with winning despite being an ‘underdog’:

*“The (name) title, they only brought me in there to lose and I just went out there and I totally destroyed him, and it was good to do it in front of his own crowd, going in there getting booed. I didn’t care, I just loved it and I knew what I was capable of. I went out there, beat him, on the way out even his mates were patting me on the back, so it was brilliant, it was good”.*

Charlie identified that in addition to the positives he gained from starting his career so young, he also considers the longevity of his career to be a success: *“So all in all I played for fifteen/sixteen years, four-hundred games and I played at Wembley and scored at Wembley. So all in all... I think I had a fairly good crack at it”.*

Isaac also considers the length of his career to be a significant success, in addition to how he has been able to make a living out of a sport in a way that many others are unable to:

*“People think of me as quite an entrepreneurial (skater) because no one else seems to be able to make money out of our sport and has to get a normal job to carry on doing it, but somehow I’ve managed to still be skating to this day, at almost thirty”.*

For Joshua, part of the success of sport was what his career enabled him to do, and how it enabled him to live:

*“Initially I’m having a ball, I’m living the dream, I’m playing international (sport). I’m earning money, I own my own home, I’m buying cars, I’m buying clothes, I’m going out with my friends, and at the same time, I’m trying to play international (sport) as well. But for me, that’s what success was, my perception of it was exactly that, that you played hard and then you enjoyed the stuff outside of that”.*

In addition to discussing the successes they experienced within their sports, the participants were open about how important their sports were. A number of the participants detailed how their dedication to their sport was all encompassing and to them their sport was their life, as George highlighted:

*“Well, it was THE influence on my life... it formed the biggest part of my sort of extra-curricular activities, football training, playing football matches, in my spare time all we did was play football... It was also a big part of my life because it was something that from an early age I knew I was good at. I knew that I was better than a lot of people at so that gave me something that I certainly didn’t get in the classroom... I don’t think it’s an exaggeration to say it was the centre of my life”.*

Joshua highlighted that whilst growing up he did very little other than play his sport:

*“I literally did nothing else... apart from the things that I had to... go to school... go and have a shower and clean your room and those sort of things. But apart from that, as a young person growing up it was (sport)... As a young boy I just did it, looking back with hindsight it was the centre of the universe”.*

The way in which many of the participants described the role of sport and sporting success in their lives appears to fit with what Douglas and Carless (2006, 2009) term the ‘performance narrative’. Performance narrative can be defined as “a story of single-minded dedication to sport performance to the exclusion of other areas of life and self” (Douglas and Carless 2009, p.215). Within the performance narrative, winning, successful results and achievement are essential, and are invariably linked to an athlete’s mental wellbeing and sense of self-worth; it is evident that winning and personal success were critical to the participants in this study. It was also clear that their lives were utterly immersed in their sports, which is consistent with the storyline of the performance narrative where “sport is life and life is sport” (Dacyshyn 1999, p.217). Within the performance narrative, athletic achievement is considered to be the entire life

focus of the athlete (Stephan et al. 2003). Douglas and Carless (2006) suggest that when an athlete's career ends, and the performance narrative no longer 'fits' their lives, athletes can find themselves with no alternative narrative to guide their lives. This may go some way to explaining why many of the participants in the current study experienced personal trauma as their careers ended or paused (explored later in the chapter).

When describing their feelings towards their sport, a number of the participants used the term love to emphasise how strongly they felt towards it. Ethan discussed how he loved everything about the game, with Joshua also using the term love to describe what his sport meant to him: *"my sport was wonderful, it's the thing I fell in love with as a young boy. It was the thing I woke up to do, it's the thing that before I went to bed, I did"*.

George spoke of his feelings towards football in terms of something he found beautiful, and something that for him was comparable to love:

*"I think of football in the same way that I think of music, in the same way that I think of love, and freedom, because the possibilities on the pitch are infinite. Its literally you're only bound by the limits of your imagination, of what can happen on the pitch... I find a lot of beauty in it, and that nourishes something in me, that would be lacking if I'd never played football. It's like a relationship with someone you love isn't it, as time goes by you uncover bits of them that you didn't know were there at first, or you weren't equipped to see at first, because as I change, my relationship with the game changes, and I believe that it is infinite"*.

The level of devotion to their sports was evident, and it was clear that being involved in sport evoked strong emotions. The types of feelings they described may well have been the reason they were able to commit to their sports and progress to become elite athletes. Scanlan (1993) identifies high correlations between enjoying sport and sport commitment, with Rhodes and Kates (2015) offering support to the notion that those who enjoy sporting experiences are more likely to continue to seek them. Athletes may find themselves in a positive cycle, the more affirmative emotions they feel through their sports the more they are inclined to 'dream big' and strive to be better (Fredrickson 1998, 2001).

Dougie described his love for his sport and depicted his feelings for boxing as an addiction:

*"I went to this gym, and just got addicted to it, I loved going there with all this energy and killing myself, going home... you wake up in the morning with sore arms and know that I've worked hard, and that's how I really got into it, I like it"*.

Billy also spoke about the addictive nature of boxing, and how for him it is an obsession, and something he wants to experience time after time:

*“I’m obsessed with my training now, and I really enjoy my life...I just think to myself... once I finish a fight, I used to just go out and get blindo with my mates and the moment that I’ve finished boxing now... I just want to get back to the gym... just to train again, because I want that feeling again”.*

Exercise can be a powerful stimulant (Meyer et al. 2011) and develop into an all-encompassing, compulsive addiction (Veale 1987; Hausenblas and Giacobbi 2004). Interestingly, the term addiction was used by both the boxers in the current study. Evidence suggests that exercise addiction is highest in endurance sports (Hausenblas and Downs 2002; Magee et al. 2016), such as boxing.

In addition to expressing their love, participants also spoke about the sensations associated with their sports. A number of participants talked about their sport in terms of a ‘high’, as illuminated by Charlie: *“It gave me all the adulation, it gave me all the highs that I wanted, that I ever dreamed of, it gave me a lifestyle which was something I could never have imagined”.*

Participants described how happy their sports made them, with Harry stating: *“I played in a playoff, (club) verses (club) and I just remember 7000 people and thinking wow this is the best ever”.* Charlie compared the high of sport to sex:

*“There was a quote by some footballer saying that scoring a goal was better than having sex, and so it was just like when you score a goal... you do a daft stupid thing that was flying around, like an idiot which I done many a time”.*

George identified that the sensations he experienced through sport could not be replicated off the pitch: *“Yeah the high that I would get from that... and the adrenaline that came with that, it’s like you can’t sort of match it off the pitch, not really...or I didn’t think you could at the time”.*

While it is acknowledged that George is a recovering drug addict (see Chapter 4) and therefore may approach his descriptions of the sensations of sport in a different manner from other participants, his comments do raise some interesting areas. He speaks about the highs of sport not being able to replicated away from sport, which is a source of concern given the fact that sporting careers have a clear end state, yet the desire to capture these feelings will not. George described how when he stopped playing football, drugs took football’s place: *“And so footballs time was...gone really. Yeah, it didn’t give me the same thing as what music did, and also what I got from now taking drugs... I really liked it when I first started (drugs)”.*



Billy also spoke about sport and drugs in a similar way, and how sport is better than drugs but he acknowledged that the feelings associated with sport will not last forever: *“I think to myself... if I train hard, the buzz of just walking out to the ring is better than any drug, it’s like, the best feeling ever. It’s like Christmas as a kid walking down the stairs”*.

Although traditionally research into the sensations of sport has tended to focus on the sensation-seeking activities of participants in high-risk sports (Zuckerman 2007), it is evident from this study, that the ‘highs’ of sport are not reserved just for higher risk activities. The participants’ enjoyment of their sporting ‘highs’ and ‘buzzes’ is consistent with findings that suggest that all athletes possess a higher need for stimuli (Tusak and Bednarik 2001).

Green (2009) identifies that for many, playing top level sport is a dream come true, and this was exemplified by both Joshua and Charlie in their narratives. Joshua described being a professional sportsman as *“the perfect job”*:

*“I had made two wishes and they were simple. I wanted to play (sport) and I wanted to go to England, and on my (age) birthday those memories came back because it was essentially job done... if at that moment I’d curled up and died that was the dream... it was a very special day of course but it was also a day that actually taught me that actually dreams do come true, or wishes come true, because I’d actually wished this before”*.

Charlie however goes further to identify that playing sport at the top level was the realisation of a dream: *“(club) was my home town club so it was just... everything I ever dreamt of to be honest... when looking back... you’re a child in a man’s world... and that was... a bit like a fairy-tale”*.

As well as discussing how sport made them feel, the participants spoke about what their sports had given them, often in very positive terms. Some participants stated that sport provided them with an escape from other more negative areas of their lives. For Archie football enabled him to get away from his toxic home life:

*“But football was only, it was only a release, I know it was... I’d go on the park and I’d give as much on the park with my friends as I would do...because I’m out of that home life and I’m there and I’m enjoying myself and...I’ve escaped for 90 minutes at least”*.

For Isaac, sport was an escape from boredom which he believed was ultimately leading him to commit crime:

*“I think the most important thing with my sport is it just took me away from it, it gave me time away, all day every day for me to figure out like what I wanted to do... That was the most important thing, it just takes you away from you know, everyday mundane life, so being bored and doing nothing... and when you’re bored sometimes you do stupid shit like I used to do when I was a kid”*.

Both Dougie and Archie used the term 'release' to describe what sport gave them. Dougie saw sport as a way to let his anger out: "*it's an outlet, it's a release, it's like a tap, I need to open*". Archie echoed this sentiment:

*"So for me my house life and home life was quite toxic so for me to get out of that I needed to find something that... took my energy away and my anger away. And I found that football was kind of a release for me... it was kind of like a bit like the Billy Elliot story I'd really describe it as... whenever you're playing football, or whenever he was doing ballet, that was kind of my free time, it was like I was released"*.

The reference to release provides support for the notion that sport offers an opportunity for release from societal oppression, acting as a safety valve (Langseth 2011) providing temporary liberation. While this 'safety valve' was evident for Dougie, Archie identified that sport could not be the solution for his need for a release all the time, and ultimately, this need for release would be filled by an alternative (in his case crime, drugs and alcohol): "*but then I can't play football twenty-four hours a day, so then what else do I do?*". George described how football provided him with a place where he could feel free:

*"I know it's such a cliché, but just for those couple of hours like including the warm up and half time and that, it's like you can just go there and not have to think about anything... It's the only place where I feel... total freedom"*.

Russell (2005, p.13) identifies that few areas of society offer such an "*array of opportunities for spontaneous self-display*", as sport, and this was clearly true for George at points of his career. (This will be revisited later in the chapter).

For Isaac and Dougie, sport acted as a saviour, and provided them with an avenue that diverted them from a far more negative alternative, as Isaac highlighted:

*"I went to that show, I started chatting to people and... through skating I started enjoying it and so I started chatting to people who were involved in it as well and it literally changed my life. It went from someone who was probably going to have a real hard life in front of them to someone who turned it around"*.

Isaac and Dougie's experiences fit with those who suggest that ultimately structured sporting activities can provide an alternative to offending, or other anti-social activities (Mahoney and Stattin 2000). Isaac's sport also enabled him to cope with some of the trauma in his life, and to essentially change his life course:

*"I don't know how else I would have had to have dealt with it, if it wasn't for skating I probably wouldn't have told anyone, it would have bottled up, bottled up, bottled up and I probably would have ended up in prison... if I hadn't of found my sport I really don't know what would have happened"*.

Considerable research has been conducted in the area of sport and psychological growth following trauma (Burke and Sabiston 2010; Carless et al. 2014; Caddick et al. 2015). It

has been suggested that sport can increase personal control, develop relationships, provide distraction in the form of physical challenges, and also act as a point of closure. Sport is also linked with the development of resilience, which enables survivors of trauma to cope when faced with adversity or distress (Connor and Davidson 2003).

A number of the participants described how being involved in their sport gave them a sense of belonging, and something to be a part of, as Isaac described: *“I think for me it’s definitely a sense of belonging, feeling part of something, and I think everyone wants that, you know”*. Belonging and being accepted into their sporting group (Lambert et al. 2013) was clearly important to the participants. The desire for social belonging is identified as a prevailing human motive (Baumeister and Leary 1995), and sport is recognised as a vehicle through which to foster belonging and social connections (Allen 2003). For those participants who described their sports as a release or an escape, these feelings of belonging may have been intensified; Walseth (2006) describes how feelings of belonging occur as for some sport is viewed as a ‘place of refuge’.

For some participants their sport provided them with a focus, and this served as a distraction from some of the more negative influences on their lives at the time, as highlighted by Joshua: *“It’s the thing that, I suppose, for a long period of time... kept me on the straight and narrow... it just simply gave me focus”*. Isaac described how his focus on sport often acted as a deterrent from escalating his bad behaviour:

*“I pushed him, and I was about to go even further but it was like “skating, skating” I wanted to go skating that night and I was like if you do this now you’re going to get a detention and you’re not going skating... That’s where skating stopped me from doing something... it made me double think”*.

Sport also acted as a practical deterrent for Isaac and a number of other participants, as it was difficult to find time to offend when already so busy with sport. For these participants, at points their sport acted as a direct diversion from offending (Nichols 2007):

*“It was the time it took up in my life... the time it took to go to skate parks, to actually train, that took up the majority of my time therefore not giving me all that time to come up with ideas with my mates to come up with get rich quick schemes... or to get into trouble”*.

This supports the suggestion that sport can be an effective deterrent from crime (Abbot and Barber 2007), albeit for some only in the short term.

A number of the participants discussed the influence that their sport has had on them in terms of their values and behaviour, and how sport has enhanced them as individuals. George stated that his experiences in sport have helped him think of others:

*"I think there are things that are present in my life now that would be lacking if I hadn't played football, mostly things around, thinking about the greater good rather than just what my needs are, what my role is, what can I do for the man next to me... I think that stood me in good stead, doing things for other people".*

For Harry, sport taught him about understanding others:

*"Subsequently looking back... is how good the sport is, the fact it does teach you that ... It's got different relationships, different values... so it's made me a rounded person in that I don't have views on anyone... I've not got an ounce of racism within me because I've always been around every race there is... religion, anyone. So it's probably given me that because I've been around so many different people from five upwards, that it's given me a much broader spectrum of understanding people".*

Dougie identified that his experiences in sport have given him a positive outlook, and an ability to cope with adversity:

*"I'm more patient... I like to think I'm 100% more organised... I'm more resilient, I try and have a positive outlook on life, so much is... I'm faced with so much and it doesn't bother me... I always know that there's something better round the corner, and when you're at the bottom and... there's nowhere to go, the only way is up, so you just know that there's something, something better's there".*

Joshua described how his experiences in his sport, and achieving the highest possible level, gave him confidence in his ability to be successful in all areas of life:

*"I was good enough and more importantly... something I'd be able to use outside of the (sport), is that, that knowledge, that stuff that I was thinking about, and stuff that I was wishing for, do actually happen, which gives a certain level of... confidence and perhaps helps you to drive on, just as long as you keep remembering that".*

Meanwhile, Isaac stated that his experiences in sport have taught him all he needs to know in order to cope with all facets of life:

*"It's taught me how to be motivated... how to focus on something, it's basically taught me everything I've needed to know in life. It's taught me about being motivated, about being focused, about being resilient, overcoming barriers, learning from mistakes, all of them things, its literally shaped me as a person".*

While the participants also described the negative impacts of sport on their lives (see later in this chapter), their overriding feelings towards sport remain positive. All except one of the participants are still involved in their sports in some way, either through coaching, playing, or their work. The way in which some describe the positive influence sport has had on their lives, albeit for some only at certain points of their lives, aligns with those advocates of sport who believe involvement in sport to be a positive and beneficial experience. The study therefore offers support for those who state that sport can serve to enhance confidence and increase social integration (Giulianotti 2015).

A number of the participants spoke about the supportive sporting environments they were a part of, and the friendships they had forged as a result of their sports. Harry discussed how his sport had 'stepped in' to help him when his life became very difficult: *"For the first time... rugby stepped in because I was pretty bottom of the pile in many regards, and through the network and support and everything else through the rugby, really just gave me another opportunity"*.

Harry also described how people within his sport had provided guidance when his behaviour began to deteriorate:

*"Certainly rugby does grab you by the scruff of the neck occasionally and says "what are you doing, have a word with yourself", and it's people who have said that throughout my life, and sometimes you're just stupid enough like I am to not listen, but you listen for a period of time and then you just go off the rails a little bit"*.

While friendships gained through sport were clearly important to a number of the participants, this was not the case for all of the athletes. Joshua acknowledged that a lot of the difficulties he encountered in his sport centred around his reluctance to socialise with his teammates, or invest in friendships with them:

*"My take would be, this is a nosey bunch of people ... whereas I just came to play the (sport), and wanted to leave afterwards. I didn't realise that in doing that rather than it being a twelve-hour day, I was expected to spend an eighteen-hour day... with all this other stuff, and quite frankly I suppose I fought that all the way through"*.

Eventually Joshua found a team where he was content, and significantly, a team where friendship was not a priority:

*"My new teammates are exactly as I like them, they are so up themselves that they haven't got any time for me! (laughs). So everybody is so confident, everybody is into their own stuff that nobody is even giving me a second thought, what I'm wearing, what I'm doing, everybody is just getting on with their job and its fantastic"*.

Isaac described how his sport brought him into contact with like-minded people, and this element of friendship was extremely important to him:

*"So I kind of felt like I didn't belong in school, in society, or with normal people... everything just kept going wrong and I didn't think the same and stuff, and then I found skating where I'd go... "oh my god you think the same as me"... you laugh about the same stupid things... they're all likeminded and so I find that hard sometimes, not being around people who think the same as myself, they're few and far between I think"*.

Ethan felt as though his sport provided him with friends that would be in his life forever:

*"It just gave me friends for life really, and something to look forward to, something to aspire to... I'm so happy that I've always played rugby, it's been the best thing that ever happened to me really. The mates I've got I still go out with now, who I*

*played with when I was six years of age, I'm twenty-five now, that's like nineteen years of friendship”.*

It was evident that for many of the participants' friendships within their sports were extremely important. The intensity with which they described their friendships fits with those who suggest that sporting bonds are typified by strong emotional connections and that sporting friends can often provide an essential source of comfort and security during periods of threat or stress (Carr 2012). It is also evident from the literature however that friendships borne in a sporting environment are not always healthy. For Ezzy (2001) friendships that are developed in what is essentially a workplace environment tend to be tarnished by competition and can result in levels of 'superficial trust' between peers rather than authentic friendships. It has been suggested that performance-orientated cultures tend to create a culture of rivalry which prohibits positive friendships (Ommundsen et al. 2005) and it is not uncommon for team mates to undermine their teammates to further their own individual success (Roderick 2006). The way in which Joshua viewed his teammates appears to be consistent with the findings of Adams and Carr (2019) who identified that sporting friendships tend to be lacking in trust and emotional intimacy.

One of the terms used by a number of the participants was that their teams were like their family, as Dougie illustrated: *“When you got in the gym it was like your family, it doesn't matter where you are from or what you are doing, they are just there, you look after each other and it was like that”.*

For Ethan, this notion of teammates as family meant that team performance was enhanced:

*“There's some teams that aren't even any good but they're good because they're all like family and they play together for years... you can have all the top talent you want and if you haven't got that friendship and camaraderie and whatever in a team, I don't think it counts for much really”.*

Kinship has been described as one of the most powerful forms of friendship, and de Vries (2018) indicates that while friendship is considered important, it is kinship that occupies the 'top billing' in our lives. By considering friends and teammates in this way they occupy the role of 'fictive kin' (Maupin 2017) and are afforded the kinds of behaviours that would ordinarily be reserved for biological family. For a number of participants this presented itself in a strong desire to provide protection for their teammates, as Harry identified: *“You're a massive team that look after each other”.*

Ethan described how he would protect his teammates at all times: *“Like you would on a pitch, like you would in a street, they become like part of your family if you play rugby every week... they’re like family to you anyway so, that’s a big part of rugby”*. For Ethan, this culminated in him being sent to prison for GBH. Harry also highlighted the notion of acting protectively towards teammates:

*“I’m very moralistic, I’m very caring, and I think it’s all born about by learning things through rugby and sport and making sure your mates are ok, and looking after each other, that’s definitely a core of me ... The sport I play is all about looking after each other, absolutely it’s all about looking after each other and I think I probably took that to another level”*.

The need to help and protect often meant he got into unnecessary trouble and often, as also in Ethan’s case, when the fight wasn’t his own: *“I was always the helper outer...always go and help someone but always end up being at the front of it”*.

In a number of cases, this level of friendship resulted in more extreme demonstrations of loyalty. Both Dougie and Ethan made personal sacrifices due to loyalty to their friends that directly impacted them, in terms of gaining criminal records. Ethan didn’t want to lose friends, stating:

*“It’s just, I... don’t want to be a grass do you but they were my mates... I’m not going to drag them down with me as well you know... two of those guys are pretty good rugby players and have a good life ahead of them and that’s something you do really. I just could have easily sat there and talked but then I probably still would have went to jail anyway... you lose friends over it then don’t you so... I don’t think if the shoe was on the other foot that they would have ratted me out. So that was a decision I made not to, it might have impacted how it went for me but wasn’t really bothered about that to be honest, I’d rather keep my friends”*.

Although the quality and importance of loyalty in friends is a trait that tends to be associated with friendships in children (Weiss et al. 1996), it was clear that the participants valued loyalty highly.

Pappas et al. (2004) discussed the strong bonds of allegiance and loyalty that form through sport, apparent in Ethan and Harry’s need to protect and defend their teammates. Goffman (1959, p.88) explains that teammates have *“a privilege of familiarity – which may constitute a kind of intimacy without warmth”*. In Ethan’s case, he understood the errors of his teammates, but he felt it was his duty to shield them from the police. Hughes and Coakley (1991) claim that the bonding that occurs in sport needs to be considered when examining deviant behaviour. In his study of nine varsity athletes who conspired to steal \$50,000 worth of electrical equipment and other property over a two-year period, in the context of varsity athlete bonding, Snyder (1994) argued that the

elements of sport so routinely celebrated, namely loyalty and group cohesion, actually promoted deviant behaviour.

## Being an Athlete

The participants talked about themselves as both individuals and as athletes. Charlie spoke at length about the unique position he found himself in as a professional athlete. He stated that when he was playing professional sport, he viewed himself in an unrealistic way: *“As a footballer you think you’re infallible... I use the word untouchable”*.

He stated that as a footballer he was treated differently by people, and even now when he talks about his previous career people expect him to behave in a certain way. When he was looking for employment after his career finished, he found that people had an image of how a professional footballer would behave: *“I think a lot think well you’ve played football, you’ll have the gift of the gab, and you’ll be able to talk to people, people who aren’t listening to you, people said “go down the sales track”*.

Charlie described how he was *“taken care of”* as a professional athlete, even to the extent that when he committed his crime, it was brushed under the carpet and dealt with by his club’s lawyers. As a consequence, Charlie stated he was *“oblivious”* to the impact of his actions: *“You just blissfully sail through and people do everything for you...even if you get into a little bit of trouble there’s people there that will help you out.”*

This notion of being taken care of extended itself into all areas of Charlie’s life:

*“I just felt... that I ever got in trouble again... it would just be like oh well, somebody will sort it out for me, as it would be like if I went into work and I needed training kit, somebody would sort it out for us. If I needed a pair of football boots I’d make a call and somebody would get me my football boots. If we’ve got a match and it’s away on a Saturday, the bus would be there for us... so it was almost...that I if I did get in trouble, although like I say, I never tried to get in trouble... somebody else would sort it out”*.

Charlie’s experiences are a good example of the concept of both terminal adolescence (Teitelbaum 2005) and ‘spoiled athlete syndrome’ (Ortiz 2004). Both build on the notion proposed by House (1989) that suggest that some athletes do not emotionally mature. These approaches suggest that there are parallels between the behaviours displayed by athletes and adolescents, such as their susceptibility to temptation, their sense of invincibility and their self-centeredness. **Adolescents occupy a marginal place in society, they are not yet adults yet they are not children, and as a consequence adults, or authority, control nearly all aspects of their behaviour. As a result of their limited position,**



the opportunities for adolescents to pursue truly free, autonomous and self-directed behaviours may only be possible through deviant activities (Miller 2005).

Within their narratives, the participants touched upon the nature of their own personalities in general, and not just in relation to their sport. Both Archie and Joshua talked with some degree of negativity about their personalities, and how they had encountered difficulties in their sports because of who they were. Archie described himself as a “waster” and a “devil child” and observed how his lies ultimately resulted in him being banned from his sport for drug-taking: *“I’d become very devious; I’d become the best liar in the world”*.

Joshua described how the aspect of his personality that felt a need to bend the rules often meant he got into trouble with his teammates:

*“I never quite settled on it so if there was a little space where I could tweak the rules, or bend them a little, I did... so if we had to go to a function and if we had to wear blazer... I took my blazer to the tailor so it would actually fit me in the way that I wanted to fit it, so it looked different. Not a good idea in a team sport however, I thought it was quite clever, I thought I was being quite sharp at the time”*.

Although his errors caused him disappointment, ultimately Joshua became used to making mistakes and “constantly stepping into stuff”:

*“So that sort of thing was experienced as a low point... because of course you are disappointed in yourself, you’re disappointed that you’ve let everybody down, and of course that was never the plan. The plan might have started out as simply doing this, but then it escalates but that seems to be a little bit of the story of your life, so, you just kind of accept that and get on”*.

For Joshua, there was a sense of inevitability that he would eventually make the wrong decision and end up in trouble: *“I wouldn’t say I’m getting used to making the wrong decision, I’m certainly getting used to being the one in the wrong place. If there’s some crap going somewhere, I’m sure I’ll find it”*.

The negative way in which both Archie and Joshua viewed themselves indicated a degree of low self-esteem. It is evident that self-esteem is linked to both personal and social future outcomes (Trzesniewski et al. 2006) and research suggests that high levels of self-esteem promote positive outcomes such as coping mechanisms and productive achievements, and can serve to prevent substance abuse and antisocial behaviour (Flory et al. 2004; Donnellan et al. 2005). In contrast, low levels of self-esteem have been associated with negative consequences, and adolescents with low self-esteem have been found to be at a greater risk of committing crime in adulthood (Trzesniewski et al. 2006). Participants in the current study may also have found themselves in a vicious cycle in terms of how they viewed themselves. When an individual is convicted of a crime

they attract the stigmatizing label of 'criminal' or 'offender' (Moore et al. 2016) which carries with it many negative stereotypes. It is possible that these stereotypes are internalised in an individual's self-concept, a process known as 'self-stigma' (Corrigan et al. 2006), which is for many a precursor to poor functioning in many areas of life (Livingston and Boyd 2010; Schomerus et al. 2011), and can invariably result in committing subsequent crimes.

While Archie and Joshua saw these aspects of their personalities in negative terms, other participants identified that potentially negative traits could be positive. Isaac acknowledged that his desire to question authority helped him at times: *"I was never a naughty kid, I just always pushed it a lot, I've always questioned everything, its helped me sometimes and hasn't helped me in others"*. Dougie felt that his tenacity helped him in his career: *"If someone used to tell me "no you can't do it", I would find a way of doing it"*.

The participants discussed the links between their personalities and their sports. Some elaborated and identified how they felt their personalities fitted with the sports they played. Ethan described himself as *"a bit of a hothead sometimes"* and both he and Harry stated that they felt their sport was ideal for their personalities, as Harry identified: *"I was quite lively, so it probably as a sport fits that type of personality"*.

George stated that although he was lacking in some areas, he possessed the kind of personality traits to be a successful footballer:

*"Looking back on it in hindsight with the sort of things that I now know... are necessary to succeed in a sporting environment, there were lots of things that I didn't have, or weren't developed at that age. But I also look back and see there were lots of things that I did have, like communication skills on and off the pitch... I had a good ability to motivate my teammates, not always through shouting and bawling but just through my actions"*.

Research into personality and sport has traditionally focused on the big five (John et al. 2008) and how these five traits (neuroticism, extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness and conscientiousness) influence sports performance. Harry, Ethan, George, and Billy all described the more outgoing, dynamic aspects of their personalities and how these aided them in their sports. It could be suggested that these aspects align to the trait of extraversion which is consistently associated with elite athletes (Egloff and Jan Gruhn 1996; Paunonen 2003). Extraversion is also associated with the ability to cope in sport, and to adapt coping mechanisms dependent on the situation encountered (Lee-Baggley et al. 2005).

In addition to discussing their personalities, or who they are, a number of the athletes talked about how they behaved as athletes. Billy focussed on his aggression and desire to entertain:

*“Very, very, very aggressive, I’m just nonstop, throw a lot of punches, I like to have a fight... I like to get in there and crowd please, someone pays a lot of money... they don’t want to come and watch me running around a ring, they want to come and watch a fight. And that’s what I give. I like entertaining the crowd, I like to give everyone that buzz... when I start getting stuck in I hear the crowd go a bit mad”.*

Harry also emphasised aggression and highlighted how this resulted in him being very “direct” as a player: *“I was... I guess quite direct, quite passionate, quite committed”.* George discussed his creativity and leadership skills when describing his behaviours: *“I was a creative player, I was somebody who played very instinctively and quite freely, I would make things happen, I was an offensive footballer... a dribbler, I was often captain of the team”.*

Billy identified how he liked to please the crowd, and how this suited his personality. This is consistent with theory that suggests more extraverted athletes perform well in front of an audience (Graydon and Murphy 1995). He also mentioned his aggressive nature, which echoes research finding that anger, and aggression, can have a positive effect on sports performance for highly extraverted athletes (Woodman et al. 2009). George described qualities that he believed to be important for his sport, such as creativity and the ability to communicate, and previous research supports this viewpoint. The ability to be creative in sport is a valued quality, and research into how to promote creativity in athletes is growing in a bid to find new ways for athletes and teams to gain advantage over their opponents (Fardilha and Allen 2020). Memmert (2017) states that creativity in sport is of crucial importance, and creativity in football in particular is viewed as a key factor for success (Kempe and Memmert 2018). Additionally, effective communication is regarded as a critical element of athletic attainment (Connelly and Rotella 1991; Sullivan 1993).

The participants spoke about the kinds of behaviours they observed as being an essential part of being an athlete. A number of the participants discussed risk-taking behaviours as being part of sport. Athletes are no stranger to risk-taking. Corkery (2011) argues that while there are obvious high-risk sports, many sports have ‘danger’ elements, such as facing fast bowling in cricket. The majority of sports require exertion, competition and to some extent physical domination. Even the most placid sports carry an element of risk to an athlete, providing an avenue for fixation and obsession for some that may be at the detriment to their capacity for human affiliation (Russell 2005), or their

objectivity when it comes to effective decision-making both on and off the field of play. In addition to the risks athletes take during competition, there is also evidence suggesting that athletes are expected to take risks with their own health to be able to play (Murphy and Waddington 2007). Isaac described how risk-taking was a fundamental element of his sport, and formed the basis of one of the competitions he won:

*“That’s a competition... created by everyone because of a guy called (name) who was one of the best (skaters) in the world but sadly died... from (skating), so we have a competition in his honour to do the craziest trick that could probably kill you”.*

Isaac discussed his attitude to risk-taking, and how his desire to take risks has aided his performance in his sport:

*“Sometimes you have to shut out the things from reality such as fear... people’s perceptions... “you can’t try that, it’s stupid”, that’s what your brain is telling you, but in your head you’re like “I’ve got to do this”... You have to take risks, and that’s one of the most awesome things, I always think to do with skating that taking risks for me is one of the most valuable things I’ve learnt. It’s sometimes if you take a risk it pays off, and if it doesn’t you learn from your mistake, and it’s a positive either way... I’m a massive risk taker, when it comes to trying a trick, when it comes to a relationship, when it comes to a job or career, I always take risks”.*

Risk-taking could be seen as a desired quality in athletes. Langseth (2011) suggests that the values associated with taking risk, such as individualism, creativity and spontaneity encourage athletes to seek out sports, or opportunities within sport, to demonstrate their propensity for risk. Corkery (2011) describes the respect that can be achieved by a person defying risk whilst Ellis et al. (2012) indicate that it enables a person to enhance their reputation in the eyes of their peers. Taking risks can also be an opportunity to demonstrate courage and can serve as a strategy to attain social status (Ermer et al. 2008). It is also associated with peer influence, particularly within those individuals with high sensation-seeking tendencies (Horvath and Zuckerman 1993), and it may be more ‘socially desirable’ for male athletes to be less risk averse in order to conform to masculine stereotypes (Coakley 2001). Risks may be viewed as particularly valuable within peer groups and teams if the results of the risk are beneficial to others, or the overall result. Some athletes may take risks in order to achieve peer recognition, or to establish alliances with their peers (Atencio et al. 2009; Sulloway and Zweigenhaft 2010). Risks within a sporting context may also draw athletes closer together, as they face adversity collectively, and for some taking risks in sport is consistently valued more highly than being conservative (Frey 1991).

Joshua believes that as an athlete he was more inclined to take risks than someone who had never played sport to a high level:

*“A lot of people I come across that haven’t played sport, tend to be not as risky. Where perhaps part of being in sport is that you can go “yeah that’s scary but I’m still going to do it”. Where, you manage it, or you lessen it, or whatever you do with it. Yeah it’s kind of part and parcel, yeah you’re scared, but you still kind of do things when you’re scared, where perhaps other people go “I’m scared so I’m not going to do it”, and I always thought maybe that’s why I became a sports man”.*

Pain and Pain (2005) suggests that the proclivity to take risks is ‘hard wired’ into a person’s brain. This position is supported by Zuckerman (2007) whose body of work on sensation-seeking and athletes suggests that risk-taking and sensation-seeking are inextricably linked, and that sensation-seeking itself is a heritable and stable personality trait. However, Llewellyn and Sanchez (2008) stress the need to not assume homogeneity when considering how athletes take risk, and that athletes do not always take risks as a result of their sensation-seeking needs.

A person’s attitude towards risk will play a role in their decision making on a daily basis (Krause et al. 2014). It has been suggested that lowered perceptions of risk, be that via exposure to sporting contexts or other influences, can serve to predict high-risk lifestyles (Krause et al. 2014). Involvement in crime is one feature of such lifestyles. Joshua stated that he knew the risks involved with drug smuggling, but dismissed them, and chose to accept those risks, thus demonstrating a high ‘risk-appetite’ or a high level of ‘risk acceptability’ (Aven 2013), when he commented: *“Of course there are consequences, of course there are people that go to jail, I know them, but I’m not going to get caught so I don’t have to think about that”.*

Joshua felt that perhaps his life as an athlete resulted in him considering the potential consequences of his actions in a different way:

*“The consequences you’re kind of aware, in a sense that you know people go to jail, and you also know that... isn’t like alcohol, so it’s a period of time. The thing is, is that even though the consequence is there... maybe part of the whole sports thing is perhaps you minimise them, because ultimately consequences are fine, but if you don’t think you’re going to get caught they don’t matter... So if as a personality I go “well actually mate, you’ve lived a charmed life, life tends to work out... consequence becomes almost irrelevant because I’m not going to get kept, I’m not going to get caught... So it isn’t that you’re not aware of the consequences of things, but of course the consequences don’t apply to you, because if they did you wouldn’t do it... So what you’re actually saying is yes there are consequences, but the consequences won’t apply to me because I won’t get caught”.*

Creighton et al. (2015) suggest there is a danger that those engaged in extreme, high-risk activities may consider themselves as exempt from expectations that govern the lives of most members of society, and that this constant pushing of the boundaries may

cause boundaries to be challenged in other areas of life that are less acceptable. Though not involved in a 'high-risk' sport as such, Harry stated that he didn't consider the consequences of his actions:

*"Even when I was getting into my mid-twenties, I still didn't think there would be many consequences, cause I kind of just always thought I was in the right and I was just looking after someone or whatever else. I didn't think through the consequences that much until... (name) pointed out to me that I was being a bit of a knob".*

Frey (1991) suggested that as a result of repeated and familiar experiences in sport, athletes often express feelings of invincibility and possess a false sense of control which may lead them to underestimating the risks they take. This was particularly evident within this study in the cases of Finn, George and Archie, whose behaviours escalated over time as a result of not being caught by police.

Athletes within this study showed an awareness of, and acceptance of, risk. Although they did not speak of their desire to take risks, it was clear that as athletes they felt their perception of risk, and consequences, differed to non-athletes. Edgework has been described as a risk paradigm (Anderson and Brown 2010), where risks are believed to be pursued for the captivating appeal of risk-taking itself (Bunn 2017). The participants' enhanced risk-appetite, and the appeal of risk itself, may have increased their likelihood to pursue edgework activities, with their crimes occurring as a form of this 'risky behaviour' (Dhami and Mandel 2012). It could be argued that the propensity of some athletes to show little regard for the risks they take, and their inclination to demonstrate sensation-seeking, impulsive behaviours, may be indicators of their low levels of self-control (Gottfredson and Hirschi 1990), therefore making them more likely to commit criminal offences.

Some of the participants described the need to be tough as a common theme among athletes. Archie highlighted that he actively tried to be tough as a footballer: *"I've said how I liked to as a kid be tough, that's how I wanted to be as a footballer, so I kind of tried and took that into my football as well, I wanted to be a tough footballer"*.

Charlie felt that being tough meant he would be perceived heroically:

*"I was the daft idiot who would stick their head in when nobody else did, or going for tackles I shouldn't have done, and then get applauded for getting stretchered off, and then having a weekend in hospital ... And you do things like, well if he's not going to stick his head in there and get a few stitches then I'll do it, and I'll be the hero"*.

Mental toughness is lauded as an important trait of athletes (Guillen and Laborde 2014) however, several of the participants believed it important to appear tough too. Appearing tough is a dominant form of masculinity, and it is evident that those who conform to the male stereotype of 'jocks' (Messner 1990) or athletes in this case, value a tough or heroic image (Wetherell and Edley 1999). It is believed that individuals who want to fit in with a group or team, are more likely to conform to stereotypes (Yzerbyt and Rocher 2002; Castano et al. 2003) and while likely not a conscious decision, the participants exemplified this. Most relevantly for Archie, Smiler (2006) found that men who identify as 'tough' were more likely to conform to violent norms.

Both George and Charlie spoke about the importance of hiding fear and pain as an athlete, as George stated: *"I would feel fear, I wasn't fearless... I would feel fear but you wouldn't know it from what I demonstrated on the pitch"*. Charlie described how pain was something he refused to concede to: *"the pain... I learnt to live with it to a certain extent and that thing goes back to the macho... puffing your chest out and nothing's going to beat me"*. George and Charlie's comments are consistent with the belief that sport can encourage individuals to behave in certain ways; Crosset (1999) finds that athletes are routinely encouraged to ignore pain and hide their fears. Research by Young and White (1995) suggests that athletes often minimise the potential significance of pain when it may threaten their athletic performance. Similar findings were reported by Pike (2005) who discovered that athletes can be seen to demonstrate a disregard for their personal wellbeing in pursuit of performance, even in amateur sport. The notion of athletes being prepared to risk everything, including their health, to succeed is frequently cited when considering the psychology of athletes and their desire to 'win at all costs' (Ehrnborg and Rosén 2009; Weinberg and Gould 2015). This assumption however, has recently been challenged by Moston et al. (2017) who believe it to be fundamentally flawed and based on discredited research. Engelberg and Moston (2020) state that the belief that an athlete would sacrifice their own life in order to achieve sporting glory demonstrates how willing the media and the public are to 'believe the worst' about athletes.

It was clear from the discussions on being tough that, for the participants, this was something that went hand in hand with being a man. The language used by Archie demonstrated that he associated being tough with being a man: *"As a kid I always wanted to be a strong person, and I always read the Kray books... I always tried to be this tough man"*. Harry described that on occasions aggressive and violent behaviour from players was accepted, or dismissed as routine and to be expected: *"In rugby circles, players if I'm really honest were just... I'm using words that I would now not then, boys will be boys... it's just what it is, don't worry about it"*.

Charlie spoke directly about the masculine environment of sport, “*football changing rooms are incredibly masculine, very*”, and how this influenced the way he behaved: “*I think a lot of it with football is ego... I suppose you’re working in a male environment, so you want to be the biggest and the toughest and the strongest than anybody else*”.

The participants’ comments about the association between being tough and being masculine are consistent with those who believe that traditional forms of masculine expression such as a preoccupation with achievement, fighting, risk-taking, and appearing tough, influence the ideological beliefs that athletes possess (Pappas et al. 2004). Messner and Stevens (2002, p.226) state that:

*“the institution of sport tends not to only ‘reflect’ but also to amplify everything about masculinity that is generally true in the larger gender order... Values of male heroism based on competition and winning, playing hurt, handing out pain to opponents, group based bonding through homophobia and misogyny, and the legitimation of inter-personal violence as a means to success are all values undergirding hegemonic masculinity in the world of sport”.*

## **Aggression and Violence**

For some of the participants, discussing aggression and violence was expected given the nature of their crimes. However, interestingly other participants also discussed the role that aggression and violence had played in their careers despite not being arrested for violent offences. Finn, Isaac and Harry described violent incidents when they were younger, and highlighted how aggression and violence were apparent at the early stages of their careers. When Finn was sixteen, he punched a referee and had to appeal a ban from the Football Association:

*“I must have been sixteen ready to leave school, and I got asked to sign (for a professional club), I was supposed to sign and I ended up getting into a bit of bother. I ended up playing with my mates on a Sunday game when I shouldn’t have, and ended up punching the referee (laughs) yeah, it’s the truth... I ended up getting, I was nearly getting banned for life from football. I had to go to the FA and a few people... stood up and said look I’ve got a career in football... but from that moment... it just never worked out”.*

Isaac described how he reacted violently when confronted by a teacher at school:

*“I picked my bag up and went to turn around and he pushes me, and this is at a point where you don’t push kids at school, there’s no canes anymore or things like that. And... I turned straight back round... no one pushes me... and that caused a bit of a thing. He fell over the table... but in my eyes he pushed me first, no-one’s going to try and intimidate me...it was just the way I was”.*

Harry described an incident during an under eighteen game where despite being off the field of play after having tackled an opponent, he hit the player in the face for no reason, knocking him out. As an adult, this is still an incident that he reflects upon:



*“It kind of haunts me, I was playing for (team), and it still haunts me and I still can’t believe it. There was an incident where I just tackled someone and we went over the touch line and I remember there being a few parents legs about, and this lad was lying his face towards me, I was kind of on top of him, and I remember just hitting him straight in the face and knocking him out. And nothing happened. I played on. And to this day every now and again I think, that’s just horrible, and honestly, I keep thinking about it. And I’ve no idea why I did it. And it’s still stuck with me... It’s bizarre, it was so horrible and it was so unneeded”.*

The violent tendencies of Finn, Isaac and Harry at a young age, and latterly Ethan and Archie, may fit with what Young (1993) described as conformity to a violent sports ethic. They saw displays of aggression as a natural part of sport and how they should behave as athletes and men. Terry and Jackson (1985) view aggression as behaviour that is learned in a culture that reinforces and models violence, however, none of the participants mentioned being violent or aggressive as a result of witnessing others behave similarly.

Ethan discussed his tendency to be overly physical when playing rugby, and was ultimately given a prison sentence for grievous bodily harm: *“I woke up in a blue paper suit in the police station, I thought I had killed someone”*. For Ethan, whose crime occurred on a night out after drinking all day, his offence may fit with what Felson (2002) describes as the ‘chemistry of crime’: an extension of RAT. He states that violent crime is most likely to occur in settings such as bars where there are high numbers of men drinking. There are what Felson terms presences (men and alcohol) and absences (such as prosocial audiences – children, older people); these in combination with a likely offender, a suitable target and the absence of a capable guardian result in a crime-generating context.

Both Ethan and Harry spoke about how their on-pitch behaviour influenced how they behaved away from the field of play; both were arrested for violent acts. Ethan highlighted that the mentality of playing can transfer to social situations:

*“I was a bit fiery on the pitch, I’d had a few (fights) on the pitch... its different when you go on a rugby pitch... when you go on there you’re just in a different zone then. On a rugby pitch you can have a fight, you can have a fifteen on fifteen brawl and then you have a pint with them after and shake hands, but I suppose in a city centre its different... if you’ve been with the boys all day and I suppose you’re like jack the lad in the rugby, and then you’re going out with all the same crew I suppose the same mentality of the rugby goes out with you into the town then”.*

Harry discussed his tendency to get involved in fights away from the field of play and linked this to his actions while playing rugby:

*“We talk about white line stuff, what you can do on the pitch and what you can do off it and there’s a very vast difference. Maybe I lost that line occasionally and*

*realised, I thought I was still looking after everyone as I would do on the pitch... The reality of it, is that I used to try and still be the helping team mates, and helping people out, and I think that's probably where the lines crossed a little bit".*

There is no suggestion that this cross over of behaviours from the pitch to social situations is distinct to rugby. These are just two examples; however, they do provide some level of support for the notion of cultural spill over, which suggests that the more violence is supported in a legitimate setting, the more likely it is to be transferred to other spheres of life (Kudlac 2010). Both Harry and Ethan spoke about their aggression and violence on the pitch where their behaviour was condoned, and in some situations encouraged. This is consistent with those who suggest that rewarding violence in sport increases the risk of it transferring, or spilling over, into other scenarios (Forbes et al. 2006; Yar 2014; Groombridge 2016).

Both Harry and Archie discussed how their aggression was helpful at points during their playing careers. Describing it as being 'lively', Harry identified that far from being discouraged, his aggression and violent tendencies aided him: "*So I was quite young to break into the first team, again cause I was young but quite lively, that probably got me through it*". Harry felt that maturity played a part in his aggression and subsequent violence: "*I would always see it as aggression in the context of the game but maybe sometimes that passion when I didn't quite have the maturity spilled over into, into I suppose violence*". Describing himself as, "*Aggressive, fit, and a leader*", Archie detailed the influence his anger had on his football: "*I was a defender... I suppose my anger when I was younger, in my younger days it hindered, and it also helped me as well*".

This theme of aggression and ultimately violence is what Smith (1979a) termed an occupational culture that results in conformity to standards where violence is deemed necessary to succeed. This inclination towards violence from athletes in certain sports not only provides an opportunity to impress coaches, but also acts as a way of establishing a positive identity for the player (Smith 1979b) with displays of aggression often resulting in greater coach and peer perceptions of that player's ability than their playing or sport specific skills (Weinstein et al. 1995).

Harry described how at points he felt that his violent behaviour was reinforced, or rewarded, when he played rugby. He spoke about violence in the context of a tackle, and how this seemed to be celebrated:

*"I remember playing in a game... and I just remember tackling someone very well, causing them... really big contact in the tackle, quite a reasonable crowd sort of, acknowledged that tackle. I remember players acknowledging that tackle*

*and again that's one little thing that I just remember that made me feel quite important at the time".*

This fits with what Messner (1990, p.203) describes as “*bodies as weapons*” in sport, and how accomplishment can be associated with using violence successfully in the context of a game. Perderson et al. (2009) state that efforts to deal with the issue of violence in sport are often undermined by the sporting industry, and incidents that would provoke criminal investigation off the field of play tend to be minimised and seen simply as a ‘normal’ part of sport (Engelberg and Moston 2020).

Harry stated that when it came to being aggressive or violent in the context of playing rugby, he actually found that he enjoyed it: *“You could picture this arrogant rugby player, I never strutted round... I just, if something went on, I just seemed to be in the middle of it, I never even thought about it, I was quite happy”.*

This enjoyment may have been due to the fact that Harry viewed his aggressive and violent acts as ‘normal’, as he conformed to a violent sport ethic (Young 1993). As Winlow et al. (2001) explain viewing such acts as normal can help displace feelings of guilt despite the individual’s behaviour potentially causing harm to another (Jamieson and Orr 2009).

## **Negative Sporting Experiences**

In the same way that I asked the participants to consider their highs in sport, I also asked them if they could describe any particular low points. All the participants were able to describe an event, or a set of circumstances, that caused them to experience a low, some more than others: Dougie joked, *“Ohhh, too many man, now you’re hurting me!”.*

While for many of the participants, their sport was where they felt most at ease and able to be themselves, this was not true for both George and Joshua. Both described not fitting in to the culture and ethos of their sports. George described how he felt split in two different worlds, football and music:

*“And it took me a long, long time to actually come to terms with those two sides of myself because if I was with the footie lads there wasn’t, or I felt like there was like 50% of me that wasn’t there... But similarly if I was with people like musicians... I felt there was 50% of me that wasn’t there... So I always felt like I wasn’t in either one of those camps, I had a love for both of them, and it’s taken me a long, long time to actually sort of accept that there’s those two sides, at least those two sides, to me, and to be comfortable in each environment, actually as who I am rather than denying a part of me”.*

For George, his feelings of not fitting in seemed to be largely down to the differing nature of the environments he spent time in, and what he felt they demanded for him personally. George described himself as a 'conundrum' to people as he felt he never behaved in the way people expected, primarily as a footballer, then a footballer balancing an addiction, and latterly as a homeless drug addict committing crime.

Joshua's feelings of incompatibility with others in his sport seemed to stem in part from perceived cultural differences. Joshua believed he was perceived as a 'difficult' player because he approached his sport differently from others, and he felt this was because of his background:

*"That promotes thoughts from time to time, why do you stick out, what's the difference in you? The general consensus or the general consensus I have in my mind is well, you started in a different place, you have different ideas, you do things but you do it differently, and of course I know I am not trying to be a trouble maker, I know I was just getting on with my stuff, that's your perception because I'm not doing it your way, so there's a lot of thinking as regards to those sort of issues where I see it as a little bit of a culture clash".*

Joshua felt that this was something that could have been mitigated had other players appreciated his different background, and had he perhaps acknowledged that this adjustment in opinion would take time:

*"That is essentially two groups of people who have different views on how to do the same things... people in the same space, coming from different cultured place, even different things they actually do socially and how they spend their downtime. So it was simply all that, in hindsight I can look at it all now and go, that's what was going on, I could have been better at this, they could have been better at it".*

The issues that Joshua describe are not uncommon and despite occurring in the 1990s, research indicates that international athletes still encounter numerous difficulties when arriving to play sport in a new country. Baghurst and Parish (2010) note that international athletes can face many barriers and can often be mistreated by teammates and misunderstood by coaches. Additionally, and particularly evident for Joshua, international athletes may not fit in with existing norms and may have belief structures that differ from their teammates (Baghurst and Parish 2010). Many international athletes will suffer with homesickness and feelings of dislocation (Rajapaksa and Dundes 2003) and struggle to make constructive relationships due to cultural differences (Frawley 2015). Joshua's teammates' reaction to him appeared to perpetuate the stereotype of the 'impulsive black sportsman' (Rosbrook-Thompson 2013) and clearly displayed a lack of appreciation and understanding of his culture and upbringing. Research suggests that coaches play an integral role in insuring international athletes are welcomed, and are responsible for creating a climate that promotes integration (Popp et al. 2010). It was

clear that in Joshua's case both his coaches and teammates failed to understand the need for understanding and integration, and consequently he was treated poorly and ostracised (Baghurst and Parish 2010).

In addition to a "*culture clash*", Joshua also felt he encountered problems within his sport as a consequence of not wanting to socialise, or be personally involved, with his teammates:

*"My idea of really being a team mate, really, was really focusing on (the sport)... for me there's a lot of stuff talking about team this and team that, but I thought the whole point of this was to go and win the (sport) matches, not for me to hold your hand... I wouldn't say there's more about holding hands but that was part and parcel of it, the tradition and the going out here, and the going out there, and spending time with your teammates after. Now in my world it didn't make any sense".*

He acknowledged that perhaps it would have been beneficial to go out with his team mates occasionally, but that he did not like going to pubs. Ultimately Joshua felt he would have had to change to fully fit into his sport.

*"But again we all have our learning curves, that was just simply mine... about certain things, some of which were taken up perhaps very slowly but that's because I didn't necessarily always like the lesson that was being taught, that I had to change something in order to fit in".*

Both George and Joshua spoke about the impact that rejection had on them and were both able to make links between being rejected, or dropped, from their sport, and the actions that followed, which for both of them culminated in crime. George spoke about being released from his professional football contract and how his small stature had been used as a reason for this rejection:

*"A lot of its down to interpretation isn't it and how different individuals interpret something cause some people get told "You're not playing centre midfield because we don't feel like you're physically strong enough" and some people just say "Well, I'll show you" or whatever... I think for me subconsciously I think that did have some sort of negative effect on me, of not being... not being enough, or something like that...so, that not being enough, not being good enough, not being... not being enough".*

George was left with enduring feelings that he was "*not enough*" which for him translated into feelings of inadequacy. He felt as if he hadn't been "*man enough*" to succeed in his sport, potentially due to a combination of the feelings of rejection, and the language used by coaches when he was rejected. George very quickly found that he was able to silence those feelings of failure and incompetence by rapidly increasing his recreational drug usage; he was released from his professional contract aged sixteen and was a heroin addict by seventeen.

Rejection from a team, or failure to be selected, can be described as a non-event transition whereby a predicted outcome fails to occur (Schlossberg 2004), and the impact of this on an athlete can be significant. Research into the negative impacts of being rejected, deselected or failing to be selected is extensive. Deselected athletes have been reported to experience a loss of identity, anxiety, humiliation, anger, despair (Munroe et al. 1999; Grove et al. 2004; Barnett 2006, 2007; Brown and Potrac 2009) and are at an increased risk of psychological distress and mental disorders (Brand et al. 2013; Blakelock et al. 2016). While research into the language used within deselection is lacking (Capstick and Trudel 2010; Seifried and Casey 2012) it is clear that effective feedback needs to focus on performance (Darekar et al. 2016) and not, as in George's case, physical attributes. Capstick and Trudel (2010) discovered that coaches largely lack any training in communicating deselection, a finding that was reinforced by Gleddie et al. (2019) who discovered a shortage of policy surrounding deselection.

George makes direct links between his rejection as a footballer and his drug use, which led him to crime. Joshua discussed two different types of rejection. Firstly, he described how he felt being dropped on and off over a period of time: *"The reoccurring nightmare is that from time to time I still put my foot in it, so that means that periodically I'm dropped"*. Initially this was something that he learnt to cope with as it was part of being a professional sports person, and also was often due in part to his own actions:

*"We've had a ball, I've even made my way back into the England team after injury, hey presto I'm man of the (event), I'm performing well. The end of the (season), I put my foot in it again. I've turned up late, and that's the end... that's essentially the end of the (International) career. Disappointed. But it's life... things happen and you dust yourself off and you get on"*.

Joshua was able to identify that being dropped from the international team had significant ramifications for his desire to continue playing his sport domestically:

*"So this is just another one of those, you make your apologies, lie low for a while and then at some point you'll have to dust off and get on with it. But really, it's the beginning of the end. Without so much the lure of playing international sport, a little bit of motivation has gone, there seems to be less point to this"*.

While Joshua gave a very pragmatic overview of being rebuffed due to his performance and, at times, poor decisions, he also described a second form of rejection, being ousted from the sport by fans and other players. Before his career ended Joshua reported corruption in his sport and far from being lauded as behaving honourably he was pilloried by the governing body of the sport, the press, fans and his fellow players. This widespread rejection left him extremely disillusioned and angry:

*"So it was a surprise that something like that, that the people who had been preaching at me for a very long time (laughs) about how I wasn't enough, would do that. I almost felt like I'd been duped to be perfectly honest, so it's convenient"*

*for you... I was spitting feathers, and didn't really want to be a part of, of anything because from what I saw it, I come to you potentially doing you a favour, telling you something, and look what you've done. Literally you've actually... where are they (the fans) getting this stuff from, they aren't getting it from me, they're getting it from you. You're doing me in, literally doing me in. You've told me to come to you with this stuff, I've come to you with this stuff and the result is, a few months later I have no job, I have no career and everybody thinks I'm a complete and utter cunt. So, I wouldn't say I'm not in a good place, I'd just simply say I'm in an angry place".*

Joshua felt strongly that he had done the right thing in reporting corruption but felt that he was demonised as a result. He no longer felt comfortable playing his sport and finished his professional contract early:

*"It's really got to the lowest point, because here I am... still playing and people are booing, because apparently, I'm a snitch. By the end of that (season), or half way through... I just want to leave... I'm not even half way through a six-year contract, which includes the benefits... so we arrange and at the end of the (season) I am no longer a professional (sport)... I feel, I feel I've been done in, I feel I've been set up... the (corruption) thing came and I simply just did not want to be in the space".*

Joshua believes that this experience had a direct effect on his behaviour and attitude towards others, and his sense of morality:

*"But with hindsight, I think a lot of things, a lot of anger that we don't necessarily deal with just stays just below the surface, and I think for me when it came to making certain choices, that perhaps part of my moral control, being part of a moral world, I kind of slipped a little bit, like I don't really owe you anything actually... so it isn't a question that something became right in a moment it was perhaps more, a question of actually looking at it and going yeah, perhaps that's wrong, I understand that was wrong but actually mate, I actually don't really owe you... and if you're living in a community it's a dangerous thing to head down that road... I wouldn't say through experience because it wasn't the experience that made the choice, I made the choice, but I suppose I used certain things to allow me to make that choice".*

While self-control is widely acknowledged as a determinant of crime (Gottfredson and Hirschi 1990) others believe that morality is the fundamental cause (Wikström 2010; Messner 2012). Research suggests that strong levels of morality decrease the likelihood of an individual committing a crime (Stams et al. 2006; Antonaccio and Tittle 2008). For Joshua, Situational Action Theory (SAT) may be particularly applicable to the way he describes crime occurring when his moral compass 'slipped'. SAT views the decision to commit a crime as the result of a combination of exposure to crime and propensity – which refers to both self-control and morality (Wikström et al. 2012). For Joshua, his change in morality may have been the trigger to explore the criminal networks that had always been apparent but that he had never previously explored.

Billy described the injustice he felt at a turning point in his career, following which he struggled with a period of depression, culminating in a criminal court case and an enforced break from his sport. After losing a fight his manager entered him in, Billy's behaviour '*spiralled*', he spoke about how he felt cheated out of a title and the impact this had on him:

*"When you've worked so hard for something and then you get cheated out of something you get very depressed, and disheartened... I thought I won the fight, my manager thought I won the fight... my fans and everybody, and they give the other guy the decision. So I lost a belt which I thought I won... I just won a fight and they just ripped it straight from me".*

Billy's reaction after losing a fight he felt he had won is consistent with research that suggests that perceived injustice can evoke strong reactions in people. When a situation is perceived as being unfair, particularly if this results in an injury, there is a greater likelihood of depressive consequences (Sullivan et al. 2008). Additionally, perceived injustice has been linked with higher levels of aggression in individuals (Baron et al. 1999).

George, Joshua and Billy were all able to explicitly identify experiences within their sports that they felt led them towards criminal activity. Feelings of rejection, failure and injustice resulted in a direct alteration in behaviour, and a shift in their attitude towards committing deviant behaviour and ultimately crime. The General Strain Theory of crime (Agnew 1992) may provide an explanation for why such experiences result in an athlete's perception of crime changing. Agnew explains that while not everyone will process 'strain' in the same way, some strained individuals will turn their attention towards deviant or criminal behaviour. General Strain Theory identifies that an individual's response to strain is influenced by various factors which include the nature, intensity and duration of that strain, the emotion that the strain elicits, how effective a person is at coping with strain, and the context in which the strain occurs. A strain will result in an adverse emotion which requires a person to find a way to cope with that emotion. If they are unable to access a legitimate coping mechanism, because such a mechanism is either unavailable or ineffective then a person will potentially instead utilise an illegitimate coping strategy.

The three strains that Agnew identifies can all be applied to participants within this study. Firstly, the failure to achieve a highly valued goal, such as selection or a specific title/event; secondly the loss of positively valued incentives, these could be the losses associated with no longer being involved in sport in the way the athlete wishes; and finally, the appearance of negative stimuli, which for athletes could manifest themselves in negative feelings, or practical issues such as those associated with both normative



and non-normative transitions out of sport (see later). When an individual's strain results in significant anger that cannot be lessened using legitimate coping mechanisms, a criminal outcome becomes a strong possibility. For those who support General Strain Theory (Ngo and Paternoster 2013; Zavala and Spohn 2013) it is acknowledged that there is a strong link between strain, anger and crime. A strain can be particularly potent for an individual when it is perceived as unjust, high in significance, and associated with feelings of low social control.

An individual's ability to cope with strain will be affected by factors such as self-esteem, temperament and intelligence, in addition to their social network. This is particularly applicable to athletes such as George, Billy and Joshua whose esteem and immediate access to the social network of sport were directly fractured by the strain placed upon them. Additionally, Agnew identifies a social network can have a clear influence if it contains access to deviant peers, this is particularly true for a number of participants within this study who only appeared to invest more in the criminal contacts they had known for some time when they experienced a negative event.

A number of the participants spoke about the injuries they had suffered during their careers, and the impacts these had on them. For Charlie, the injury he suffered relatively early in his career plagued him and was the reason he finally had to concede he was no longer able to play. Charlie identified that as soon as he suffered the injury he knew how serious it was:

*"I remember doing my knee, and... I'd never felt pain like it... Leading up to it I'd done my cartilage in my left knee, I'd fractured my eye socket, and my cheek... I'd done my cartilage in my right knee, and... that pain was unbelievable, I'd never felt anything like it. And I always remember, that it was on a Friday... I was in the hospital over the weekend, and... on the Monday I'd seen a guy, a surgeon and he'd said "We want to drain your knee, its full of fluid", he said "We'll drain, your knee...if it's clear you're fine, if its red then...you're knackered", and next he came back and said "It's black", so I was... I knew then".*

Charlie told me that his injury was something he "*learnt to manage*" but he knew it was a limiting factor in his progression in his sport:

*"Looking back it sort of, I... just got through doing enough. I knew because of my knee I would never get back to the premier league because I would never pass a medical... so I... just sort of plodded along a little bit".*

Dougie described how hard he finds it now that an injury is the restricting factor in his ability to perform:

*"As a professional my last two fights, which is probably the reason why I'm stopping now... I know it's through my knee, and I'm getting hit and I'm going down, and I'm getting up and I'm not even hurt, but it's just losing my balance... I get frustrated and annoyed".*

As an athlete, the risk of injury is an ongoing reality and whether the injury is temporary or permanent, the emotional demands on an athlete can be significant (Brewer 2001; Weinberg and Gould 2015). Research has shown that athletic injuries can result in both frustration and depression (Brewer 2001), and negative emotional responses such as anger, anxiety, disappointment and fear (Mainwaring 1999). Serious injuries may impact on the athlete's ability to function both socially and occupationally, and it is not uncommon for the athlete to experience changes in their relationships with family and peers (Ford and Gordon 1999). This was evident for Charlie whose marriage began to fail as he coped with his injury and the impending end of his career. In addition to ending his career, the long-term implications of Charlie's injury are still apparent today: *"Every day I wake up with pain in my knee... and that goes into my back... goes in my other knee, goes in my ankles... cause I don't walk properly"*.

Retiring due to injury is one of the primary causes of athletic career termination (Lavallee 2000; Taylor and Ogilvie 2001) and studies have demonstrated that loss of career due to injury can be extremely challenging for the athlete (Cecic Erpic et al. 2004). Kleiber and Brock (1992) identified lower levels of life-satisfaction and self-esteem in the five-ten years following retirement in those athletes whose careers had been terminated due to injury, compared to those who retired for alternative reasons. However, research by from Loberg (2008) suggests that while injured athletes showed signs of psychological distress during the initial stages of their retirement, this dissipated around nine-fifteen months later; sadly the experiences of Charlie and Joshua do not follow this pattern.

Participants in this study touched upon the pressure they felt to be successful, and how this impacted upon their happiness and enjoyment of their sport. When discussing his discontent, George highlighted how such pressure meant that he wasn't being himself: *"I felt like I wasn't myself on the pitch, I was trying to remember instructions, trying to listen to different people on the side-lines, and it always felt like you were playing for your future"*.

Dougie gave an insight into the various sources of pressure he encountered as a professional boxer, such as maintaining the correct weight and selling tickets, and how difficult it was to manage while still maintaining a life outside of his sport. Joshua described how draining his sport could be, and how the intensity, combined with the pressure an athlete is constantly under to perform, was exhausting:

*"There was just so much (sport) going on, that half the time if you were operating at 80% you were kind of doing well, and I mean that not necessarily physically, I*

*mean emotionally because you were that tired. And here you are, another (game) and you've just finished an International match”.*

The reality of elite sport is that there is intense competition for places and success is limited. Elite athletes are often considered expendable and easily replaced by another athlete who is ready and willing to take their place (Connor 2009) which results in them routinely enduring conditions that can have affect them negatively. For many athletes, the organisational culture of sport itself can be a source of strain (Feddersen et al. 2020) as they are expected to cope with pressure on a routine basis.

In addition to feeling under pressure to perform, participants discussed their perceptions of a loss of freedom and overly restrictive and constraining environments. For George, the constraints of his sport, coupled with the pressure he felt to perform meant that he felt very little freedom at all:

*“Training became something that didn't feel enjoyable anymore, and it felt like... that I was having the joy coached out of me, and that love and freedom that I felt on the pitch coached out of me... it all become a little bit too like a fucking job... I felt restricted”.*

While for some sport can be seen as an outlet for freedom, for many the reality is that it is very constraining (Carter and Carter 2007). Gruneau (1980, p.72) acknowledges the lack of 'play' that exists in modern sport, explaining that the over-regulation of sport has resulted in leaving little freedom or creative expression, indicating that limits of sport can be “*as repressive as they are liberating*”. In addition to a loss of freedom and lack of enjoyment, George stated that playing elite sport felt like he had “*shackles*” on.

When we discussed sporting high points, Finn recalled one from early in his career and stated that he had enjoyed his sport far more when he was younger than when he played professionally: “*My biggest high from football... I'd say was winning the English schools trophy when I was fifteen... and that was good cause football changes then, it becomes serious then... and things are different then*”.

Whether feelings of constraint are caused by sport (Nixon 2004; Murphy and Waddington 2007) or are self-imposed (Roderick et al. 2000), it is likely that when combined with feelings of a loss of freedom and over regulation, athletes may feel they no longer have power or control over their lives (Connor 2009). **These feelings of constraint may have led the athletes to pursue the edgework experiences that enabled them to regain some degree of control over their lives, and challenge and escape from the structures they perceived to be constraining them (Lyng 2005).** For George, his loss of freedom and increase in structure, was significant and resulted in him actively pursuing alternatives to

maintain a degree of freedom in his life: *“This game that bought me so much... freedom all of a sudden becoming very, very structured and rigid to the point where I didn’t enjoy it anymore, drugs were like the opposite of that”*. George’s reaction could be viewed as a direct response to feeling he had limited influence over his life (Anderson and Brown 2010). By pursuing edgework experiences, participants were potentially able to feel more than they did in their daily routine experiences (Miller 2005).

For athletes, a perceived lack of control over their lives may result in them feeling a degree of anomie, a sense of meaninglessness (Carter and Carter 2007) and detachment, which can result in changes in their behaviour. Additionally, when athletes are unhappy (with performance or sport in general) they are more likely to experience higher levels of anomie (Carter and Carter 2007) and consequently more likely to feel alienated from others. In his study of delinquency, Miller (2005) highlighted that alienation in combination with institutional constraints, conspires to create the conditions that enable forms of edgework to occur; edgework can provide alienated and controlled individuals with a thrilling and exciting escape, and this may have been the case for some participants in the current study.

Given the media hype that surrounds elite athletes, particularly those who make a living through sport, it would be easy to assume that playing professional sport is a dream come true (Carter and Carter 2007; Green 2009). Surprisingly, some of the participants describe their experiences of elite sport in less positive terms. Both Archie and Charlie described going to ‘work’ in mundane terms when they discussed their football careers. Harry described how the increase in structure playing professionally affected how he felt about his sport: *“The game I had played for fun had taken over and become a bit more you will do this, and you will do that, and I just didn’t enjoy it”*.

For a number of the participants these feelings of constraint and loss of freedom were coupled with, or resulted in, a loss of enjoyment in their sport, as George described: *“I can’t remember ever enjoying a game I played because I was so focused on my position, supporting the play, tracking back... it felt like that sort of joie de vivre had just sort of gone out of it really”*. Harry spoke about how his experience in professional sport appeared to be a mismatch with how others perceived the world of a professional athlete to be: *“So probably realising that... I’m not enjoying this when I was doing something that most people go “wow” about”*.

For many athletes going to the Olympics will be the pinnacle of their career, but Dougie told me that when he arrived at the games, he realised he just didn’t want to be there:

*“Going back to the Olympics, I looked at the draw, and everyone in that draw I had beaten, or could have beaten or I was ranked above, apart from the (athlete) who was at the top of the draw, and if I’d meet him it would be in the final. But I didn’t want to be there, didn’t want to be there”.*

Charlie highlighted that despite achieving a great deal, once he had fulfilled what he set out to, he was left with a career that couldn’t match up to that previous high point:

*“As a kid all I ever wanted to do was play for (club), score for (club) and play at Wembley, and at twenty-five I’d done everything, done everything that I’d really wanted to do. And then the last seven years... were a bit of an anti-climax to be honest”.*

The attitude of some of the participants echoed the findings of Carter and Carter (2007) who explained that discovering that nearly half of their study group were unhappy with some aspect of life was one of the most surprising elements of their research into players’ offences in the NFL. Despite the clear links between sport and happiness documented in the literature (Kiyani et al. 2011), it is clear that the happiness of elite athletes cannot be presumed. Neshat dost et al. (2009) argue that sport brings happiness, but it was clear from the participants in this study that being an elite athlete did not necessarily bring the positive experiences that athletes imagine. The tendency of the public to idealise elite athletes has led to many misconceptions about athletes (Reardon and Factor 2010), particularly regarding the perceived ‘immunity’ of athletes from being affected by issues that affect the rest of society, such as mental health (Coyle et al. 2017). Carter and Carter (2007) described how they were overwhelmed by the amount of chronic personal and social problems and how many of their participants explained that life off the football field often felt meaningless.

For several of the participants in this study their decisions to commit crime were invariably linked to feelings of discontent in some area of life and to deep-seated personal issues. This reinforces the need to avoid assumptions about elite athletes. To the outside world these athletes were living charmed lives, but the reality was very different. The highly successful Olympic gymnast Olga Korbut has previously spoken out about the realities of elite sport and how they do not match the perceptions of the public. She observed that despite her gold medal winning performances, the experience was far from enjoyable. Korbet (1992, p.81-82), noted, *“my strongest memories of that entire period are fatigue, pain and the empty feeling of being a fly whose blood has been sucked out by a predatory spider”.*

Several of the participants discussed how it felt to be treated as a commodity as a professional athlete, as Charlie highlights: *“You are an utter commodity to the football clubs and when you’re done you’re done... and when they’ve had enough of you, you’re*

*hung out to dry*". Finn talked about the role money played in him being moved clubs while playing professionally, and the impact that this had on him:

*"I had a time when (club) came in for me, but it was a high and a low cause I'd signed a two-year contract for a team, a semi-pro team, and this is just where more or less that was it then for me, and (club)... wanted to sign me but the Chairman was wanting too much money for me, they were like nah, don't want him"*.

Charlie discussed the negative impact that being treated as a commodity had on his family:

*"I was playing for (club) against (club) in Nottingham and I lived in Lincoln at the time. Nottingham to Lincoln's about an hour's drive, going home. So I played for (club) against (club), finished the match and... by the time I drove from Nottingham to Lincoln back home my manager at (club) had sold us... so I literally got in the house and my wife at the time says "You need to ring the manager", so I rang the manager and he said "We've had a bid accepted for you from (club)... we've accepted it so you can go for talks". So that's literally we've taken the money, were going to get the money for you so you're on your bike... That actual decision was the downfall, that sort of instigated me getting divorced"*.

Charlie's experiences fit with those who suggest that athletes are commodified (Mountjoy 2019), and particularly in professional football, the most popular sport in the world, where excess is often reported on (Nicholson 2007; Raney and Bryant 2009). Despite concerns around the use of the term 'exploitation' (Murphy and Waddington 2007), various authors have suggested that elite athletes are indeed exploited (Nixon 1994; Young 2004). To some they are treated as widgets, or marketable assets, within a modern, corporate and media-driven arena (Stratton et al. 2004; Connor 2009).

Overall the negative sporting experiences described by the participants could fit with what McAdams (2001) identified as contaminating events. These are events that originally have positive traits, such as those experienced during a flourishing athletic career, but then at some point begin to go wrong (Browne-Yung et al. 2017). In a contaminating event, the positive features are undermined, or contaminated, by the events that follow (McAdams et al. 2001), and events such as these can have enduring, long term effects as they potently remind the individual of their failure (McAdams 2001). Many of the participants' experiences fit with this description, such as Billy feeling cheated out of a fight and let down by his manager, George being released from his contract, Harry realising he disliked the reality of professional sport, Joshua's rejection from sport and subsequent failed comeback, and Charlie feeling that he was just a commodity.

## Stopping Sport

While a small number of the participants are still competing, the majority of participants no longer compete at an elite level. For Ethan, Finn and George the end of their elite sporting careers was directly due to their involvement in crime or drugs. Retirement from sport is something that all athletes have to face and for many, particularly elite athletes, this can be a life-altering experience (Samuel and Tenenbaum 2011). As was evident with the participants in the current study, the transition out of elite sport can be a complex and multidimensional experience (Martin et al. 2014) and is better viewed as a process rather than a single event (Alfermann and Stambulova 2007).

The literature surrounding sporting transitions tends to focus on end of career transitions (Lavalley et al. 2000) however, many athletes are also affected by within career transitions. A number of participants in this study dealt with non-normative within career transitions. These are characterised by their unpredictability and may include being de-selected from a team, temporary injury or the loss of a coach (Pummell et al. 2008). George experienced this type of transition when dropped from his professional contract, Billy when told to take a break pending investigation, Archie while in a rehab facility, Harry when he stepped away from his professional contract, and Isaac when he injured his face and wouldn't leave the house. Arguably a number of the participants also fit the term 'drop out' which refers to the "*premature sport career termination among young athletes before they reach their full potential*" (Park et al. 2013, p.36). Billy 'dropped out' for a period of time, as did Harry, Isaac was close to dropping out before his arrest changed his outlook, and Finn describes how he failed to fulfil his potential.

For some of the participants the choice to take a break from their sport or to stop competing altogether was due to a change in focus. As George entered his mid to late teens he began to develop alternative interests, whereas when he was younger sport was his only focus; he realised there were alternative ways to spend his time:

*"That started to change when I got to an age where I could... experience different things... Growing up as a kid like that you don't experience loads of different things do you, you go to school, you see your family...but once id got a little bit older and I was reading more and started to listen to music. Also you get to that age where girls all of a sudden become something worth anything (laughs)".*

George found that his interest in music developed further, and that he began to identify with influencing figures within music than within his sport: "*But when I started making music myself and I was now involved in that then compared to footballers, musicians and writers... were so much more interesting as well*".

While George's circumstances were influenced primarily by his drug-taking, and the fact that his alternative interest facilitated this side of his life more, he described how this began to demand more and more of his time and ultimately, he had to make a choice:

*"That then became something that developed into being on an equal footing with football and demanded as much of my time but also my thoughts as ... So then football had a rival then I suppose... There was no big incident, there was no blinding light or anything, no moments of clarity... it just petered out and again it didn't feel like I was making a big decision. I can't even tell you, it wasn't pinpointed it just felt like a very natural thing, I don't want to do this anymore, I would rather be doing this... You'll know this, anyone will, that there's only a certain amount of hours in a day and if you want to prioritise things that you really want to do, something else has to go".*

George's fractured relationship with football may also have been influenced by stage of life. His athletic career ended during adolescence as he began to enter the mastery stage of his sport (Wylleman et al. 2004). This stage can be extremely stressful for athletes as they attempt to balance the increased demands of their performance with their education and burgeoning social lives (Lally and Kerr 2005; Pummell et al. 2008; Stambulova et al. 2012).

For Ethan, it was clearly his criminal offence and subsequent prison sentence that acted as the catalyst in changing his attitude towards his sport. While he was desperate to return to rugby while in prison he also gained a different sense of perspective, that his sport was no longer the most important area of his life:

*"I still enjoy playing now but, it's not the be all and end all now... I'd probably rather go to work now than play, depends who we are playing. If it was a big game at home and we have a big crowd I'd probably go and play then... there's just more to it, cause once you get a bit older... it's more of a hobby now, but back then it was everything".*

He highlighted that a shift in priorities since leaving prison contributed to his view of his sport as no longer being central:

*"When you're a bit younger you don't mind, you don't really care about money, you'd just rather play rugby but then you get a bit older. I've got a son now and I've sort of fallen out of love with it really. I don't train much, I work evenings... I can't really be arsed anymore if I'm honest... I turn up on Saturday, have a good game just with a local team, with all my mates, have a couple of pints after and that's more of what I'm into now ... I think my time's passed more than anything".*

Ethan's reasons for altering his view of rugby, and stopping competing at the elite level, are consistent with those who consider a conflict of interests as the most commonly encountered reason for dropping out of sport (Martin 1997; Salguero et al. 2003). It is clear that for Ethan, the effort required to negotiate the structural constraints of competing (Crawford et al. 1991; Jackson et al. 1993), namely time and money, was no longer justifiable for him and so he stopped trying.



After leaving school Isaac experienced a break in competing, partly due to his activities outside sport (committing crime and taking drugs) but also his perception of a potential future in his sport:

*“There was a point when I left school, and to like the age of nineteen where, I don’t really know what happened in my head. I’d won quite a lot of competitions... but I couldn’t see scope for skating taking me any further... Everyone, and I mean everybody, including my schoolteachers was telling me “You’ve got to get a job, this isn’t going to be sustainable for ever” ... I was sixteen, I hadn’t even started, but they were already discouraging me to not do it”.*

While for Isaac this negativity surrounding his future career served as a deterrent, studies suggest that for many elite athletes, others’ doubt or lack of belief can serve as a source of motivation to continue (Rees et al. 2016; Hardy et al. 2017).

While Billy was officially unable to compete while criminal proceedings were ongoing, he identified that this enforced break coincided with him desiring a break from his sport for his own reasons. He described his shift in focus as a desire for normality: *“Just really wanted a break... I lived life as a boxer from the age of six... I was twenty-two at that time... it’s a long time and I just thought I’m just gonna live a normal life, like normal lads”.* In reality, Billy’s movement into ‘normality’ saw him taking drugs and partying with his friends, but for him this change in focus initially provided him with a level of short-term relief after competing so seriously for many years. It was clear that during Billy’s break from sport his social support network from within his sport was limited which may go some way to explaining why this transition was ultimately so distressing for him; social support is viewed as key in optimal athlete transitions (Wylleman and Lavallee 2007).

Participants offered a number of reasons for stopping their sport, either for a period during their careers, or at the end. For Billy, Joshua and Charlie there was an element of the decision being forced upon them, through allegations and injury respectively. Joshua in particular felt he had no choice but to stop playing: *“Because of course stuff was in the papers, and I was the traitor and this, that and the other... But it was probably, you asked about low moments, and that’s probably (sport) wise the lowest moment”.*

Joshua expanded on how his professional career ending through (in his opinion) no fault of his own, made him feel and how it impacted on his personality:

*“I’m not really going to engage with anybody or anything, I just need to be on my own. What that really actually means is that, it’s a really dark time... and I use the words dark times loosely, it means that my thought process, because it’s now coming from this place where I’m short, I can feel the shortness. I’m still calm on top but scratch the surface and I’ll snarl very quickly. It isn’t a person I know, but yet here I am”.*

Billy, Charlie and Joshua's careers were curtailed by factors they deemed outside of their control; this lack of voluntary control has been linked with high levels of negative emotions (Kerr and Dacyshyn 2000; Lally 2007; Butt and Molnar 2009). The end of Charlie and Joshua's playing careers could be categorised as involuntary retirement and the impact of a transition of this nature is believed to be the most profound (Blinde and Stratta 1992). Involuntary retirement is linked to adjustment issues (Martin et al. 2014), psychological difficulties, lower life satisfaction and feeling a loss of control over one's life (Cecic Erpic et al. 2004). It is also linked with greater levels of anxiety and depression (Alfermann and Gross 1997), which is consistent particularly with the experiences of Charlie who was extremely open about the ways in which he has struggled since the end of his professional football career.

A number of the participants spoke openly about their athletic careers ending, either temporarily or permanently. A common thread appeared to be how this loss of focus and structure affected them, and for most this manifested itself in a negative way. Charlie described how much he missed having structure to his day when he stopped playing football professionally:

*"I would never say that playing football is like being in the military, but being a footballer is very militarised ... Monday morning you'll be in at nine o'clock, this is what you're going to do today, when you're finished go home, this is what you're going to need to eat, this is what you need to drink. Tuesday morning be here for ten o'clock, this is what you're going to do".*

Harry mentioned how negatively he responded to an abrupt loss of structure when he stopped playing rugby. Schwenk et al. (2007) link this loss of structure with feelings of anxiety in athletes. Harry found the freedom he suddenly had meant that he began to make the wrong decisions, and he drove his car while drunk – this is prior to the drink-driving incident that he was ultimately arrested for:

*"I just began to lose a bit of my way, cause I didn't have many restrictions in my life, didn't have any structure... after one particular incident... I drove a car with far too much alcohol, I actually crashed the car, no one else involved but then drove home".*

One of the hardest things for Charlie was learning to do things for himself once his career ended. As a professional footballer, he told me that someone was there to give him his kit, his shoes, his food, and when this ended the learning curve was steep: *"It was incredibly difficult, it was something I wasn't prepared for. It was something I had no idea about, I'd been spoon fed for twenty years and then I now had to feed myself".*

After suffering a boxing defeat Dougie made the temporary decision that he didn't want to box anymore. He described an initial sense of relief which was quickly followed by a realisation that without the structure of boxing, he didn't know what to do: *"Then I started getting lost, I didn't know where I was going, I didn't know what I was doing"*. This short-term loss of direction resulted in him relying on alcohol as a way to cope (see Chapter 8). Similarly, while Billy had initially desired a break from sport he found the reality, and the loss of focus resulted in him investing further in activities that proved to be negative:

*"But going from somebody who's boxed all their life, never had to... I didn't have nothing to focus my mind on, so I turned to going out on the weekends, finding a job, going out on the weekends, all the lads, doing what lads do, turning to a bit of drugs"*.

A number of the participants described how their lives went into a negative spiral following their sporting careers ending (or pausing), how they found themselves going off the rails as a consequence. The most extreme example is George who became a heroin addict within a year of his professional football contract ending: *"If you look at it in terms of I stopped playing football seriously when I was sixteen, and by the time I was twenty... within four years I was in jail"*.

Isaac described his behaviour during his break from his sport as *"a self-destruct path"*, and Harry stated that without rugby *"life was just getting a bit messy"*. Billy voiced the extreme nature of his response to not having boxing in his life anymore: *"I'd come home on the weekend and I'd just blow every bit of money I had, on just going out and just getting wrecked up with my mates"*.

For Harry his realisation that his behaviour was out of control was enough for him to want to make a change:

*"My colleagues came to my house came up the to the stairs and said "What the fuck have you done?" and I said "You better arrest me". They didn't so I got away with it a bit, but it made me think... I was just being a loose cannon. So I thought I've got to sort this out"*.

These experiences are consistent with those who suggest that stopping sport is often linked with a sense of loss of self-control (Lavalley and Robinson 2007) and this can impact negatively on an athlete's adjustment to their life without sport (Kerr and Dacyshyn 2000; Miller and Kerr 2002).

Some participants described how the harshest reality of their professional sporting careers ending was the loss of money they experienced. Charlie detailed the difference in earnings that he had to cope with when he stopped playing professionally, and how this is still something he struggles with today: *"I went from earning £1200 a week to*

*selling double glazing windows in people's houses... At (club) I was earning £1200 a week... I think I got paid today and I got £200... and this is like twenty years on".*

For Billy, the loss of income from boxing meant he couldn't pay rent, and had to borrow money from friends:

*"Really low, really really low... I was homeless... at that time I had no job, I was literally on rock bottom... I was going out on the weekends, and borrowing money off my mates, just so I could get, get blinder and off my head, just to take away all the troubles".*

While Joshua spoke openly about his love for his sport, he was also very realistic when he described it as a means to earn money. He was left in a position where he could not see an alternative source of income, having always relied on his sport as a way to provide:

*"I get a plan in my head, I need to go away, I need to get fit... I head away to (location), find a club there, get fit, come back and do pre-season. The contract isn't what you would call a monthly contract, it's what you might call a zero hours contract, but essentially its pay as you go, but that's alright, I don't necessarily want to be paid something I'm not earning so I have no issues with that. The issues come when after one game I'm injured and its clear I'm not going to play again. It's a full stop but it's a different type of full stop. Why is it different? In the past I had (sport) to go and earn some money, now my body wasn't working, so the option of popping here and earning a bit of money, and popping there and earning a bit of money wasn't there. I just perceived in that moment a darker place. My natural 'out' was gone".*

Difficulty in coping with a loss of income is identified as a key challenge in retirement from sport (Wylleman et al. 2004). A rapid decrease in earnings can lead to financial problems (Taylor and Ogilvie 2001; Dimoula et al. 2013) which was evident in a number of the participants in the current study.

A loss of income and a need to replicate the money earned through his sport was the main motivator that Joshua identified for his criminal activity:

*"I sat and perhaps it was the wrong time, but I just imagined a dark world, how are you going to survive here if you literally, you've got zero money coming in. The (season) is actually over so your earning potential, well a lot of stuff is gone, and looking ahead you're not going to be able to play".*

Joshua's inability to find employment or money when he needed it resulted in him making a criminal decision. There are clear links between unemployment and crime (Brosnan 2020) and particularly relevant for Joshua is the suggestion that unemployment can lead to anger and strain (Agnew 1992) which in turn contributes to criminal activity.

Charlie in particular, spoke in depth about how hard it was to adjust to a new environment as he navigated a new career path away from football. He found the difference between what he was now doing and his life as an athlete difficult to process:

*"I ended taking a job, I had to take to a certain extent. I ended up selling double glazed windows in people's houses... so that was a culture shock... But I was literally trying to flog people windows and doors at eight o'clock at night in their own homes... so it was new, it was different".*

Charlie's lack of professional qualifications somewhat limited his career choices, as was often the case for athletes retiring from sport during this time period (Wylleman et al. 1993). In addition to finding himself in a new occupational environment, and there being new expectations of how he should behave, Charlie found the very nature of his new job and how inactive it was very difficult, he initially put on around two and half stone. Charlie's experiences are consistent with the research by Cecic Erpic (1998) who identifies that a lack of training following retirement can be linked with dietary problems in ex-elite athletes.

Charlie reflected upon this time in his life as a realisation that this was how people lived in the "real world". He found that people naturally expected him to be good at certain things because they had preconceptions about him as a professional footballer. His comments echo work by Curtis and Ennis (1988) who identify that retirement from sport requires the individual to depart from a much-treasured position that previously enveloped them in recognition and prestige. In a similar way, Isaac found the reality of life away from sport difficult to adjust to, so he returned to his sport full time:

*"It's odd cause about a year ago I really started to think about coming out the sport... I don't know whether it was cause of the things I was listening to and people that I was speaking to... I still felt at the top of my sport. And so I got a full time job... for eight months, and that kind of made it clear to me that I wasn't finished, I didn't want to be stuck behind a desk. I started getting itchy feet... so I handed in my resignation".*

Unlike Isaac, Charlie did not have the option of returning to his sport and continued to find it hard to adjust to a different way of living. Muscat (2010) observes that athletes may struggle to deal with non-sporting situations because of a lack of non-sporting life experiences during their careers, something that Charlie's experiences echo. Charlie also missed the comradery of his teammates, which is consistent with studies that highlight how athletes' social relationships tend to be primarily bound with other athletes (Verkooijen et al. 2012; Petitpas et al. 2013). Cecic Erpic et al. (2004) state that retiring athletes are likely to simply miss the athlete lifestyle, and Lally (2007) confirms that being cut off from their previous social circles can result in periods of loneliness, something Charlie clearly experienced.

Both Charlie and Joshua spoke about how ill prepared they were for a life outside their sport. Charlie attributes this largely to the fact that he had done very little for himself during his professional career: *“When that stops and you have to do something for yourself... you have to wake up and fill your own diary and find a job, write a CV and covering letters was... horrific to be honest (laughs)”*. Both Charlie and Finn touched upon their lack of education as professional footballers, although this has changed significantly since their time in the sport (with footballers now benefitting from education provision within the academy system): the impact on them was significant. Finn only began to consider education when in prison, previous to this he noted, *“I couldn’t write a sentence, I couldn’t write paragraphs”*. Charlie’s lack of education also limited his options when he retired from football: *“I had no education... I walked out of school with three CSEs back then... and, two of them were in English and I was from (city) so nobody could understand me down here (laughs)”*.

Joshua spoke about his realisation that he had not *“made a plan”* when it came to his sporting career ending, and why he now sees the importance of athletes planning for their future outside of sport:

*“Another issue was actually, realising that you haven’t made a plan... perhaps my plan wasn’t made soon enough, it was actually made at the eleventh hour when I realised that, the last contract that I signed at (club) would probably just have taken me that way... I didn’t really make a plan; the only plan was to leave”*.

The need for athletes to have a plan following retirement is emphasised by Warriner and Lavalley (2008) with emphasis on the need for financial planning, something Joshua felt he lacked (reinforced by Fortunato and Marchant 1999). While elite athletes are often reluctant to engage in pre-retirement planning (North and Lavalley 2004) in order to avoid any distraction from their sport performance (Park et al. 2013), it is clear that such schemes can have a positive effect in minimising the negative elements of career transitions (Lavalley 2019). In more recent years there has been a movement towards ensuring ‘dual careers’ for athletes within elite sport with a focus on better preparing them in areas of education, health and finance (Henry 2013). While a positive step, it is clear that such endeavours have come to fruition too late for a number of the participants in the current study.

Since leaving prison Finn has worked hard to provide guidance to young footballers and helps prepare them for alternative careers outside football. He believes that education is key to avoiding making bad decisions: *“I just needed an arm round me, but you’ve got to help yourself...get yourself educated and don’t think about the money”*. Finn’s desire to

provide education for players is consistent with the suggestions of Lantz (1996) who identifies that educational involvement is positively linked to post-sport life adjustment among athletes.

The reality of stopping sport hit a number of the participants hard, who described the emotional impact of their career ending. Charlie describes the feeling as “*blind panic*”. For Finn, the reality of his sporting career ending only really hit him when he went to prison for a long sentence. Prior to that he was too busy committing crime to digest the reality of never playing football again:

*“When certain situations were going on in life I didn’t have time to think about it... When I went to prison... it killed me when I was thinking about it. I used to, in my cell I was looking up and down the leagues, I was looking on the pyramids of football, how many people are involved in football, obviously cause I was involved in football I understood it... the mechanics of the game, where do people go... that killed me... And I was thinking, reflecting back, and I was thinking “What?!”... That hurt, that hurt”.*

Charlie spoke openly about his despair at his career ending, especially as he could feel that the end was coming due to his injury:

*“It was devastating really because I knew a year before... I had a two-year contract at (club) and in that first year at (club) I struggled with my knee, so I knew going into the second year that I was struggling. I knew I wouldn’t get another contract and I knew my career (voice breaks)...my career was over”.*

Similarly, to Dougie, Charlie turned to alcohol to cope with the imminent end to his career. His career as a footballer had been long, and successful, which meant that he experienced its ending even more intensely: “*I use the phrase I lived in a bubble for twenty years and then it popped and I didn’t have a clue what I was going to do, I didn’t have a clue what the world was like*”.

The response of both Charlie and Joshua can be described as maladaptive and is consistent with studies that suggest that athletic retirement can elicit psychological and emotional difficulties including substance abuse (Svoboda and Vanek 1982; Taylor and Ogilvie 2001; Douglas and Carless 2009). Sinclair and Orlick (1993) describe how transition can be a crisis or a relief. For Charlie, the end of his career was a crisis that he continues to deal with. He acknowledges that despite the successful and challenging career he had as a professional athlete, adjusting to his life after football was one of the biggest battles he has had to face:

*“I’ve done a few talks and I talk about my football career as that was something I wanted to do, and I knew I was going to do it. But my life, and the exciting bit, or the interesting bit I think came after the football finished... the struggles... getting through it’s probably as much, much more of an achievement than actually probably playing football to be honest”.*

The extreme reaction to retirement displayed by both Charlie and Joshua is consistent with studies that suggest one in five elite athletes experience distress during the transition process (Grove et al. 1997; Park et al. 2013). A sense of loss, or feeling a void, is common in transitioning athletes (Sparkes 1998; Kerr and Dacyshyn 2000; Miller and Kerr 2002; Stephan et al. 2003; Lavalley and Robinson 2007). The feelings of devastation and hopelessness expressed by Charlie were also evident in the participants in Blinde and Stratta's (1992) study with one individual expressing how he felt he had nothing to live for anymore without his sport.

When discussing the end of their careers, a number of the participants stated that without their sports they did not know what to do. For some, their strong identity as an athlete meant they did not know who they were without their sport. For Billy, boxing was the most important thing in his life: *"It was the only thing I knew what to do"*. Harry described how he identified first and foremost as a rugby player: *"If anyone knows me... they would say oh (name) the rugby player... cause I've always been involved in rugby, always played rugby, always been around rugby players. Most of my, if not all, of my friends are connected to rugby"*.

There is evidence to suggest that elite athletes may experience an identity crisis as they transition out of sport (Lally 2007). For many athletes, their athletic identity is the most significant element of their self-concept (Carless and Douglas 2009) and the stronger their athletic identity the more difficulties they are likely to face when their athletic career has ended (Hill et al. 2001; Cecic Erpic et al. 2004). High levels of athletic identity have been linked to adjustment difficulties in athletes (Grove et al. 1997; Martin et al. 2014), and numerous, severe psychological difficulties including denial that their careers have ended (Grove et al. 1997; Cecic Erpic et al. 2004). Athletes may question who they are without their sport (Stier 2007) or struggle to construct a new identity that does not centre around sport (Sparkes 1998; Kerr and Dacyshyn 2000; Lavalley and Robinson 2007). For the athletes in the current study, such as Billy and Harry, it was clear that their sports were central to their existence, and to reach the elite level they had to invest less in other areas of their lives which is consistent with delayed adjustment to life without sport (Alfermann et al. 2004; Lally 2007).

Although no other participant mentioned a lack of support, for Charlie, this was a key feature in his struggle post his professional career. He spoke openly about feeling *"let down by the system"*, and unable to gain help from his players association at a time he



really needed it: *"I remember ringing them up and saying that "I can't get a job, I've got no money, don't know what to do"... there was no, like, path out of it"*.

Interestingly part of Charlie's insight points back to preparing for leaving sport. He felt that perhaps his expectations were incorrect, and this would have been a simple area to manage if he had been able to be more realistic about life following sport:

*"I think a lot of people in football think you will get a phone call from somebody within football. I played for... fifteen managers, something like that, and you think at least one of them will pick up the phone and say "Look I know this has happened but do you fancy doing this, or..." And the realisation is that nobody actually rings you...The phone never rang... that was something that was... heart-breaking to a certain extent"*.

The impact of sporting transitions was varied for each athlete and that the ramifications of their transitions affected them for varying time periods afterwards; this is consistent with those who suggest that impacts may last for a finite period (Stier 2007), or a lifetime (Fortunato and Marchant 1999). What is also clear from the current study is that when the transition was welcomed it appeared to be less traumatic than for those who were not primed to move onto the next phase of their lives (Pearson and Petitpas 1990).

While none of the participants directly blamed their sport ending for their decision to commit crime (some attribute their crimes to elements associated with their careers ending such as money), a number did indulge in deviant behaviour or commit crime directly following their transition out of sport (Billy, Finn, George, Harry, Isaac, and Joshua). A theory that may be applicable to athletes and criminal activity is Social Control Theory (Hirschi 1969). Hirschi explains that an individual is more likely to commit a crime when the bond between them and society is weakened or broken. The four key bonds are essential aspects of social control and are believed to interact to protect an individual from criminal activity (Siegel and McCormick 2006). In terms of an athlete each bond can be applied, and each could potentially be fractured during a transition (be that within career or career ending) leaving them more likely to commit a crime. Individuals form *attachments* to people which can include team mates and coaches, which clearly are broken when an athlete is no longer involved in playing sport. While some athletes may still have involvement in sport when their careers end, and some degree of attachment, the participants in this study who committed crime following a transition appeared to have limited contact with people from their sports in the time period during their criminal activity. Kane (1991) notes that this loss of social networks can have a significant impact on an athlete. When an individual is bonded to society they are likely to show *commitment* to activities in which they have invested their time and effort, such as their professional sporting career. When this career ends, their commitment to their goal is

broken, for some these are replaced with new goals but for some this is not achievable quickly. When an individual experiences *involvement* in a sporting activity their time is taken up with this, this bond can be broken when it is not replaced with an effective alternative. Finally, a bonded individual will demonstrate *belief* in wider social values, when this belief is fractured, most evidently in the case of Joshua, or those athletes who feel a sense of injustice or rejection as a result of sport, then an individual is more likely to offend.

## **Conclusion**

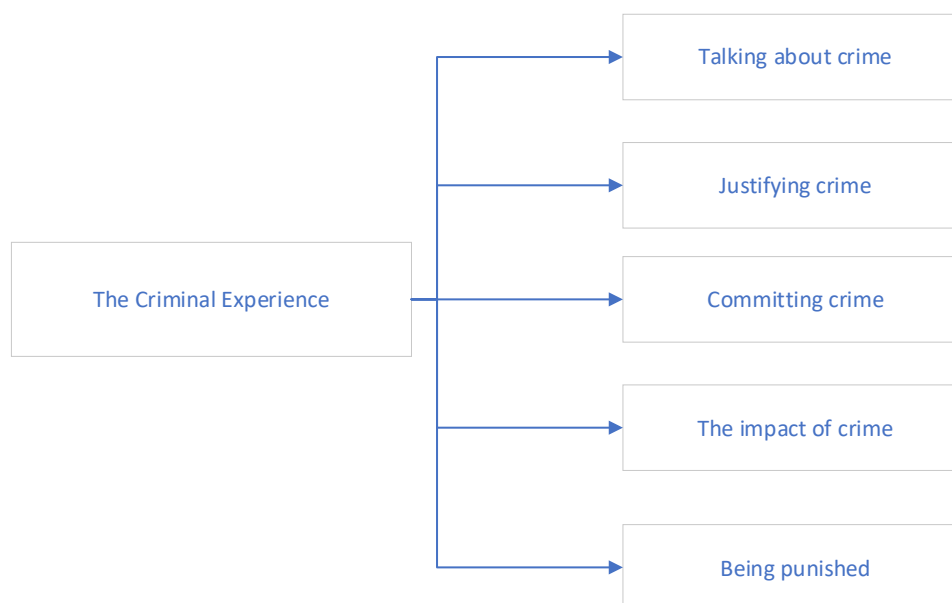
This chapter provides a clear overview of the many aspects of the sporting experience for the participants. Many spoke very positively about their sports and the successes they had experienced. Additionally, it was clear that sport meant a great deal to them and had provided numerous affirmative attributes that have, for many, guided their lives in largely positive ways. The participants spoke about their personalities and how they behaved as athletes, and what they felt was expected of them as elite performers such as taking risks and appearing tough. The role of aggression and violence in sport was discussed by a number of the participants. Participants also discussed at length the more negative sides of their sporting experiences and the impacts these had on them. It is clear that the participants were able to identify elements from the positive side of sport that they felt prevented them from committing crime at points in their lives, namely that it took up their time, and that it served as a distraction from any negative influences on them at the time. It is also clear however, that for some participants, there were direct links between their negative experiences and their decisions to commit crime – this is particularly evident for George, Joshua and Billy. In addition, both Harry and Ethan made links between their violent conduct in their sports, and their violent offences. It is also of note that a number of the participants expressed feelings of constraint and a loss of freedom through sport, which will be explored further in Chapter 10. Finally, a number of the participants discussed stopping sport, be that temporarily or permanently, and for some it was clear that the impact of this was fundamental in the deviant and criminal choices they subsequently made.

## Chapter 6: The Criminal Experience

*“And actually, that sounds ridiculously easy, and actually ridiculously quick. Really... as simple as that, and nobody needs to know...in and out, no problem, nobody will ever know” (Joshua).*

### Introduction

This chapter explores the criminal experiences of the participants. While the overarching purpose of the interviews was to explore the participants’ criminal experiences, this was consistently the area they found most difficult to speak about. There were five main sub-themes within the participants’ narratives: the way in which they talked about their crimes, attempts they made at justifying their criminal behaviours, details of committing crime which included how crime made them feel, how the crime impacted their lives, and finally their perceptions of the punishment, and treatment, they received.



### Talking about Crime

At the outset of the interviews I explained to all participants that we would work through three parts, before the incident, the incident itself and after the incident. I intentionally began the interviews asking the participants to talk about their sports, allowing them to talk about something that, for the most part, they were comfortable with. By far the hardest part of the majority of the interviews was to get the participants to talk about the crimes they committed. Some provided specific detail, but a number found it very difficult to talk in any depth about what they had been convicted of. In a number of the interviews the tone and atmosphere changed completely once we began to unpack their criminal activity, and a number were keen to move past that area very quickly. The best example of this is Archie, who claimed to not remember why he was on bail: *“when I was with (club) I was on bail for something, can’t remember what I was on bail for actually”*.

Archie only identified that he had been charged with assault when I asked him directly, and did not go into any details about the specifics of his offence, saying only: *"It was irrelevant"*. Archie's unwillingness may be due to his belief that this is a time he has moved beyond, but he was not alone in an alteration in the use of language when the interviews moved into this stage. The language some of the participants used when talking about their crimes was interesting; they often simplified what they had done. In many ways, the participants appeared to be playing down what they had done, and used descriptions that did not match the gravity of their offences, as Joshua illustrated:

*"You're stopped at the airport and your bags contain an illegal substance, it's going to be unusual that you're not going to do some time. Regardless of what you say and what you do... the experience of it even though that's very obvious... it's hard not to try to get yourself out of a pickle"*.

Joshua described the situation as a *"pickle"*, which given the fact the situation resulted in a significant prison sentence, was a significant understatement. Billy, Harry and Ethan also used simplistic terms when describing what happened to them, and used the phrase *"a bit of trouble"* to describe situations that, resulted in convictions for criminal damage, assault/drink-driving and GBH respectively.

Both Archie and Harry used humour when describing their actions, with Archie laughing as he talked about his first incident with the police. Harry's use of language reiterated this use of humour: *"I was a bit of a plonker so I'd get into quite a few scraps and scrapes, just because... I was just one of those ones that would never turn away... I'd always get into a few bumps and bruises"*.

A number of the participants were blasé when they described the period of their lives during which they committed crimes, as Finn illustrated: *"I was messing about doing the wrong things"*. Charlie described the moment he had to go and tell his managers about being arrested and detailed it like it was an everyday occurrence: *"So I just went to them and said... this has cropped up"*.

Some of the participants changed the way they were speaking when they described their crimes adjusting from long periods of talking naturally and descriptively, to talking in clipped sentences without detail. Charlie, who had previously been talking very emotively and openly, described his offence very quickly. He also used the adverb *'just'* to outline what happened: *"Monday Morning, there's a notorious place in (location) which was like a bottle neck and... obviously I've just ended up hitting a car which hit a car, I think there was seven cars involved in the end"*. When Billy spoke about his offence he spoke in

very simple terms: *“I woke her up and I talked about it and snapped the phone, I says “you’re not having the phone back, its mine, I bought it”, snapped the phone”*. Harry described his offence abruptly: *“drove a car, got stopped, convicted for drink-driving”*.

When Ethan spoke about his offence he described it in a very matter of fact way, and with no emotion:

*“I was stood in a club... somewhere from another group of people a glass was thrown across the club and it hit my friend in the face... he thought it was this particular girl who threw it, he’s gone over and he’s had words with her, and he’s pushed the girl away like... “What do you think you’re doing?” and this girl’s boyfriend had come out of nowhere and punched him in the eye, cut all his eye open so straight away... two of us who were with him started fighting with the guy, the bouncers all come running in... threw everyone out, so got out into the street and I saw the guy so I walked back up to him, I punched him in the face... he tried to run up the street so I chased after him, I was like holding onto him and still punching him, he fell onto the floor... and then I just walked off”*.

Getting the participants to be open and descriptive about their criminal experiences was a challenge; with the exception of Ethan to a certain extent, the majority of the participants tended to ‘gloss over’ the specifics of their offences. Theory suggests that had I been interviewing white collar criminals, the likelihood of them sharing details of their crime would have been far higher (Shover and Hunter 2010). While white collar crimes are not victimless, they occur at a distance from the victim and as a consequence, perpetrators often express limited guilt or remorse (Rub 2017). The participants in the current study all committed what would be considered ‘street offences’ where generally drug consumption and the presence of other men affects judgement and the ability to evaluate effectively before an illegal act is committed (Shover and Hochstetler 2006).

The participants were generally guarded about the details of their offences. Offenders are naturally viewed as dishonest and manipulative people by the public (Presser and Sandberg 2015), and it is important to acknowledge that everyone keeps secrets, particularly those who may be damaged by telling the whole truth. As Junninen (2008, p.67) explains, *“criminals must have secrets or they would not be ‘good’ criminals successful in their trade. Only ‘incompetent’ criminals reveal everything and potentially risk harming themselves in the process”*. It is clear that for an offender, the repercussions of telling the truth are greater than for many others (O’Connor 2015).

When interviewing criminals, Junninen (2008) states that it is important to consider the extent to which participants will tell stories they think someone would expect, or like to hear, to please them. Offenders may be more likely to try and separate themselves from their previous wrongdoing (Bruner 1990) and project themselves in a more positive light,

and this was apparent in the current study as the participants consistently attempted to put distance between themselves and their criminal offences.

Despite their criminal convictions, a number of the participants maintained their innocence. Billy was eager to stress to me that he did not do what he had been accused of however, has since been sent to prison for similar offences with a different partner:

*“She accused me of beating her up but I didn’t (voice breaks). She had a little scratch on her lip where she went to attack me cos I smashed her phone, and I just put my hand out in self-defence...I just... I put my hand out in self-defence and it cut her lip and she took me to court for it. I ended up sitting in a cell for twenty-four hours... at that time I was thinking to myself why me, why me, what have I done to deserve this?”.*

Ethan described how his friends caused the most significant injuries to the victim, not him, thus detaching himself: *“They gave him a bit of a pasting so, they tried to argue that I didn’t cause the injuries but then the judge argued that if I didn’t start it then the other guys wouldn’t have caused the injuries”.*

Isaac was also keen to distance himself from the actions of his friends, and maintained that he hadn’t initially done anything wrong:

*“To me I had... actually done nothing wrong, on this particular day I’d done nothing wrong. I was very drunk and I started saying, trying to make this apparent that I’d done nothing wrong, I hadn’t done what you’re accusing us for... everyone else around me probably had but just for me at this moment I hadn’t. I’d gone into the bush, gone to the toilet whilst we were walking home, everyone had pulled down a brick wall and a fence and stuff. I walked over it and laughed about it cause I saw it on the floor but I didn’t put two and two together that they did that... they were all known to the police, the police pull up and start throwing everyone in meat wagons”.*

Both Charlie and Dougie stated that they didn’t actually know if they had committed the acts they were accused of, as Dougie described:

*“So we are in the police cell and that and I’m like “I’ve done nothing wrong, have you got me on camera? I’ve done nothing wrong”. I’m pretty sure I never took anything, I’m pretty sure that was one of the incidents I never did”.*

Ethan described how he was a different person to the person that committed GBH, it wasn’t the real him: *“I knew I wasn’t that guy... I wasn’t the person that I was that night really”.* Both George and Joshua were very articulate in the way they described how they do not see themselves as the person who committed those crimes, as George stated: *“from the outside looking in, the things that I sort of was a part of, witnessed, experienced myself... its horrific, but I didn’t experience it like that at the time, which probably says a lot about me then”.* Joshua expanded on this viewpoint explaining that in some way the felt like he was not there:

*“I’m not even there...this thing, or this perceived me is driving the whole show, and has actually taken over. You’re not actually thinking, whatever need perception you have is running it and its coming from a desperate place where it needs to be executed now, here and now”.*

Isaac stated that at the time of his offence he was blind to the decisions he was making:

*“Any decisions I make for a positive I’m really aware of it, but any... negative...at that time I was blind to it. Every decision I was making was negative, the people I was hanging out with, the things I was doing, the path my life was taking. I was not aware of any of it, for me I was having fun, in a weird way”.*

It has been suggested that athletes often engage in active processes of image repair following transgressions, in an effort to reduce the damage caused to their careers and reputations (Allison et al. 2020); by repairing their image, athletes are often able to protect their livelihoods (Blaney 2013). While speaking with me clearly would have no impact on restoring their careers, image repair often hinges on the individual’s desire to maintain a favourable impression and they feel compelled to provide a justification or apology for their negative behaviour (Benoit 2014).

There were examples within the narratives of elements of Benoit’s (1995) Image Repair Theory, the most basic of which was ‘denial’, as was evident in some of the participant’s accounts of their criminal actions. Those participants who spoke about committing offences when they were younger tended to adopt an ‘evasion’ strategy where the focus was on lacking knowledge or control, thus distancing themselves from their actions. There was also evidence of ‘corrective action’ where the participants focused on behaving better in the future. Finally, the strategy of ‘mortification’ was clear for a number of participants where they admitted responsibility for their transgressions. The ‘mortification’ strategy has been described as ‘universally successful’ (Brown et al. 2018) in studies considering the image repair strategies used by athletes (Glantz 2013). It was used to good effect by Serena Williams following her indiscretion at the US Open in 2009 (Brazeal 2013). Both ‘corrective action’ and ‘mortification’ were also utilised as image repair strategies by individuals in a study by Fortunato (2008) who examined the behaviour of three Duke University lacrosse players accused of sexual assault. Benoit (1995, 2016) identifies that mortification is most effective when paired with corrective action, as was demonstrated by Archie who combined his apology for being caught taking drugs with an immediate request to attend rehab.

While some of the participants attempted to proclaim their innocence, a number stressed that they accepted responsibility for their actions and knew that what they were doing was wrong. Harry for example, began to try to justify why he was stopped driving under the influence of alcohol, but abruptly stopped himself:

*"I think, probably because I was suspended and probably in not in the best place then... it's probably why... no, that's an excuse... I even remember the night this all happened, I just remember being at an event where I wasn't supposed to be long, it's not excuse here, I keep saying that".*

Archie stated that although he could blame his addiction for a lot of his behaviour, ultimately, he did know what he was doing:

*"That's not to say I didn't know what I was doing, of course I knew what I was doing, unless I was completely blotto and then... there's probably one or 2 things that I didn't know about, but... of course I did".*

Although at points Ethan demonstrated a very blasé attitude towards his offence, he also consistently accepted that he had started the fight that resulted in the victim's injuries, and therefore he who began the chain of events that resulted in his custodial sentence: *"I took it on the chin though... like I said to my barrister at the time, it's not as if I didn't do it, so, just took it on the chin".*

Ethan highlighted that although he was aware of his decision to hit the victim, he didn't consider how his decision would spiral. He did acknowledge that he did not have to act in the way he did in the first place:

*"It was my decision to help this guy out and protect him... it's like you make a decision to protect him but then I wasn't aware of the decision I made to take it so far... I could have protected him and just stood in front of him".*

In addition to speaking very briefly about his offence, Harry was keen to make it clear that he was entirely to blame for making the decision to drive while drunk, and although he went through a very difficult time following his conviction, he does not accept sympathy as he believes himself to be responsible:

*"Awful, as you can imagine, not that I want any sympathy cause it was my fault... so I was at an event that I wasn't supposed to be at, and it progressed into a much bigger event, I hadn't planned ahead, and I just thought "fuck, I'm stranded" so drove home... Did I think of the consequences? Not for a moment, I just thought, I just got to get home, very much a home bug... so just wanted to get home and didn't think through the fact that I'd had too much to drink, and then the rest... the rest is history".*

Harry admitted that prior to being arrested for drink-driving, he had driven under the influence of alcohol before, which is consistent with the suggestion of the World Health Organisation (2007) that those at the highest risk of this offence are those who have displayed this behaviour previously. The majority of research surrounding the offence of drink-driving concerns men, as it is traditionally viewed as a male problem (Impinen et al. 2009; Kelly-Baker and Romano 2010). Harry was reluctant to discuss the specifics of his drink-driving offence, which is understandable given how negatively this type of offence is viewed. The reality that drink-driving endangers the lives of others leads to



many viewing this offence indisputably immoral (Watling and Armstrong 2015). El-Gabri et al. (2020) discovered high levels of disapproval towards those who drink drive, and judgements towards such offenders as being 'bad' or suffering from character flaws. Robertson et al. (2011) identified that those convicted of drink-driving often display strong feelings of shame around their conviction, and that there is a stigma associated with the offence, which was also evident from speaking with Harry. Harry stated that drink-driving was not something that people did in his sport, which may also explain his reluctance to discuss the specifics of his offence; people often judge the offence more harshly, and have less acceptance when it is uncommon (Macleod et al. 2015).

Finn spoke openly about making the wrong decisions, which he took responsibility for:

*"There's loads of incidents what could have been different, but... I chose, I had choices and I chose the wrong choices at that time... All the choices in crime, I chose them... I wasn't pushed, I wasn't targeted, it was nothing like that, I chose to do it... I just used to make choices on my own really, the wrong ones".*

Joshua highlighted that although he felt his decision making had been completely blurred, he did not take the time to try and consider alternatives to smuggling drugs. He acknowledged that external events contributed to his decision-making process (see next section on Justifying Crime, and Chapter 5) but that it was his responsibility to look at all the options available to him:

*"And from that thought, everything spurned, from that moment. I did not check to query that information, at the beginning, I just accepted it was so because that's all I could see around me, I didn't actually look at that information and go "well actually mate that might be so, but these are your options, here are your options". I just accepted what I presented to myself in that moment. That it was all doom and gloom, and from there, for me, desperate actions started".*

In addition to accepting responsibility, some of the participants identified how they feel now they consider their criminal activity in hindsight, and articulated disbelief and shame. George expressed incredulity when he reflected upon his actions:

*"I think about it now... and I just think I can't believe that I did some of the things that I did... I can't believe that I actually, I can't think of the right word to describe it, that I had the front to actually do that really. I don't know where I got the... maybe you can help me here because I don't want to use the word courage".*

Harry and George spoke about the disappointment and shame they feel about the acts they committed, as Harry described:

*"Just pure and utter disappointment in myself... everybody who's been convicted of drink-driving probably says this, it's not something that was in my make up, and probably through actual social etiquette of rugby, is yes you'll have a few beers but it's not even spoken about, you just have a few beers get a cab. It's not something that I've seen in rugby, that people will have a few beers then get in the car... just completely let myself down at that moment, so I was devastated that I'd been... such a knob. Devastated".*

George described how the shame he feels is exacerbated by how his life is now:

*“There’s some things that I did that I feel ashamed about, more shame now, because of the way I live my life now, now that I’ve got a house, I’ve got a son... some things I did that I feel more shame now, where I didn’t at the time”.*

Dougie stated that he now sees his previous actions as pointless and ultimately extremely sad:

*“We used to go there and we used to nick the right trainers... from (shop) and then go to another soccer shop where they used to have the left shoes, so they’d get nicked! ... When Adidas torsions were out and they were like £80 odd... we used to nick the right foot and someone would nick the left, I used to nick it as well...sad, sad. I remember that”.*

Joshua also used the word “sad” when he described himself at the point of being arrested:

*“Sad. And I don’t mean sad as in the sad with compassion, I just see a sad individual, standing there in customs. I’m standing behind him and I’m observing him, I can see how he’s standing... I can see him, and I can analyse him from here...There’s nothing to say, he’s already at customs... I needed to speak to him earlier”.*

Shame as an emotion is understood to emerge due to exposure to disapproving others, it is a ‘public’ emotion and results in people feeling exposed (Smith et al. 2002). Tangney et al. (2011) state that when an individual feels shame they are likely to feel worthless, small and powerless. Although not evident in the current participants, there is a tendency among those experiencing shame to react angrily and blame others for their actions (Bennett et al. 2005; Bear et al. 2009; Tangney et al. 2011). Shame tends to be associated with recidivism and a denial of responsibility (Tangney et al. 2011) which contradicts the behaviours of the current participants given that 9 out of 10 have not reoffended. Although the participants used the term ‘shame’ to describe how they felt, it is possible that they were using this term as way to describe both the public shame they experienced, and the more private emotion of guilt. Guilt tends to be directed towards a specific behaviour and results in people revisiting what they have done with a view towards doing things differently in the future, in that respect a proneness to guilt can be a protective factor when it comes to reoffending (Tangney et al. 2011).

A number of the participants reflected on themselves as criminals. Harry stated that although he was convicted of a crime, he does not view himself as a criminal: *“I am a criminal I guess, but I never see myself as a criminal”*. Finn highlighted that to him crime was a way of making money, simply a job:

*“The crime side... that was my way of life, that was my job, that was it... I'd think of stuff to make money out of, it was a business, I was just thinking of business ventures. I do it now today but I do it legally”.*

While the participants were generally open, there were clearly elements of their stories that they held back on. While this may be due to the sensitive nature of the subjects we were covering, it would be naive of me not to consider the influence that gender may have played during the interview process. The interview process is an unavoidably gendered phenomenon (Miller 2010), and it is suggested that particularly when it comes to interviewing offenders, male interviewees are likely to be unforthcoming or repressed when interviewed by a woman (Gatrell 2006). My experiences echo those of Huysamen (2015) who found that while her participants treated her with respect, there was a wall of silence around sensitive issues such as violence. She too found that her participants distanced themselves from negative events and presented themselves in ways that they felt she would find acceptable. Both Arendell (1997) and Presser (2005) found that their male participants displayed chivalry towards them, and there were points during the current study that I felt ‘taken care of’ (checking I arrived home safely, or that I knew exactly where I was going to meet them). As Huysamen (2015) concluded, it is essential as a female researcher to be aware of, and acknowledge, female presence in the research process, and the ways in which it can affect findings.

## **Justifying Crime**

When the participants described their criminal activities some tried to provide a justification for why these incidents occurred. Some claimed that they didn't know that what they were doing was wrong, and pled ignorance. Billy told me that he didn't realise what he had done would be classed as criminal damage:

*“I caught her having some messages on her phone, decided to snap her phone, which was classed as criminal damage, but at the time because I paid for the phone I didn't realise, so I pleaded not guilty... but because when you buy somebody something its classed as a gift, its somebody else's things, it's their property, so I smashed somebody else's property”.*

Charlie caused a multiple vehicle pileup while driving uninsured, and highlighted that he didn't realise he wasn't insured:

*“Her mum and dad went on holiday and said that... I could use the car while they were away, and that basically allowed me to take their daughter to work and then I could go to football with it... it was only for a week... I think her mum had said she'll sort out the insurance and things like that so I did it blindly”.*

Isaac stated that not only did he not understand the ramifications of his actions, he also didn't even realise that what he was doing was criminal:

*“The police go round and raid my house, luckily there was nothing there. I was never particularly involved heavily in drugs and stuff like that, it was just the people I hung around with, I’d do favours for them every so often, not knowing the severity of the things I was doing sometimes... It was really funny... well it’s not funny, cause I could have ruined myself completely and I could have never been skating ever again... I wasn’t even aware that what I was doing was wrong, which was funny”.*

When it comes to criminal offences, there may be some degree of truth to the phrase used by Shakespeare in the play Hamlet, *“the lady doth protest too much”*. Olson and Wells (2004) suggest that when an individual creates an alibi, or in the cases of Billy, Charlie and Isaac, pleads ignorance, it evokes a sense of disbelief in the listener. Although discussed in the context of anti-doping offences, Haigh (2009) explains that denials, or ignorance, are often seen as an attempt by a guilty party to avoid punishment, or reduce sanctions.

George utilised his own rules to justify his behaviour to himself and described himself as *“delusional”*. Rather than consider that he was stealing from a person he told himself it was ok because the property didn’t belong to a good person, or because the theft wouldn’t affect an individual:

*“If it was like a dwelling, occupation, I would... tell myself it was alright because I would tell myself it was somebody who I knew, who was like a wrong un, or sold drugs, or something like that. But mostly it was... commercial properties... cause then I’d say to myself well... they’ve got insurance or “fuck Tesco”... something to that effect”.*

Most burglars use their offence to gain money quickly, like George, and are largely driven by profit (Cromwell 1991). Burglars are believed to be rational offenders, who would much rather enter unoccupied properties and reduce the risk of being caught (Nee and Meenaghan 2006). Sykes and Matza (1957) describe the neutralisation techniques that offenders use in order to rationalise their criminal activities to themselves, and Taylor (2014) observed that both ‘denial of injury’ and ‘denial of victim’ were common to burglars. George demonstrated ‘denial of victim’ in his belief that those he burgled were not good people, and also ‘denial of injury’ through his attitude towards those with insurance, or who wouldn’t notice the monetary loss (Taylor 2014). George attempted to maintain a moral code in his offending, and distinguished between those who could be victimised and those who could not (Sykes and Matza 1957). Taylor (2014) explains that this moral code enables the offender to manage the battle between their belief that they are a moral person, and the immoral acts they conduct.

Finn justified some of his involvement in crime as something that ‘had to happen’ because of the choices he had made:

*"I felt that some of the things that obviously I can't go into, but I made choices... some of them had to be done... I had to do some of them... I had to be involved in some stuff and that's just the way it was, I chose it and I would have chose it again... I should have played football, I should have had a job like other people do and you know sacrifice things... but when you are earning X amount of money and when you are involved in other shit and... sometimes... it takes you beyond that "I'm not even getting involved no more" (laughs) you're involved and you've got to deal with it".*

A number of the participants discussed the role that a desire for money and gaining possessions played in their criminal activity. Money became a major focus for Finn and greed began to play a large part in his actions. He described how he wanted and needed money:

*"I chose to do it... because I needed money, and I wanted money, and then obviously with money becomes greed... and then that greed's not a good thing, I'll never let that come inside me ever again... I try and think... was I poor? No, I weren't poor, but I'm trying to think about how I thought then, and I wanted money, I just wanted money. But then once you get money you want more money, and now I'm not on anything what I earnt, or what I could earn, and... I'm happy".*

Finn told me that greed was a real driver, and that it affected the way he thought:

*"I was doing things because it gave me money, I wanted money, the greed, I think greed's got a lot to answer for... greed can make you not think straight... I've seen a couple of incidents with people and greed kicked in, the money side... they're not nice with each other".*

His drive for money became so strong that it contributed to stopping his sport – he knew he could earn more money as a criminal than a professional footballer at that time:

*"I stopped playing football properly when I was around twenty-six – that's a young age for a goalkeeper... but I was involved in different things in life... I was getting a lot of money from it, the money changed me... It was a time when... there wasn't a great amount of money in football as such as could be earned in an illegal way... that's what took my mind... The two highest profile footballers in the country weren't on more than me... I think they were getting £5000 a week... and that's not just myself, a lot of other people who were involved in crime, they weren't touching them".*

Dougie highlighted that part of his reason for committing crime was to gain the kind of possessions he had never been able to afford previously: *"I always wanted to have nice things in life... we never came from a rich background, but you have all your mates having the Nike trainers and I wanted that as well".*

In addition to believing he could earn more as a criminal; Finn also saw his desire to provide for his siblings as a driver in his desire to earn money through crime:

*"I was thinking about my little brother and sister, I want to buy them this, I want to buy them that, that's where it's come from... I just wanted to provide, that's what it was, but I could have done it on a much lower income... So obviously I wanted, I wanted to provide at first I think, I wanted to provide".*

Isaac stated that due to his sport he had more money than his friends so he used this money to take his friends out, and this led to the kind of anti-social behaviour that resulted in his eventual arrest. He felt that money clouded his judgement:

*"I was earning money at this point don't get me wrong so this was another thing that came into play, so I had money in the bank, and so my mates were like "let's do something at the weekend", everyone's like "I got no money", and I was like "I've got loads... (laughs) I'll buy all the alcohol, let's go and get drunk"... I think that was one of the issues. One of the things I've learnt in my life is without money you make the right decisions, with money well (laughs), you've got a lot more that you can make".*

Joshua credits his concerns with money with the desperation that led him to smuggle drugs into the UK:

*"Not because I wanted to become this thing, but... because I just wanted a little space to alleviate this... I'll come up with a plan, I'll make it work, but right at this moment, I need a bit of space. I just need a bit of space, just a bit of thinking space, and how do I get that?... I get that with big money, £40, £50 grand right now would be able to give me a bit of space to think and just sort something. And it's funny where that becomes reasonable, that becomes thinking... and it goes from there, where actually you're not thinking at all (laughs) you just think you are... I think the man is coming to get the furniture any day now, I think that might be him at the door so to speak... So the only thing I'm thinking about is to alleviate this perceived pain, everything else, it's important but I'll deal with that after I deal with this one. And this one, is the financial issue. Once I deal with this, my head is clear and I'll be able to sort everything else out which is even more important... So it becomes one track, everything else will wait until you've done this, until you've sorted the finance out, and then you can go back to being a human being again... A plan is hatched, I'm on a plane to (location), a week later I'm heading back. And as I get to customs I'm stopped".*

Money, or the desire for material goods, was a factor in the criminal activities of a number of the participants. Dougie used crime as a way to get things he could never have afforded, Isaac described how a desire for money clouded his judgement, George stole to get money for drugs, and both Finn and Joshua smuggled drugs for direct financial gain. While Joshua committed his criminal act out of a desperate need for money, Finn explained that even when he had plenty of money, he still wanted more. The actions of Finn are consistent with the suggestion that "*greed motivates crime after need is satisfied*" (Braithwaite 1992, p.81). Tunley (2011) emphasises that greed is a powerful motive, and identifies that for some offenders, even when their financial needs have been met there is a 'shift' from need to greed.

Archie and Dougie discussed alcohol and money as motivators for criminal activity respectively, but they also told me how committing crime alleviated boredom. Both participants highlighted that for the most part their sport satisfied their interest levels, but when they weren't playing or training they looked for something else to do. Dougie was

able to identify that if he wasn't boxing he needed to fill that time to mitigate for his boredom:

*"If I was to put my finger on it I would say, if I wasn't boxing I was bored, I was bored... boxing's in the evening, I've got the whole day, I wasn't doing anything so it was boredom... I was really bored and... I just wanted to do stuff, I was active all the time".*

Advocates of sport as a means to reduce crime note that sport acts as a diversion (Yar 2014) which was evident for both Archie and Dougie. However, clearly, they still had time available outside of their sporting lives, and they filled this time with deviant or criminal activity. Both Archie and Dougie stated that they became bored when not occupied by their sports. Barbalet (1999) explains that boredom arises from a lack of meaning or activity and results in individuals feeling restless and with a need to replace this sensation with something alternative. Boredom can be viewed as emptiness that individuals seek to fill (Steinmetz et al. 2017), with excitement as an antidote to boredom (Ferrell 2004). There is a link between the feeling of boredom and an increased risk of deviant behaviour (Brissett and Snow 1993) including substance misuse, low academic performance and criminal activity (Iso-Ahola and Crowley 1991; Amos et al. 2006; Pekrun et al. 2014). Some offenders have simply blamed their crimes, including murder, on the fact they were bored (Vaneigem 2001). Malizia (2018) concluded that a proneness to boredom, such as that demonstrated by Archie and Dougie, is a significant predictor of deviant behaviour, particularly in youths. It is suggested that close attention should be paid to those with a propensity for boredom with a view to assisting them to fill this void with non-deviant activities (Malizia 2018). Finally, the types of criminal activity that Dougie was involved in such as vandalism, could be viewed as those committed to gain the approval of his peers, to get back at a specific target (in his case the police) or that are simply done to relieve boredom (Hopkins Burke and Pollock 2004).

## **Committing Crime**

When we started to discuss the criminal acts themselves, some participants spoke about how they established criminal contacts, and how they began to access criminal opportunities. For George, his decision to begin committing crime was due to his heroin addiction however, these were people he had known since he was younger:

*"There were people who I was sort of around, mixing with... people I might have grown up with or known... for years, but they might have been older and they might have always been into criminality and stuff like that... I expressed an interest in learning some new... skills and then they were happy to oblige and show me".*

Although the participants were not asked directly about the areas in which they grew up, a number mentioned their backgrounds. Ethan for example highlighted that when he

went to prison he found that he was serving his sentence with people he already knew, and had gone to school with his cellmate. Both Finn and Isaac also spoke about how the areas they grew up in resulted in an increased awareness of both drugs and crime.

Joshua stated that crime was something that he had always been aware of but never paid any attention to, until his need for money altered his views:

*“As I’ve pointed out, I come from a part of (location) where going to school...you know people. And I don’t mean know them in the sense where you’re taking part in their stuff but you know what they do because you’ve grown up with people... You’re in places where its smoky in times and conversations are taking place, but I’ve never really listened to those conversations. But, do you know what, my ears are hearing them, I can hear them, especially the bit about the money”.*

It has been shown that there is a clear link between crime rates and areas of low income and unemployment (Baharom and Habibullah 2008; Han et al. 2013) so it is unsurprising that there was an undercurrent of criminal activity for many of the participants and their friends while they were growing up, or if they returned home during their athletic careers.

Although the participants were not asked directly how committing crime made them feel at the time, a number spoke about the sensation of committing crime. Gove (1994, p.388) described how many of the inmates he studied explained how committing crimes gave them feelings of elation, whereby they felt *“intensely alive and able to do anything”*. These feelings of enjoyment and elation were expressed by several participants with Harry stating, *“If something went on, I just seemed to be in the middle of it...I quite enjoyed it in a bizarre way”*. Dougie identified that even though he was not artistic he enjoyed the sensation of vandalising property: *“to be honest I am crap at throwing up graffiti stuff, but I used to love it”*. George went further and observed just how strong the sensation was when he committed criminal acts: *“there were times where we might do something... very audacious perhaps... and get a big result... where the feelings were the extreme feelings of elation”*.

George noted that the feelings he gained through crime rivalled those he experienced through his sport: *“Some of those feelings, like feelings of elation and at times camaraderie as well, that I experienced on a football pitch, in a changing room... I got that from crime as well”*. George’s comments echo one of the quotes utilised in the introduction to this thesis, to help underpin the original rationale for completing this research (Crabbe 2000).

Zuckerman (1979) suggested that individuals need to experience novel and varied sensations and that in seeking sensations, individuals are prepared to take social and



physical risks - which may inadvertently, or deliberately, result in criminal action. Katz (1988, p.52) refers to the seduction and “*sneaky thrill*” of crime that may enable a person to escape a mundane existence. This was reinforced by Miller (2005, p.155) who noted “*Crime is seen as a powerful, seductive, emotional experience that allows social actors to transcend their otherwise routine mundane lives*”. Katz (1988) discusses the emotional power and aesthetic attraction of crime, and how it offers distinctive rewards and feelings.

As highlighted in the cultural perspective of crime, one reason for committing crime is the search for excitement (Ferrell 1999). Ferrell’s work builds on earlier work by Elias and Dunning (1986) which considers the excitement of physical action, acknowledging that people can experience a ‘high’ when committing crime (Gove and Wilmoth 1990). Blackshaw and Crabbe (2004) argue that deviant behaviour in sport is evident because it makes the heart beat faster. This is supported by Hartmann and Massoglia (2007) who attribute the link between sport and the specific offence of drink-driving to the thrill seeking, hyper physical nature of sport. Finn highlighted that although money was his primary motive for smuggling drugs, there was also an element of excitement that he considered: “*There is a buzz of it... and then you go out and you’re having a good time and you can do whatever you want... Anyone who tells you anything else is lying, it’s a buzz*”.

Dougie also spoke about the excitement of committing crime:

*“It was... just a buzz, and we would meet up later on that night... “Where did you go? We did this, did you get caught? Yeah I got caught, I had to give them such and such’s name”. It was just the buzz of it”.*

The responses from participants suggest that there may be some truth in the notion that crimes are not committed solely for rational purposes as cognitive theories would suggest, and that reasons may be more emotional and fit cultural theories suggesting that crime can be thrilling and seductive (Katz 1988). The cultural perspective enables crime to be seen as a clear decision to pursue experiences that provide excitement and thrills (Silverwood 2015). Although elite athletes are often considered to be more conscientious and agreeable than athletes competing at lower levels (Allen et al. 2011), there is some consensus that elite athletes are highly driven (Mallet and Hanrahan 2004). Those studies suggest athletes can, and do, exhibit impulsivity (Lage et al. 2011; Maher et al. 2015), and sensation-seeking behaviours (Zuckerman 1983). **This tendency to sensation-see may have led the participants in this study to pursue edgework activities, and ultimately crime, as alternative avenues to fulfil their need for excitement and thrill. Edgework activities can be viewed as thrilling and intense experiences that place the individual on the edge of their physical and/or mental abilities (Anderson and Brown**

2010). Katz (1988) describes the extreme feelings that people encounter with edgework experiences, as they transcend in and out of rational control into places that are “unavailable to the rational consciousness in the mundane world” (O’Malley and Mugford 1994, p.191). Halsey (2008) identifies that for some the hyper-reality of the edgework experience may be beyond explanation. Lois (2003) argues that edgework is a very addictive and exhilarating experience for some. Bunn (2017) also describes the sense of urgency and necessity that a person will experience once they enter an edgework space, with Lyng (2004) stating that these authentically real situations can be self-actualising for the individual.

For some escaping law enforcement and the fear of being caught play a key role in the thrill of crime (Miller 2005); Dougie described how evading the police after committing a crime was something he derived satisfaction from stating “*I used to get a buzz getting away with it*”. Evading detection or escaping from the police can be addictive (Kellett and Gross 2006), and can evoke a combination of excitement and fear in offenders (Light et al. 1993). Katz (1988, p.9) described how “*getting away with it*” is a way of exhibiting personal competence, which is particularly relevant for the participants in this study as a number were committing crimes with friends.

While the participants discussed some of the more positive feelings they experienced when they committed crime, some also discussed how scared they felt at the time. Although Isaac’s fear was not enough to stop him continuing his activities, he described how afraid he was when he thought he was about to be caught by the police on more than one occasion:

*“We both had blue cars, and he’s had a report about a blue car getting up to all sorts... he’s searching my friend’s car rather than mine... I was so scared, if I’d of got caught then, it would have been the end of me for a little bit... That was interesting, but it wasn’t enough to stop me, I was still hanging around with the same sort of people”.*

Dougie highlighted that although he enjoyed committing crimes with his friends, he always knew he would stop because he was so scared:

*“This is what I was thinking of when I came down here today, “Why did I used to do that?” I was the biggest... shitbag (scared person) ever, I really was... People say “Some things you do were stupid but do you think they would have escalated and you’d have gone into prison, if it wasn’t cause of boxing?” and I will be honest with you and I will say no because I’m that much of a shitbag, I don’t like doing things like that... That sort of criminal activity I don’t think would of escalated because I think I was too scared”.*

Finn described how crime in itself can become very dangerous very quickly: “*Obviously once there’s drugs, crime, there’s that, that’s one thing, but then when you’re going into*

*like a side where... you're arguing and you're fighting with people, then it becomes a different... its wars... It's dangerous...that's just best left alone".*

Dougie's observation that fear stopped him from committing crime is consistent with those who consider fear as "*an inhibitory emotion*" (Topalli and Wright 2014, p.52) which produces feelings of anxiety or dread (Warr 2000; Farrall et al. 2009). Fear is considered to be central to criminal deterrence and it is understood that fear can lead to would-be offenders aborting their criminal plans (Cusson 1993). Deterrence theory (Cook 1980) rests on the assumption that people fear sanctions however, it has received some criticism. The evidence behind deterrence theory has been observed as weak and lacking (Paternoster 2010; Pratt and Turanovic 2016). Despite the reticence around the theory there is evidence to suggest that level of fear is the strongest predictor of an intention to offend, and is a stronger predictor than prior offending behaviour or levels of self-control (Pickett et al. 2018).

George spoke very openly about the way in which his criminal activities escalated over time:

*"I didn't start off like burgling hairdressers or anything like that... it started off with shoplifting and things like that, but... as it went by, if you steal a stereo or something from Halfords, you've then got to go and sell it to somebody, and if you do it at 3 o'clock in the morning... I would then have to wait until such and such a time, and then if I was like physically withdrawing, so that's why I started to do things where I thought I might be able to get money, rather than stuff to go and sell, which is where... burglary started coming into it".*

There is no shortage of evidence linking drug use with criminal activity (Huizinga et al. 2000; Mumola and Karberg 2006). In George's case his criminality began with low level theft to fund his addiction, like other addicts he started by shoplifting (Bennett et al. 2008) and then progressed to theft and burglary (Fridell et al. 2008).

Some of the participants discussed stopping crime. For George, being caught was something he actively pursued towards the end of his criminal career, as he wanted to be able to change his behaviours:

*"I got arrested for something and I asked them, "Can you remand me?", and they said "No we can't" and I said "But... I'd rather just go to jail". The custody sergeant was really upset by that, he gave me money for the bus home out of his own pocket. I think he could see that I'd had enough".*

Finn also expressed relief at finally being caught as it meant he was in a place of safety rather than out on the street committing more serious crimes:

*"I'm happy I got arrested that day, it made me not be involved in other scenarios what was happening, or what could have went on or what did go on. Obviously*

*at that moment in time I weren't happy, but then as you see things happening, and things what go on you think "Woah, I'm happy I'm here at this present moment in time". That might be crazy but... I was away from stuff, there was no way I could participate in events... when I think back now I'm happy".*

Isaac also described how he reached a point where he just wanted to stop committing crime: *"I did change myself around... that one was a point for me where it was "That's it"... But for me that was enough to... be like, enough enough... stop it".*

While some of the participants were pleased to have been caught, Joshua did not feel any sense of relief, and described the panic he felt when he realised that he had been stopped at customs: *"The thinking process doesn't start straight away, a different level of panic just kicks in (laughs)".*

Both Ethan and Finn discussed how they felt when they were convicted. For Ethan his conviction came as a surprise as his legal team had been confident he would not receive a custodial sentence:

*"My barrister was pretty confident that I wasn't going to go to jail, went to court in the morning... I thought I was going to get away with it and then the CPS got out a load of photos and started showing the judge the kids injuries. He had... a broken cheek bone, broken eye socket, big cut on his head... In order to fix his cheek bone and his face they'd... cut his head open and sort of removed some skin. So (laughs) when I went to court that day the kid was sat there with all his hair shaved off, there was all like staples in his head, it just looked horrific. So they started showing the judge all these photos, he's... looking at me... I couldn't even look at him, I just knew straight away then. He gave me the minimum term of what he could give me ... It was pretty surreal, just marched straight down the stairs, in a cell... and then just driven over to (location) prison and just sat there... I phoned my Mum from there, she was like "I can't believe you've gone to jail like", (laughs) cause none of us expected it".*

As a contrast Finn felt that he was fortunate to receive the sentence he did; he recognised that he could have been incarcerated for much longer:

*"I was lucky to get twelve years... I could have still been in prison today, I could have got longer... I was lucky... When I got the twelve years it was a downer, but twelve years is six years... six years is not the end of the world is it. Although it's a long time. I think in prison sentences I must have done around eight years".*

Nagin and Paternoster (1991) identified that it is rare and unusual for an offender to simply 'quit crime', as there are a number of reasons why a criminal will stop. Most of the participants stopped committing crime because they were caught, whereas George's criminal activity was linked to his drug-taking and once he joined an effective rehabilitation programme he no longer had the 'need' to commit crime.

For Finn in particular, being caught was a way to leave the world of organised crime he had become embroiled in. As Bovenkerk (2011) explains, criminal organisations do not let people leave easily, escape routes are difficult and for Finn, being arrested gave him a clear way out which he could not be held accountable for. Amir (1989) identifies that there is no retirement age from organised crime, so it is understandable that Finn expressed relief at being given an opportunity to leave that world behind, albeit via prison.

## **The Impact of Crime**

Participants spoke about the wider impact that committing crime had on them. Some participants discussed how committing crime directly affected their sport. A number were arrested during their competitive seasons, so their detention had an unequivocal effect on competing. The best example is Archie:

*“We was playing at Wembley, against (club) on the Sunday, and on the Wednesday night I went out... and then got arrested. Because I was on bail I was kept, I was sent straight to prison... Obviously I had one phone call to make, so I had to decide who I made the phone call to, so I decided to make it to my manager rather than any of my family. And I told him that I wasn’t going to be able to make Wembley. He just put the phone down on me and I was obviously just left to deal with what I had to deal with”.*

Isaac described how he was released from custody just in time to compete:

*“I got arrested, the next day I was doing a show at (event). They let me out luckily, but they could have not let me out and then I wouldn’t have made the money from my shows... that would have really put a spanner in the works”.*

When Ethan was released from prison he wore an electronic tag, and highlighted how this impacted his ability to play rugby. He described how at times he felt judged by teammates, and how difficult it was to explain to people why he was wearing a tag. On some occasions he was prevented from playing:

*“I used to tape it up, one game I played, the ref wouldn’t let me play because I had it on, that was a bit gutting... I suppose I don’t know whether it was a rule or not or if he was just making it up, or he was a police officer”.*

Being ‘on tag’ restricted Ethan’s reintegration to rugby following his incarceration. He was not allowed to play in away games due to his curfew, but on one occasion broke the conditions of his release just to enable the new coach to see him play:

*“So I went back up to training for a couple of weeks, they had new coaches up there, so I went training for a couple of weeks and... they had a night game and he really wanted to watch me play. So I broke my curfew, just to go and... that’s how much it meant to me really, just to play in this one game. I come home, they’ve got... a little phone on top of the box and it was ringing and ringing, I was like “I had a puncture”, and they believed me (laughs). But I got home like forty-*

*five minutes after I was supposed to be in... I pretty much finished the game, got in the car still stinking, just like ripped home to my house, run in the house”.*

Finn’s criminal activities had a significant impact on his football career. He stated that he would turn down full time professional contracts because playing semi-professionally enabled him to continue to commit crime alongside his sport: *“I remember playing the games for (club) and I remember getting offers and just turning them down and then going to play for other semi-professional teams... semi-pro you’d only train twice a week, and then play... madness”.*

Ultimately Finn’s criminal activity ended his sporting career. He became so embroiled in criminal activity that it was no longer safe for him to play football as to do so would mean his location would be known, and he would be a target for a rival criminal group:

*“It was why I stopped more or less going because obviously I was fighting, arguing with people... and the manager reminded me of it the other week... he went “remember that game you come, and you said you’re going to have to get off because you’d had a phone call that these two lads were coming down”... So I was turning up to footie games, this was semi-professional football, and I’m going “I’m gonna have to go”... a lot of other stuff was happening, and I couldn’t be found to be playing, I was an easy target if I was going to be playing a footie game... I couldn’t get caught out there”.*

For Ethan, his enforced break from rugby, and the resulting restrictions placed upon him on his release resulted in him losing interest in the game:

*“It was pretty gutting... where you’re doing pretty well, you’re sort of... forgotten for a bit and it wasn’t the same going training with the tag on, it was weird... I sort of started falling out of love with it then... I just couldn’t really be bothered... When you’re sat in your cell you think there’s more to life than a few things... cause I wasn’t going to go anywhere, it was still a good standard but you start... working more then and start doing other stuff rather than living and breathing rugby”.*

Archie and Billy discussed the negative reactions of their sports managers when made aware of their criminal activity. Both athletes received very little support; Billy was simply instructed he could not compete until his court case was resolved, whereas Archie’s management actively took steps to have him transferred from the club:

*“I knew how the club felt, cos the manager slammed the phone down and I’m supposed to be playing in the biggest game of my life... now I’m locked in... prison... I knew what they were thinking, and I knew I’d have to face them when the time was right... The writing was on the wall... I got moved to (club name) then. I got transferred, so that kind of explains how they felt about it... rightly so as well, rightly so”.*

While Archie and Billy’s experiences were poor in terms of support, both Ethan and Joshua accepted that they had been fortunate in terms of how their sports reacted, as Joshua highlighted: *“The players association through (name) has been amazingly*

*supportive, even before sentencing, once I was arrested they offered up help, and now it continues to support".* Ethan found that he was consistently supported throughout his experience, his club offered to write personality references and he was immediately accepted back once he left prison.

While several of the participants were able to garner some support from those involved within their sports following their criminal offences, this appeared to be situation specific. The majority of participants felt there were limited protocols in place to support them. Given the damage that the personal conduct of an athlete can cause to a sport's reputation, it is perhaps somewhat understandable that for the most part the participants experienced rejection or anger from within their sports. Athletes are often utilised as celebrity endorsers (Liu and Brock 2011) and therefore their transgressions can affect stakeholders (Sveinson and Hoerber 2020) their sponsorship opportunities, and those of their team (Allison et al. 2020) as well as the impact that their absence can have on overall performance.

Participants discussed how their crimes impacted on their own mental health. Being convicted of an offence had a marked effect on all the participants. For some this impact is more obvious, for example being sent to prison. For Harry, his conviction while not custodial, sparked a chain of events that left him in a very 'dark' place:

*"I actually resigned because I thought "I've fucked up here" so I won't fight this, so I threw the towel in and resigned... By this time I'm married with three young boys, so I was a bit of a mess, well that's an understatement, probably as low as I could go. Again no sympathy required cause it's my fault... worried about the family and everything else".*

Billy described how being accused of assaulting his partner, while maintaining his innocence, left him very depressed:

*"I thought I was going to get sectioned, I really did... my mum, my whole family wanted to... it's a horrible thing to be going through a depression... its hard. When you sit and tell somebody you're depressed and they think you're unhappy, and its more than that... because deep down... not even words can describe it, it's a very lonely place".*

Ethan expressed how committing crime ultimately resulted in considerable loss for him: *"Well... obviously I lost my job, and lost playing rugby which were two big things for me".* It is perhaps unsurprising that participants discussed how their mental health suffered as a consequence of their criminal offences, but it was also refreshing given the tendency for athletes to minimise mental health issues through fear of stigmatization (Pike 2019). Harris (2003) identifies that failing to live up to personal or social values can elicit a strong negative reaction in people, and they can become withdrawn and depressed. The

isolation, guilt and stigma that accompanies a criminal conviction can cause a deterioration in mental health (Sharma et al. 2015). Criminals have been found to be more likely to develop a psychiatric disorder than non-criminals, and are at an increased risk of suicide (Fazel et al. 2008; Baillargeon et al. 2009). A number of the participants experienced a delay in their legal proceedings and, like Billy, were unable to compete during this time. Delays are associated with feelings of hopelessness and helplessness and may contribute further to the development of depression and anxiety (Sharma et al. 2015).

The participants reflected on how their crimes not only affected them, but their families. Billy identified that as a result of his crime his sister witnessed his arrest: *"Got me arm bent up round the back of me, in front of my little sister, and it's not nice having your family see that"*. Isaac's family also witnessed his room being searched by police as a result of his offences: *"luckily for me I had nothing in my house... it was enough for my Mum to be like "What the fuck's going on... what are you doing?"*. Finn spoke about how his family suffered as a result of his punishment: *"I got a proceeds of crime hearing against me, I've had one previous, so I had to pay money. They're not nice things, I was close to having my family out on the street"*.

A number of the participants talked about how they had let people down, and hurt their families, as Isaac exemplifies: *"I felt ashamed... I felt like I'd let myself down, I felt like I'd let my mum down. I felt like I'd let my family down... I felt I let down everybody that had supported me over the years"*. George highlighted that he had caused hurt to his family as a result of his actions: *"A lot of people were very hurt by, what I'd done to myself"*.

Joshua described how he couldn't even begin to process the impact that his arrest would have on his family:

*"It's some weeks later until the panic subsides perhaps to a level where I can even start really even thinking about the collateral effect to everybody else... It's a bit like this, if I've just fallen off a bridge and I'm in the river and I'm going down the stream, my first thought at that moment isn't how I fell off the bridge, it's about getting out of the stream. I'm in a spot and all my brain is concerned about is how do I get myself out of this absolutely monumental hole I've just caused"*.

Several of the participants spoke specifically about the impact that their crimes had on their parents, with Joshua, Isaac and George all highlighting how their crimes affected their mothers. For Isaac, it was his Mum's reaction that began to have an effect on him acknowledging that he was behaving differently: *"It was just like little things like my Mum*



*going “Your attitude’s changed, where’s the (name) that I used to know”... It is horrible, and especially as the person... doing it and you know you’re doing it”.*

George told me that his parents used to visit him in prison, but he acknowledged the toll this had on his family, and he realised he didn’t want to keep upsetting them: *“My Mum isn’t jail people... I know lots of people who are jail people, who are very nice people, but that’s not my Mum”.*

Joshua stated that when he was able to begin to consider the wider impact of his actions, it was his Mum that he first thought of:

*“So there isn’t even really the capacity yet to think about other stuff and its literally panicking, but its later that the thinking process starts, and you sit. Whether you sit in your cell for a moment, and there’s enough space in your head where perhaps you’ve become a little bit more comfortable in your surroundings, so all those jail movies aren’t scaring you as much... and then you go...Mum... and her experience, and then you go...out of all this do you know what, the part where it actually effects the family negatively and it effects everybody else, simply wasn’t part of it. That simply wasn’t part of it, and there was no intention in that, and now that you’ve actually done that...well, what was the point, what was the point of it ultimately? The family is hurt and everybody’s in a worse place. There’s no point”.*

The negative impact of the participants’ offences on their family members was clear; as a consequence of a crime, the offender’s significant others will be affected by their actions and their punishment (Arditti 2005; Comfort 2008). It was evident however, that family support did not wane despite the participants’ convictions. While support from within their sports was at points lacking, a number of the participants described how their families visited them in prison, or remained supportive of them regardless of the offences that had committed. Studies suggest that strong levels of family support, and resilient family ties are linked with reduced rates of reoffending (Cobbina et al. 2012; Walker et al. 2020). Social bonds are believed to play a key role in the desistance process (Laub and Sampson 2003), and by maintaining supportive relationships with their family members, despite their own behaviour, participants were able to internalise prosocial norms (Hirschi 1969). Research also indicates that those who receive visits from family while incarcerated are less likely to reoffend than those with little or no family contact (Sampson and Laub 1993).

A number of the participants expressed how they became aware of the impact that their behaviours were having on members of the public who were either victims of their crimes, or who witnessed what they were doing. Isaac realised that others were directly affected by the way he was behaving:

*“A teacher stopped on the way home and saw it all happening and was just like “What’s going on, what are you doing?”, and I could see the look in her eyes and*

*I was just like "I've fucked up here"... cause I was all like my hands in the air and "I aint done nothing" (shouts) like drunk. A car pulled up with two old people whose house it was, they were screaming and shouting, I was screaming and shouting as well. I was leaning on their car, they were intimidated by me".*

Dougie stated that it was his realisation of the impact of his behaviour on another person that was the catalyst for him to change his behaviour:

*"Near my Mum's house there was... a shop... and we always used to go there... and used to rob this shop. We used to rob it, every single thing... alcohol... We would go in there and just rob, rob stuff we never even wanted... it got so bad... that the woman used to say to us "Can you only come here once a day?"... When I heard that, it took something like that for me to say "what are we doing?".*

For George, it is only now on reflection that he is able to consider the impact his offences had on people.

*"I'm aware more now of the impact that some of the crimes I committed would have had on people whereas at the time, I didn't care, I don't even know if I was able, if I was equipped to care. I was so delusional... maybe it's necessary to be able to do that stuff, to be able to delude oneself so completely".*

Crime can have a widespread emotional effect on victims (ten Boom and Kuijpers 2012) and while violent offences are more likely to incite severe psychological reactions, over 75% of theft victims of theft also report being emotionally affected. In addition to the psychological effects a victim might experience such as anger, fear and depression, victims may also experience shock and an enduring loss of trust in society, as well as a sense of guilt at becoming a victim (Shapland and Hall 2007). Both Dougie and Isaac were able to identify that seeing how their crimes affected their victims was a catalyst in them addressing their behaviours. Encouraging offenders to consider the impact of their actions is at the heart of restorative justice and is based on the premise that once an offender has understood the harm they have caused they will not wish to repeat that behaviour (Liebmann 2007). Although none of the participants were formally involved in a restorative justice programme, it is evident that some were aware of how they were impacting their victims and this was a facilitator in their process of desistance.

## **Being Punished**

In addition to some of the participants describing how being caught had made them feel, a number of the participants spoke about the nature and impact of their punishment. They commented directly on their interaction with the police. For Billy and Dougie, their experiences of the police were largely negative; Dougie in particular felt that he was often targeted by the police due to his race (see Chapter 7). Billy spoke openly about his disdain for the police: *"Horrible. Horrible... got quite a good hiding in the cells, but that's police for you".*

Dougie did accept however, that not all the police treatment he received was damaging, and one officer in fact helped him realise that he would not always be treated negatively:

*“I was lucky enough that there was one police man... that had pulled me up a few times and had noticed what I was doing and... this is what sort of turned me round. He said “(name) I don’t even want to see you no more”... but apart from that he was really down to earth with me and he made me realise that one bad apple doesn’t make the whole crate bad”.*

Harry was encouraged to join the police by his rugby coaches in a bid to turn his behaviour around. While he eventually had to leave the police due to his conviction, he acknowledged how positive the police was as a career to facilitate playing sport, and a way of ensuring he stayed within the law:

*“Sport was massive in the police, rugby was particularly... but (they) really took me on for the rugby, and saw something that I could do as a policeman as well, and I guess on reflection... probably thought they might keep me out of trouble”.*

Five of the participants received prison sentences for the crimes they committed, and each discussed their incarceration. They discussed the constructive impact prison had on them, but at points Ethan, George, Archie and Finn expressed a level of indifference about certain elements of their time inside prison. Ethan highlighted that his prison experience was bearable because he felt his time was easy, as he knew a lot of people in there at the same time:

*“First time I’d ever been in trouble and I didn’t really know what was going on... but the area where I come from a lot of the guys are... in trouble quite a lot so I knew... quite a lot of people in there which was quite a bonus really, if anything... I was like well looked after, I had a good time, well I didn’t have a good time but I didn’t have a bad time like... It’s not like people make out, it’s pretty easy, it’s a bit shit that it’s so easy really, just lay on your bed watching Jeremy Kyle all day”.*

While George told me that he did not enjoy being in prison, he felt that as long as he behaved well, and didn’t get on the wrong side of people, then being in prison was tolerable:

*“It wasn’t hell, it certainly wasn’t good though. I didn’t like it, having your freedom taken away from you. I met lots of people who said... “I don’t mind jail”... maybe they don’t mind it but there’s a difference between... suffering something because you have to make the best of what you’ve got and not minding it like. I didn’t like it. I didn’t feel any sort of connection with the people I was in there with... I didn’t really feel it was the sort of place where I wanted to be... Don’t get me wrong... I did laugh when I was in there... I didn’t get... brutalised (laughs) or anything like that... I don’t get a buzz out of violence or anything like that, but I think unless you’re a real twat... that’s the only time you ever have any problems in jail really”.*

Ultimately the purpose of incarceration is to teach an individual that crime does not pay however, the effectiveness of prison in general to reduced recidivism has been questioned (Cullen et al. 2011). Within the UK in 2018 59,000 people were sent to prison,

and nearly half of adults (48%) released were reconvicted of another offence within their first year of release (Prison Reform Trust 2019). While Finn and Joshua credit prison with changing their offending behaviour, neither Ethan or George identified that their lack of recidivism was directly due to their incarceration. The description that Ethan and George gave of their prison experiences perpetuates the image of prison as a 'holiday camp' (Coyle 2005) though it is clear that prison can be a frightening and intimidating place even for experienced recidivists (de Viggiani 2006).

Finn expressed a similar level of indifference about the deterrent effects of prison when he reflected on his shorter sentences. It wasn't until he received a twelve-year prison sentence, that prison had any effect on him:

*"Obviously I've been to jail. The little sentences... they must have just been warming me up for a big sentence... I think them little sentences, for me personally they didn't have an effect, I just thought "yeah sound"... They had no effect on me, but the twelve-year sentence did".*

Both Finn and George served multiple short sentences which appeared to do little to deter them from reoffending. Questions have been asked about the effectiveness of short prison sentences (Stewart 2008; Trebilcock 2011) with the suggestion that rather than changing an offender's behaviour they are more likely to provide a schooling in crime (Killias et al. 2010).

Archie declared that prison did not act as a deterrent for him; he felt that once he had completed his sentence he could go right back to behaving the way he was before he was caught:

*"Ridiculously because I had been in prison and thinking, now I'm alright to go back out doing what I was doing... it wasn't going to bother me, it wasn't going to stop me, it wasn't going to stop me for drinking that's for sure, or taking drugs".*

In fact, instead of deterring him, Archie's prison sentence made him feel a sense of accomplishment: *"But even then, and I remember... walking out of the prison with my bag over me shoulder, and I kind of felt six foot tall".*

Prison is a complex world to navigate and is full of traditions, values and rules; inmates are under pressure to conform in order to be accepted socially and survive their sentences (de Viggiani 2006). As homosocial settings, prisons perpetuate hegemonic masculinity (Sabo et al. 2001) and being considered 'tough', aggressive and violent aids prisoners within the prison hierarchy (Bandyopadhyay 2006). Those inmates considered violent and tough occupy the upper social levels (Marshall et al. 2000; Miller 2000), and acting tough can serve as a protective factor (McCorkle 1992). It is common for inmates

to suppress and deny fear in order to project a tough image and cope with the prison experience (Sabo et al. 2001) which may account for the fact that Archie appeared so unaffected by his prison stay and rather than deterring him, he saw it as something that buoyed him to continue his negative behaviours.

While there was a degree of apathy around the long-term rehabilitative effects of prison and, for some, attempts to play down the impact that prison had on them, a number of the participants spoke openly about their negative prison experiences. Although he expressed his disagreement about the ability of incarceration to curb his behaviours, Archie did state that he found the prison experience frightening: *“I was sent to prison as well which was absolutely traumatic, traumatic... Only a couple of weeks, but it did scare me”*.

Joshua spoke in depth about the fears he experienced in prison. He voiced that he was too afraid to even sleep, and that his fears did not just centre around being in prison. His incarceration meant that he had time to worry about many other things:

*“The impact is, for me, was more mental. The six months on remand, I can’t sleep. I’m spooked all day, when I do eventually go to sleep I have nightmares. After a while it becomes clear I’m just going to explode, I am just so tired, my brain is going at twenty-four miles an hour with all my possible fears, not just about being in jail, the fears about the family... It’s not just personal fear as in because of where I am, it’s the fear about how you’re going to be viewed... your brain is picking up every dribble it could possibly find about absolutely everything. What will your friends think? What will this person think? What will that person think? How will you do this, how will you do that? How will you go out there? People are disappointed in you... and I’m going to explode. And it’s at this point that it dawned on me that this is the point that people make choices about whether to go bonkers or not in jail, because going bonkers right now would actually be a release because I wouldn’t have to think about this stuff”*.

Ethan also touched upon having too much time to think in prison. He also felt very lonely: *“It’s a pretty lonely place really once the door closes”*. He felt that he was constantly missing out on what was going on outside:

*“So you get a lot of time to think about what else is going on... how the rugby’s going... I saw a newspaper every day but that’s doesn’t tell the news about my life does it, what’s going on around me... You get a couple of phone calls a day or whatever, get to know what’s going on but more than anything you really want to be back out there and you feel like you’re missing out on loads. I don’t know how people go back and forward all the time, it just baffles me, how people can live and want to spend like ten years of their life in prison, it’s unbelievable, they must be wired up wrong in the head like, I’d never go back”*.

Finn highlighted that although previously he had been able to cope with prison sentences, it was missing out on time with his family and especially not being able to be there for the death of his Nan that made his prison experience difficult:

*“Don’t get me wrong, I’ve been to jail four times, was the jail a killer...no, I could do it... People who you can’t have an effect on outside, it has an effect... I’m speaking about my personal views here, my nan dying, things happening to my brother, my sister what I couldn’t be a part of, and my brother and sister growing up. My brother was a young lad, my sister was a young girl, now they’re adults... I had to come back out of prison and make an adult connection with them. For me, that kills me. My Nan dying kills me... you can have all the money in the world, can you get that back? No. I used to think, and sit on that, on my own, I used to think “That’s me, I’m done”.*

Being separated from family, and society as a whole, can have a significant impact on the wellbeing of prisoners (Mackenzie and Mitchell 2005; Yang et al. 2009). The separation that Ethan and Finn described can result in stress and an increased likelihood of mental health problems (Rutherford and Duggan 2009; Lafortune 2010). Living in close proximity to others naturally puts individuals under pressure, and this is exacerbated by isolation from family and friends, and loss of freedom (de Viggiani 2007). Prisoners are described to be suffering from many forms of ‘mental agony’ (Sharma et al. 2015) as they adjust to life behind bars.

Both Ethan and Finn described how prison had a positive influence on them. For Ethan, his incarceration forced him to change the way he thought about life, and made him want to value the opportunities that he had open to him upon release:

*“It’s more like time is really precious... just make the most of things really...It’s quite a lonely place really in jail, so just embrace your friends and if something makes you happy then just carry on doing it ... I knew I wouldn’t do it again”.*

It took the death of Finn’s Nan to change his outlook on his time in prison. After she died, he began to focus on how he could use his time in prison to his advantage and make positive changes in his life:

*“I was doing two or three courses at one stage, blew my head off like... obviously my English and maths... I couldn’t write a sentence; I couldn’t write paragraphs. Prison gave me that, I wouldn’t have ever done it outside. Prison gave me that, gave me the chance to educate myself... I was messing about for a bit... obviously after my Nan passed away... and I thought fuck this... I’ve got to change my life now... that’s when I got on with my English and Maths to start with, entry level three. I was trying”.*

Studies suggest that becoming immersed in educational programmes can have positive effects on prisoners. Although the literature concerning outcomes of educational programmes is not vast (Pelletier and Evans 2019) there is evidence to suggest that the recidivism rate for those who participate is reduced (Davis et al. 2013; Pompoco et al. 2017; Fogarty and Giles 2018). There are also links between educational programme participation and an improvement in employment prospects and wages on release (Fabelo 2002; Duwe and Clark 2014) as demonstrated by Ethan. In addition to formal qualifications, becoming involved in other educational activities such as reading and art

have been shown to aid prisoners, encouraging self-reflection, improving social and communication skills, increasing motivation, and supporting a sense of connection with the outside world (Sweeney 2012; Cheliotis and Jordanoska 2016; Barak and Stebbins 2017; Baranger et al. 2018). Enabling education in prisoners is believed to increase their self-efficacy (Allred et al. 2013) and promotes a self-perception of mastery which aids them in developing prosocial connections when they do re-enter society (Pelletier and Evans 2019).

In a similar way to Finn, Joshua spent his time in prison keeping busy and enrolling on courses. Rather than viewing this as a means to turn his life around, Joshua used the courses as a way of coping in prison:

*“You’re constantly trying to structure it and then, you find a period of time has gone. So, there would be a course, cookery, that’s three months... I can focus on that, not think about time, happily knowing that once I finish cookery that will be three months done. So rather than thinking about things on a day to day level which makes a day seem like a year, it would be an absolute nightmare and the worse part of the nightmare is focusing day to day, moment to moment. So I tended to focus on more projects”.*

In addition to keeping busy, Joshua realised that he needed to control his thoughts in order to cope with the reality of his situation:

*“So it became clear after a period of time, that what my mind was doing was going to be the key... So I try to only indulge thoughts that are a little bit more positive. And let the other ones go, and I find that my space is a little bit easier because I’m not terrorising myself and ultimately that becomes the plan to get through. The pain that you are feeling and the things that you are generating in your head with your thought process, how you are processing – yes this has happened, but how you are processing it is actually what’s causing you the pain”.*

Archie found it easier to cope by not thinking about others, and by acting selfishly: *“I never thought about my family... you don’t think about anyone else other than yourself because that’s what you are, you’re selfish”.*

Although some of the participants described how they found prison tolerable, it was clear that all struggled to cope at points during their sentences. Fundamentally, prisons are considered to be unhealthy locations (de Viggiani 2007) and time spent incarcerated is undoubtedly a ‘health depleting experience’ (Burgess-Allen et al. 2006). Individuals who go to prison are more likely to experience PTSD (Goff 2007), and the negative impacts to their mental health are likely to be enduring beyond their release (Jewkes 2018). Studies suggest that individuals respond differently to the experience of being incarcerated, and their resilience depends on their mental health history and coping styles (Liebling et al. 2005; Slotboom et al. 2011). While academic courses, vocational qualifications and other interventions such as music (Davey et al. 2015) and yoga

(Kerekes et al. 2017) can help reduce stress, ultimately an individual's mental health is reliant on their ability to adapt and adjust to the prison context (Crewe 2009; Harvey 2012; Van Ginneken 2015). For both Finn and Joshua, who served long sentences, their ability to cope was dependent on their ability to find meaning in their prison experience, and on how they used the resources available to them to pursue a better future upon release (Crewe 2009; Van Ginneken 2015).

Both Joshua and Finn served six-year sentences, so understandably were concerned about leaving prison and how they would adjust to life outside. Joshua described how excited he was when he realised that his sentence was nearly over, and how his relief began to affect him physically:

*“So there’s one point I think it’s a month to go, I come home for my last home visit and I go back and ... I don’t have to do anything, I can make it to the end. So I practically stop eating because obviously I’ve never enjoyed the food and I just look at it and go “I can jump to the end now”... and my body went (motions deflating), and bizarrely enough that’s when I stopped being able to walk, I stopped being able to run and all this started to happen. About a month before hand, and I remember mentally in my head just going “I’m done in”, it doesn’t matter, I know I can do this so that’s by the by, however long it takes it’s only a month. It’s just that moment and I didn’t realise that I was actually storing that much tension within my body until that moment where I went, I’ve done it and I could actually feel my body (deflating)”.*

Both Finn and Joshua used the term ‘strange’ to describe how they felt upon release. Both participants identified that they were unsure of the ‘new’ environment they found themselves in, and how it took them time to adjust, as Finn described: *“it was like everywhere was small which is strange... I was like whoah, everything’s caving in... To be honest it took me about a year to get my head together”.* Joshua described how his confidence was affected upon release: *“The actual day, walking out, I’d already decided beforehand that it was already done. It was just strange, it was different, in the sense that, I was a little unsteady, a little not sure of myself”.*

The experience of adjusting to life upon release, a process termed prison re-entry, can be very difficult, released inmates may suffer from numerous personal and social struggles (Hlavka et al. 2015). Long sentences in particular can impede social reintegration as family ties can be strained, and inmates become accustomed to prison routine, often struggling with freedom after being so tightly controlled (Maeve 2001). The immediate hours and weeks following release are critical as individuals attempt to reconnect with their communities (Travis et al. 2001). For the majority of released inmates employment opportunities are the ‘cornerstone to re-entry’ with many struggling to find legal opportunities (Solomon et al. 2001; Uggen and Thompson 2003) however, both Finn and Joshua planned for beyond their release, and have used their experiences



to facilitate their employment. For many released inmates, their transformation to being a law-abiding member of society begins in prison (Hlavka et al. 2015) and it was evident that both Finn and Joshua began this process in advance of their release. Personal motivation, social support and lifestyle changes (Bushway et al. 2001; Laub and Sampson 2001; Travis and Petersilia 2001) all significantly affect prison re-entry. Familial support is considered vital for reintegration (Laub and Sampson 2003; Visher 2007; Herrschaft et al. 2009; Wakefield and Wildeman 2014). Families can serve as agents of 're-socialisation' (La Vigne et al. 2004; Visher et al. 2004), and this level of support was highly valued by both Finn and Joshua.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter provides a unique insight into the criminal experiences of the participants. For many this was the first time they had discussed their offending behaviour in relation to their sporting experiences, which may go some way to explaining why some found it so hard to open up about the intricacies of their criminal activities. Those who did share more openly gave an inimitable opportunity to understand how they felt about their criminal actions, and how committing crime made them feel. The interviews also gave the participants an opportunity to consider the impact that their criminal behaviours had, not only on their own sporting careers, but on those around them. Finally, the participants offered reflection on the way they were punished and provided an insight into their prison experiences and the impact that being incarcerated had on them.

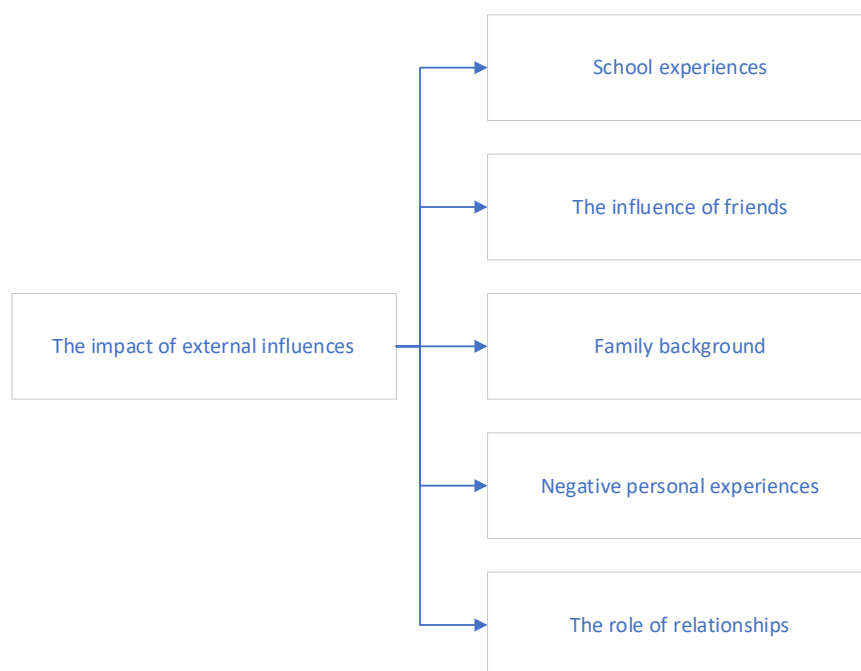
## Chapter 7: The Impact of External Influences

*“So I think there’s just things in life you are never prepared for, or educated for” (Charlie).*

*“You can be this nice person, but because you’ve got all this stress in your head and to try and be that nice person you’ve got to battle all these demons first... you can’t be arsed to do it” (Isaac).*

### Introduction

This chapter explores the ways in which the participants were affected by influences outside their sporting careers, and how these influences impacted their experiences and behaviours. Participants discussed how external influences shaped different areas of their lives including their sports, their criminality and their general behaviour. There were five main sub-themes within the participants’ narratives: their school experiences, the influence of their friends, the impact of their family lives, the role of negative personal experiences, and finally the role that relationships played.



### School Experiences

Many of the participants mentioned school as the time when their sports began to dominate their lives. For a small number of the participants it was clear that they reflected negatively on their school experiences. Isaac felt that his teachers did not understand him, and were too keen to attach a label to him rather than take the time to find ways in which he could learn:

*“I’m dyslexic, I find it hard to read and write... apparently I have learning difficulties. I don’t believe that anymore, I used to at school and now I’ve left school I’ve just realised they are all negative labels, connotations that they give to people and actually make a situation worse. I call them surrender labels”.*

Instead of preparing him for a future career beyond education, Isaac felt that school simply got in the way of the things he really wanted to do, particularly with regards to his sport: *“For me school hindered my (sporting) career... I couldn’t go and do what I needed to do at the time cause I was still at school and it was a legal requirement... I wasn’t very good at school at all”*.

Finn stated that he behaved badly when he was at school however, while he did not engage at that time, he has since come to realise the value of an education, something he believes surprises those who used to know him:

*“I left school with nothing, I didn’t take school seriously at all. I think education for me... it’s a big input if you’re going to change your life. I’m not saying you can’t be a decent person but an education’s... valuable for someone who wants to do well out of life ... I believe in education and for me to say that it freaks people out who know me, they just go “what are you talking about?”*

Despite not enjoying school, Isaac also acknowledged that school could have been a different experience if both he and his teachers had approached his education differently: *“(if they had) made it a bit more relatable to me, tried to understand my way of learning, then it probably would have been a bit different at school”*.

Evidence suggests that leaving education early, or not completing secondary school education, can be linked to future criminal activity. Harlow (2003) identifies that the level of individuals who have failed to complete their education within the prison community are considerably higher than the general population. While participants completed their education, many openly admitted that they did not engage or perform well. Poor school performance is recognised as a substantial risk factor for, or indicator of, future criminal activity (Tanner-Smith et al. 2013). If individuals do not fully engage in their education it is likely that they will miss key social skills which ultimately act as a deterrent from crime; education encourages children to treat others with respect and to be future driven, considering the consequences of their future actions (Lochner 2008). Finn stated that he left with nothing and couldn’t even write a sentence. Illiteracy is also considered a potential risk factor for crime with up to 60% of prison populations classed as functionally illiterate (Karpowitz and Kenner 2003).

Many of the participants talked about how occupied they were with their sports when they were younger. Finn was the only participant to acknowledge that perhaps his sport served as a distraction from his education: *“Maybe if I didn’t play football I would have got stuck into my education”*.

While the benefits of playing sport at a young age have been evidenced, and sport is applauded for its high social utility (Weatherill 2017), it is clear that for some, sport can become all-consuming at a stage of life when an individual still has educational demands. Ryba et al. (2015) found that young athletes can often struggle to balance the demands of their sports and their academics; with some athletes dismissing their studies as something they could just 'do later' when their sporting careers were over. Werthner and Orlick (1986) describe the power that elite sport has to consume a young athlete's attention, often to the point where it is almost impossible for them to be much other than an athlete.

Joshua discussed his time at school in more positive terms; his teachers were role models who did a great deal to support him and his friends pursue their sporting careers. Without his teachers, his sporting career may not have been possible:

*"Mr (name) would give up his Saturdays, his free day, to organise a match for us so that we could actually play (sport). Do I become a professional athlete if I play no (sport) in school? These guys made a massive difference and potentially simply it wouldn't have happened".*

The role of school in the development of young athletes cannot be understated. Joshua's early experiences support those who suggest that positive relationships with school staff are linked with positive mental health and subjective wellbeing (Moore et al. 2018). For a number of the participants however it was clear that their school experiences were less positive, and the impact of this was even more significant for participants such as Archie who had minimal support at home. It is suggested that school connectedness can act as a protective influence from substance misuse or poor mental health (Markham and Aveyard 2003; Bonell et al. 2016) or becoming involved in deviant behaviours (Fletcher and Bonell 2013). The importance of connectedness is even more heightened for those with low levels of family support (Moore et al. 2018).

## **The Influence of Friends**

The importance of friends has been touched upon a number of times during this analysis, but within this chapter, the role of friends in the participants' lives will be explored. When exploring their reasons for committing crimes, a number of participants discussed the role of friendships. Friendships are recognised as being essential for health and wellbeing (Way 2013), and those found to have close friendships and strong social support networks tend to have positive psychological health (Parker-Pope 2009).

While some participants discussed the friends they gained through their sports, a number described the importance of their old friends, those who had been significant in their lives

prior to sporting success. These were friends not associated with the participants' sports but friends they had grown up with locally or gone to school with. A number of the participants grew up in areas where crime rates were high. Many of Ethan's friends became involved in drugs whereas Dougie observed that a lot of the people he had grown up with had gone on to commit crime or spend time in prison:

*"All my friends in (location) are either locked up in prison, have got a million different kids to different baby mothers, or in a mental home... There's very few of them who I call friends who settled down, have got a decent job... living life, maybe not living life but they're surviving, they're getting on".*

The participants described the role that their old friends played in their lives and a number expressed a reluctance to disassociate with these friends despite their negative effect on the future of their athletic careers. Isaac stressed how important his old friends were to him and why they spent time together. Regardless of their criminal activities, he still saw them as his friends:

*"It isn't because you do the same thing, it's because you have the same life... I didn't necessarily hang around with these people because they were bad boys or drug dealers. I actually liked them, they were cool, they were my friends".*

Both Billy and Dougie highlighted that despite spending their time training and competing they would still seek out and spend free time with old friends, and at weekends would be fully immersed in their activities, good or bad. For Billy, his friends provided an escape from boxing when things were going badly, and gave him a chance to be 'normal' again. Joshua acknowledged that the time he was spending socialising with his friends was having a detrimental effect on his sport performance, but he did not want to stop:

*"I wasn't a drinker, I enjoyed dancing, so my friends and I would go out dancing a lot. The unfortunate thing about that is that the dancing took place late at night, so there was occasionally tiredness on the field but I'm young enough, I shake it off and I still perform".*

Isaac described how he liked his friends for different reasons, and wouldn't be dissuaded from spending time with them. Despite their negative influence, Isaac's friends offered him something that authority figures couldn't appreciate. When told they were bad for him by coaches or teachers, he stated:

*"No, they're not... for me they were ambitious. They weren't just happy to sit at school, get a good education so they could get a job that pays them £20-30k a year. They wanted it all... even though they were doing it in the wrong way, in a negative way. I understand that now, at that time I was attracted to people and wanted to be around people that wanted to push themselves".*

This aligns with the concept of 'ghetto loyalty' (Dohrmann and Evans 2007) which highlights the desire of athletes not to be separated from old friends. It suggests that athletes, usually from impoverished backgrounds, feel obligated to remain committed to

old friends. Carter and Carter (2007) discovered a degree of understanding from athletes that when players came from backgrounds where they spent time with people they 'shouldn't', they were less likely to make 'good choices' in terms of offending behaviour.

While a number of the athletes still see their friends, despite their lives now being vastly different, over time the intensity of friendships with those outside of sport reduced. When Isaac began to be successful in his sport, he acknowledged that this was not always received positively by his old friends: *"When I first started getting money, like decent money, like what they make selling drugs, I'd turn up in a nice car and they were like "That's a shit car, why do you buy that one?!"*

Isaac's eventual movement away from his friends was largely due to the time available since fully committing to his sport, resulting in less time to invest in these social relationships (Patrick et al. 1999). In their study of adolescent academy level footballers, Adams and Carr (2019) found that athletes often expressed feelings of disconnection from outside friends as they make the choice between two identities – their old friends or their potential new career. Isaac acknowledged that he and his friends needed to adjust their expectations of each other to remain friends, and described how he had to change the way he behaved with his friends to enable their friendships to continue:

*"I still see all my friends... I just live a different life nowadays. I don't involve myself in what they do, and it made me realise you don't have to do everything your friends do... They're still my mates... and I think that was the biggest testament growing up that I could still be friends with them".*

Participants discussed committing crime with friends, and how for some crime was simply part of the time they spent with their friends. It was apparent that the criminal behaviour of the participants was often supported, and at times encouraged, by close friends. Dougie stated that if it hadn't been for his friends, he felt it unlikely that he would have committed crime independently:

*"I put a lot on peer pressure as well, cause I would never have nicked or taken something on my own, I would always have to have my mates there... that's a bit of a coward mentality as well... I know I have been following people and I have been doing what the crowd have done".*

Harry described how he was part of a close group of friends, and this closeness often resulted in them all getting into trouble together: *"It was a few of us mostly together that would always end up in a bit of trouble, cause we were quite a tight knit group".*

While primarily used to consider delinquency, there is a large body of literature that considers the role of peers on offending behaviour, and how significant the influence of peers can be on nefarious forms of behaviour (Brechwald and Prinstein 2011; Weerman

and Hoeve 2012). One of the most stable predictors of delinquent behaviour is having delinquent friends (Haynie et al. 2014), and this was clearly the case for several of the participants in this study. Additionally, often a deviant social group identity becomes important to people as a source of social acceptance and support (Canter 2008).

In addition to committing crime with their friends, the participants also took part in high-risk activities (such as drug-taking) which for many did ultimately result in criminality. One of the most attractive features of edgework is the 'inaccessibility' (Bunn 2017) of edgework spaces, and through entering these areas an individual elevates themselves above others and enters an 'elite' group (Lyng and Matthews 2007). For a number of the participants, such as Dougie and Isaac, the collective enjoyment of risky edgework activities with friends further bonded them to the group.

Dougie, Isaac and George discussed their friendships around the time they initially committed crimes, aged eighteen-nineteen. Arguably they may have been particularly drawn to their friends because of their life stage. Adolescence has been described as a period of storm and stress where the social focus shifts from family and friends to peers (Pummell et al. 2008). Research consistently shows that during adolescence the influence of an individual's friends takes primacy (Giordano et al. 2003), and the association between delinquent behaviour and the behaviour of friends is stronger than other risk factors (Warr 2002; Haynie et al. 2014). Isaac's behaviours were consistent with the findings of Bond et al. (2007) who identified that substance use was at its highest amongst those who, like Isaac, demonstrated low levels of school connectedness but high connectedness to peers.

A number of the participants discussed how they had friends with criminal connections. George stated that when he needed money for heroin he knew exactly which friends to turn to. Similarly, Isaac had many friends connected to criminal networks, primarily focused on drug dealing; when I asked him where he thought he would be without his sport he told me that he would have inevitably become more embroiled in crime:

*"I think I'd definitely be in prison, definitely. I'd like to think I wouldn't be but from the people I grew up with and hung around with... I don't come from a violent place or anything like that, but it just so happens that the people I knew... shouldn't have been living in the area we lived in. They were from certain parts, they had certain connections and stuff like that, it was just one of them things. It was so hard to get away from and obviously where I lived in such a small place it was quite cool knowing people like that, I got a reputation and stuff, it was nice, but yeah I can't see many positive things coming from it".*

For elite athletes, there is a danger that not only could their associations with deviant or criminal friends result in them committing crimes, but that these relationships could

adversely affect the development of their talents (Patrick et al. 1999). Joshua highlighted that in the end he turned to the friends who he had always known were criminally connected and essentially became embroiled in crime overnight.

Some of the participants relied on their friends for support and guidance, and this was (and continues to be) an extremely important aspect of their lives. Both Billy and Isaac developed mentor/mentee relationships with ex-athletes whose abilities to share experiences helped them navigate their own issues. Billy credits his mentor with helping him turn his life around, and ultimately return to his sport, after he committed his crime:

*“He’s brought me back on track cos he went through a similar stage to what I did, he went to a really low time and part of his life and... we talk about it. And when you’re talking to somebody who’s been through that experience, it’s like he’s been there done it, wore the t-shirt... He leads me through it, he guides me through it, he’s a good mentor like that”.*

The value of compassionate friends is consistent with findings from Long et al. (2017) who discovered that supportive friendships are linked with reduced risks of smoking and substance misuse.

The acceptance of their peers was a key feature for a number of the participants who continued to invest in their friendships despite their negative impact. Friends can act as a source of safety and comfort (Carr 2012), which was particularly important for Isaac as he began to open up and tell his old friends about the sexual abuse he had suffered as a child. Isaac’s friends provided emotional support (Rubin et al. 2006), and their approval positively influenced his feelings of self-worth (Harter 1999), as he observed:

*“The friends that almost ruined my life, they’re still there now. They were really supportive, they helped me... I live a completely different life to them now, but we are still mates, and that’s the most important thing I have learnt is that you can learn so much from everybody. Just because someone sells drugs doesn’t mean they are a bad person...it’s about understanding people”.*

Social support networks can act as a ‘buffer’ (Vaux 1988) and enable people to deal with stressful situations and experiences. For Billy, the friends who stood by him when his boxing career began to fall apart revealed themselves to be true friends, and a support system he didn’t realise he had: *“It was the people who I never thought would be there, were there for me. I had probably had about four or five friends who showed... they were my friends”.*

Isaac’s friends enabled him to explore his feelings, and he began to feel comfortable discussing the traumatic incidents in his life:

*“The things that we’d joke about and laugh about was really serious stuff... we would just joke and laugh about it and I think that’s what I liked about it... nothing*



*mattered around them, it felt... strong together. That anything that happened that was bad we'd just dissect it and laugh about it... To me that was positive... that really crap situation but just laughing about it".*

Being fully accepted by his peers increased Isaac's commitment to, and investment in, his friendships. Isaac's friends provided a vital level of support that he did not receive from his own family:

*"My family's great but I didn't really have one, it was fractured. Everyone was having their own problems and going a bit mental, and then obviously with the friends I had... we used to sell drugs and that, it was a little family. A little gang and it was cool. They were nice guys to me, to other people they weren't but to me they were nice...I think it's the main thing for me, it's just finding somewhere I feel like I belong".*

His friends became a family unit and this is consistent with the findings of Vitaro et al. (2002) who state that for individuals who perceive their family closeness as low, the influence of their friends can often become more significant than that of family members.

While at times negative, it is evident that Isaac's friends did have a positive influence on him and the way in which he was eventually able to navigate the obstacles in his life. Friendships, particularly, in adolescence can be a determinant in an individual's ability to cope, to feel acceptance, to have positive emotional health and to be motivated (Coie and Cillessen 1993; Ladd 1999). While Isaac did eventually stop committing crime with his friends, it is clear that their bond was complex, and reiterates the need for those involved with athletes to not underestimate the value of friendships that may seem superficially damaging from an outside perspective.

## **Family Background**

A number of the participants discussed their families, particularly their parents, and specifically the impact their father's behaviour had had on them whilst growing up. Both Archie and Isaac described the negative impacts that their fathers' violent behaviours had on their childhoods. Archie witnessed his father physically attacking his mother, and later he too was assaulted:

*"I'd see my dad be violent toward my Mum, I've seen him beat her up... he's done some horrible things to me. One thing that I can recall was it was my sisters sixteenth birthday party, he would promise that he wouldn't drink... I was fourteen... it got to about 10 o'clock and he decided to drink, caused a big fight and he drove home and smashed his car round a lamppost. So my mum told me to run home and make sure he was ok, I ran home, it was only a five minute run home and I got there and I asked him if he was ok and he threatens to kill me with a carving knife against a wall".*

The impact of his father's behaviour was significant for Archie, and resulted in him being very angry and ultimately committing violent acts of his own:

*"I buried that for years and years and that kind of explained to me that why as a kid for many years I was very angry and I didn't understand why I was. But it was incidents like that, I realised... why I was angry, because the person that I loved... my hero, was wanting to kill me".*

Isaac's father's violent behaviour caused substantial disruption as he was growing up. His family was moved to another area to get away from him, but his father's behaviour continued to have a negative effect:

*"It was nuts with my Dad... We used to go to school, my Dad had a court injunction so he would come running to see me and my sister. Obviously he's my Dad, he wants to see us, he was angry about situations that I didn't even understand at the time... And then the police would come in... it was just mental, it was just crazy. I wouldn't say I was negative but I definitely wouldn't say I was positive, I just didn't understand what was going on".*

Most significantly for Archie, his father was an alcoholic and as Archie began to drink and take drugs himself, the violence between the two intensified:

*"If he came home at weekends I would go and drink with him... now that was the thing to do. It wasn't long then before it became... me and dad at logger heads... both of us are quite volatile characters. For the first part of our drinking day... it would be alright but then soon as the beer started flowing the anger would come out and then we'd end up... getting into fights with each other".*

As Archie began his own journey with addiction, he began to understand his father's behaviours further:

*"I know a lot about alcoholism and a lot about drug-addiction, I know it's a disease. So after learning all that and realising that I'm one myself now I understand... why my dad did it... I can kind of put that in perspective, a little bit".*

Research into child development supports the premise that significant elements of adult personality are shaped by influences from early childhood, both conscious and unconscious (Cervone and Pervin 2008; Macionis and Gerber 2011). The way in which Archie, in particular, appeared to emulate the violent behaviours of his father is consistent with findings that suggest the abusive behaviour of athletes can be attributed to their modelling behaviours demonstrated by abusive parents or significant others (Terry and Jackson 1985; Hogben and Byrne 1998). Research suggests that significant attachments to individuals who support or reward antisocial behaviour, like Archie's father, can ultimately increase a person's risk behaviour (Catalano and Hawkins 1996; Catalano et al. 2005).

Not all the participants reflected negatively on their fathers. Both Charlie and Dougie identified that their fathers were "*hard workers*" which inspired them to work hard too.

Charlie and Dougie's attitude is consistent with the findings of Hardy et al. (2017) who identified that being exposed to a strong work ethic by family members can serve to help elite athletes develop a link between process and outcome, and to develop an understanding that hard work will result in positive consequences.

Isaac spoke at length about his step-father, and the constructive influence he had on him. His step-father's influence was in direct contrast to how his biological father had behaved and this affected him positively:

*"(We were) really close... obviously I'd been around my Dad who was a bit off the rails. It was nice to have a bloke in the house that was calm... I never heard him shout, he was always happy, always smiling. He's still one of the things that pushes me today"*.

When Isaac was twenty-two his step-father died, and he identifies this as a significant point in his life: *"That's what changed my life"*. He began to set himself goals, open up about his problems and try to be more positive:

*"When my stepdad died... that's when I finally got to grips with a positive mental attitude, how to process things positively and understood that being positive doesn't mean just walking around with a smile on your face. It's the attitude in which you solve a problem... so when my stepdad died... it definitely was a low, but... I managed to deal with it in the right way... That's when I was like I've got to deal with all of this properly for once rather than burying my head in the sand and just not doing it"*.

The attitude of Isaac towards his step-father's death emulates the response seen in the findings of Hardy et al. (2017). One of the elite athletes they interviewed identified that his father's death increased his focus, commitment and desire to succeed in his sport; ultimately the basis of his motivation to succeed was to prove his worth to his father.

Those participants who spoke about their mothers' influence tended to speak in very positive terms. Dougie described how as a child growing up his mother would often protect him, and often advised him on his career, discouraging him from turning professional too quickly. He described her as an *"inspiration"* to him stating: *"My Mum's... a strong woman... and I believe if she's behind me I can do anything, anything"*.

Archie acknowledged that ultimately it should have been his mother he was emulating all along:

*"I kind of looked around for different people to try and be an image of, to sort of copy them, and the person I should have looked at really was probably my mum... She has lived with my dad who was an alcoholic, and both my two sisters were alcoholic, and then me, the devil child. So after all this, it's my Mum that I thank daily, because she showed me unconditional love... All of us have put her through hell, but she's still there for us so I thank her...I love her to bits"*.

Charlie discussed the significance of his relationship with his mother, and how her being diagnosed with cancer was a catalyst for a number of negative events in his life:

*“About six years ago I literally got a phone call which rocked my world and since then... my life has been up and down... She'd been diagnosed with cancer... Looking back that sort of spiralled everything... When I got that phone call that obviously changed everything in my life... The way I dealt with my Mum's cancer caused me to get divorced a second time”.*

Archie, Charlie and Dougie all emphasised the strength of their mothers, and the quality of their relationships. It is evident however that while maternal support can act as a protective factor against an individual committing crime (McCord 1991; Juang and Silbereisen 1999), these strong bonds cannot unequivocally prevent an adolescent becoming involved in crime, or negatively influenced by peers (Starker 2009).

### **Negative Personal Experiences**

Several of the participants described their home environments and how these influenced their behaviours. Archie, Isaac and Harry discussed their exposure to violence at home and how this affected them. Archie frequently described his home environment as “*toxic*” and how it drove him to play football as an escape: “*I was like a prisoner when I was at home, it wasn't very nice so from eight, nine years old I started playing football... I don't want to be in the house, because... it's not a nice place to be*”. Archie also made the link between the environment he was exposed to at home and his eventual addictions: “*I just think that my childhood... played a massive part, in how I'd become. My childhood made me become an introverted kid, and that made me search for something*”.

When Isaac spoke about his turbulent childhood he used humour however as alluded to above he accepts that such exposure to violence had a negative effect in his childhood development: “*I grew up in quite a violent household...that's just a joke I always say... I tell young people “I grew up in a violent house, the house wasn't running around punching people, it was the people in it” (laughs)*”. When Harry described his own behaviours, he used the term “*lively*” to describe how he often got into fights and trouble as a consequence. He used the same term to describe the volatile environment in which he was raised: “*We were quite a lively family... fiery. Mum and Dad never touched each other but... rowing constantly. I've got three sisters and two brothers, so I guess it was quite a lively environment*”.

Research consistently suggests that experiencing foundational traumatic events is strongly linked to health and social risks including depression, suicide and alcoholism (Roy 2004; Roy et al. 2007; Wiersma et al. 2009). Research suggests however that for

elite athletes, negative critical events such as divorce of parents, or witnessing/experiencing violence or abuse, need not negatively influence an individual's sporting trajectory. Hardy et al. (2017) identified that all sixteen of the super elite athletes they studied experienced negative foundational events however, they believe that these may be key to developing the types of characteristics that are necessary to excel in elite sport. A number of authors suggest that the characteristics required to cope with childhood trauma, such as motivation, resilience, ruthlessness and robustness, are the same key characteristics that enable an individual to excel in sport (Gogarty and Williamson 2009; Collins and MacNamara 2012; Morgan et al. 2015; Rees et al. 2016). Hardy et al. (2017) suggest that limited exposure to early trauma may not provide the conditions needed to develop these elite characteristics to the extraordinary levels seen in super elite athletes. It is acknowledged however that the timing of the traumatic event could be key for the elite athlete. In 14 out of the 16 athletes identified by Hardy et al. (2017) their traumatic event was directly followed by a positive critical event linked to their sport; they believe these positive events may have contributed to minimising the negative outcomes ordinarily associated with a traumatic event.

Isaac spoke at length about being a victim of sexual abuse, and how this had significantly affected the course of his life. Initially, directly following the abuse Isaac became non-verbal:

*"It was a nice area... there was a guy that lived a few doors down. He used to let me play on his computer... I was a young innocent sort of naive young man, I was seven... and he took advantage of me ... I don't know what's the best word to use, sexually abused, assault... It messed my head up as a kid, to the point where I couldn't deal with it. From eight to ten I didn't talk, I was traumatised, no one knew why, everyone thought it was because of the stuff from my childhood".*

Isaac struggled to deal with the trauma following the abuse: *"And that really... screwed me up as a young man trying to grow up, trying to deal with something and I wasn't"*. Rather than speak to anyone about what happened, Isaac tried to bury his memories of the event which ultimately had a negative impact on a number of areas of his life. He frequently found that people around him did not understand his actions and it significantly affected his relationships:

*"I wasn't thinking properly, and I didn't think properly for thirteen years. I was too busy cutting things out rather than dealing with things, and now that I look back at it cutting your emotions out is a real serious problem... It affected a lot of my relationships with girlfriends, with my family... even with myself. I was lying to myself about how I felt, "I feel fine"... Lying to yourself is probably the worst thing, it sent me a bit crazy I think... And when you've told no one... no one knows how to help you, so you're stressing out and people are like "what's wrong with him?"*

During adolescence Isaac began to question his sexuality as a result of the abuse he experienced:

*"I didn't know if I was straight or gay growing up, I really didn't know. I had a lot of different girlfriends... I had good fashion sense and people used to say "Are you gay?" and it used to hit hard... really deep and I never used to show it but I'd go home and... I really didn't know. And I had to put myself in some really stupid situations to realise that I wasn't... I used to buy like gay magazines and just look at the pictures... "Do I find this attractive or not?". I'm like... I'm definitely crazy (laughs) it was mental... I got to the point where I realised that it (the abuse) just twisted my head up".*

Isaac makes a direct link between the abuse he suffered, and some of the criminal decisions he went on to make:

*"I understand the importance of communication because I didn't do it for so long. It twisted me up inside and caused me to do so many other things... I got involved with people that I probably shouldn't have, drug dealers and all sorts of stuff".*

The trauma would affect Isaac at different stages of his life, and in different areas. Ultimately it began to have a negative impact on his sport:

*"I was such, I still am, a very talented athlete, and at that age I was massively talented. I was young, I was able, I was gifted, I could have done so much more. But I just didn't get any help, or whether it was me just burying my head in the sand... I didn't answer the phone for two months... I would lose work... self-destruction, it was so bad and I couldn't see it. And then I stopped... the world's there... it hasn't gone anywhere, it's all there, it's positive, it's great. I can start working and doing this and I was so scared of everything, it was mental".*

Eventually, in his early twenties, Isaac began to talk to people about the trauma he suffered as a child. The first person he confided in was a stranger:

*"When I told everyone... everyone was so sorry, and it wasn't really what I wanted... But it was nice that people understood that it was hard what I was going through... It was a complete stranger... at a party... When I told him I felt great... it was crazy. I felt absolutely awesome, I was going to drive home and tell my mum but I was drunk... that was the starting point".*

The case of Larry Nassar has brought to the surface the long-term impacts that sexual abuse can have on athletes, with many of his victims reporting significant mental health disorders, and suicide attempts. Sexual abuse can directly affect athletic performance with victims more likely to dropout prematurely or take performance enhancing drugs (Yukhymenko–Lescroart et al. 2015). Many of Nassar's victims reported feeling deep levels of embarrassment and shame, as well as feeling as if they had lost their childhood (Mountjoy 2019). The damage of sexual abuse can endure long after the abuse has come to an end (Fasting et al. 2002) and is a predictor of mental health issues, self-harm, substance abuse, psychological distress in adulthood, and ultimately low quality of life (Sundgot-Borg et al. 2003; Chaplo et al. 2015; Vertommen et al. 2018; McMahan and McGannon 2020). Being a victim of sexual abuse as a child is also linked with future

criminal activity, with victims more likely to be arrested and also to behave aggressively towards others (Widom and Maxfield 2001; Chen et al. 2010).

The way in which Isaac's friends accepted him and provided understanding was integral to him beginning to recover from the abuse he suffered (Carless and Sparkes 2008). Social support is essential for abuse victims if they are to be able to cope with adversity and future challenges (Galli and Vealey 2008) which again reinforces just why Isaac's friends were such an integral part of his life.

Both Dougie and Joshua described how being victims of racism had influenced their behaviours. Dougie grew up as one of the few mixed-race children on his estate, other local children used to call him "*paper boy*" which he initially thought was related to his job delivering newspapers, but soon came to understand that this was a racist term:

*"I confronted them once and started fighting... they don't call me a paperboy because I do a paper round, they call me a paperboy cause my Mum's black and my Dad's white... When I found out that I just flipped, it was stupidity... and I suppose that was the first time I really got caught with racism".*

Dougie stated that he was frequently targeted by the police growing up; he believed this was largely due to the fact he was mixed-race. He felt victimised by the police, and by one officer in particular. Interestingly Dougie highlighted that on reflection, he thinks perhaps part of the reason he kept offending was in rebellion against the police, and the way he was being treated:

*"I think, maybe I was rebelling against the police... in (location) I always used to get pulled up and they always used to give me illegal strip searches in the back of the van and it was just madness and I used to hate it. There used to be a policeman... my Mum had to take him to the high court to get him moved on, he was that bad... It was like he was waiting for me and my brother. We weren't as white as snow, we weren't clean or anything but... he was racist as hell, nigger this and nigger that... we got so used to it... just madness".*

Joshua moved to England at the age of eighteen to sign a professional sporting contract. He felt that his teammates, and those in charge of his sport did not understand the cultural differences that existed:

*"So the interaction for what I see, two cultures sort of collided and not necessarily people appreciated that there were two cultures colliding. It was just kind of taking place... "Why is he doing that?". Did anybody ever go: "Well he's doing that because he's not from here"? No I think they just went, "He's doing that because he's a twat".*

This lack of understanding resulted in a distance between him and his teammates, and he became detached; he felt resentment towards those within his sport. On reflection, he identified that this detachment left him with few friends within his sport, and this

became apparent when few people from within his sport visited him or contacted him during his prison sentence: *“Ultimately in hindsight, because I didn’t do the social... that has a knock-on effect (laughs), and you’re going ok, well people haven’t come to visit you, well why would they...mate (laughs)”*.

Research corroborates Dougie’s account of the racist treatment he received at the hands of the police growing up, particularly regarding stop and search. In 1999 the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry identified significant ethnic disproportionality in the use of stop and search powers, and a reform dictated that the use of these powers be addressed to ensure they were used fairly. By the time this disproportionality was reviewed it was clear that there had been minimal improvement in some areas in the UK, particularly in London (Miller 2010). Data obtained in 2015 still suggests that black people are 4 times more likely to be stopped and searched than white people in the UK (Tiratelli et al. 2018). It has been suggested that perceived racial discrimination, such as that reported by Dougie and Joshua can be linked with a greater engagement in risky behaviours, psychological distress and an increased likelihood to form bonds with deviant peers (Benner et al. 2018).

## **The Role of Relationships**

In addition to relationships with family members, some of the participants discussed romantic relationships. Archie identified that he found he always ‘needed’ to be in a relationship and was unsure if this is due to seeing the fractures in his parent’s relationship:

*“I always found... that from a young age that I always felt that I needed to be in a relationship with a girl. And I don’t know whether looking back at it that’s because of seeing my mum and dad apart, I don’t know, I can’t quite put that bit together. I always felt that I needed to be in a relationship, whether it was right or wrong”*.

Archie highlighted that he emulated his father in many ways, one of which was how he behaved poorly in relationships: *“I still believe you become what you see... In every relationship that I’ve been in I’ve done what my dad did, physically abused...I’ve also been a womaniser”*.

The way in which Archie described his own abusive behaviour is consistent with findings that suggest exposure to domestic violence can have significantly negative effects on individuals such as anxiety and increased levels of aggression and anger (Kitzmann et al. 2003; Graham-Bermann and Seng 2005). Baldry (2003) identifies that individuals who are exposed to domestic violence as children, are more likely to engage in bullying



behaviour, or be referred to juvenile court (Herrera and McCloskey 2001). Ultimately Archie's behaviour is consistent with the findings of Wallace (2002) who states that children who are exposed to domestic violence are more likely to become abusive themselves as adults.

For both Billy and Dougie, their relationships often served as a distraction from their sport. Billy identified his relationship difficulties as the start of the negative period in his life which culminated in him being charged with assault and criminal damage, forcing a pause in his boxing career:

*"My head was all over the place with my ex-girlfriend messing me about... She slowly tried to control me, bring me away from all my friends, and start making me think like that everybody didn't like me, and they was only bothered about me because I was a boxer... My girlfriend was playing a lot... But at that stage I was in love and love's blind as they say".*

Dougie described how much he had been distracted by his partner during the Olympics. While there were other factors in play in his Olympic experience, he felt under constant pressure from his partner: *"I didn't want to be in the Olympics, didn't even want to be there... My first baby was going to be born and I didn't want to be there. She was ringing up all the time, just having murder everywhere".*

Research suggests that attentional conflict caused by others, and the distraction this invariably has on an athlete, can result in impaired performance (Baron 1986; Brooks 2015), as was the case for both Billy and Dougie. Additionally, it is likely that Dougie was suffering from athlete burnout (Gould and Diffenbach 2002) characterised by poor performance and a depressed mood (Gustafsson et al. 2008), which would have been exacerbated by the pressure he was under from his partner while away at the Olympics.

Billy and Dougie also discussed their relationships with their managers, which was a significant feature of their sport. Billy reflected on a fight that his manager had entered him into, which he ultimately lost; he felt angry as a result. He told me that he wanted to change management teams but he didn't have the confidence to: *"I had doubts... I was thinking about moving ...but I never had it in me to say to him "I want to move", in case he... said "no" and I'm stuck with this contract still ongoing".*

For Dougie, his issues with his management centred around the financial side of his sport, and how he was often not paid enough for putting himself in harm's way. He found that his manager would always profit and that there was a lack of honesty in the process which led to frustration:

*“Poor and bad management... There’s been times I’ve now taken fights for peanuts and I know for a fact the money I should be getting paid for a fight... I know there’s been times when I should be getting £10k but only getting £2k. It’s a dog eat dog world... it’s mad and it’s frustrating. If you haven’t got the right backing behind you it can be ... it’s an uphill struggle”.*

In a number of ways, it is understandable that both Billy and Dougie felt a degree of resentment towards their managers. Within the sport of boxing the purpose of a manager is to pursue and arrange fights that will aid in the development of the athlete. They are there to help and guide and ensure that their athlete does not enter a fight that they are not prepared for or not equipped to cope with (Schinke and Ramsay 2009). Selecting the wrong fight or failing to prepare their athlete can directly shorten their boxing career. If a boxer is ill-prepared physically and mentally, and does not know what to expect from the competition, it is likely that their performance will be sub-standard (Botterill 2005). It was clear that Billy’s manager in particular failed to prepare him and the consequences for Billy were significant.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has provided an insight into how the participants were affected by influences and experiences largely external to their sports. For a number of the participants school was a difficult time where they were often distracted from their schooling by their sports or it was not an environment they felt suited them. However, several acknowledged the importance of education, and teachers. For a number of the participants their friends acted as a catalyst for their criminal activity, but also provided a vital level of support and even a degree of ‘normality’. Several of the participants explored the negative sides of their relationships with their fathers but also identified positives in the relationships with their parents, particularly their mothers. It was evident that growing up in a violent or turbulent home environment had a negative effect on the participants and one spoke at length about how being a victim of sexual abuse affected all facets of his life. Finally, participants discussed relationships, both romantic and with managers, and how these often placed an additional level of pressure on them when trying to perform in their sports. Overall, it was clear that external influences not only affected the participants’ sporting careers, but also shaped some of the decisions they made which resulted in them committing crimes.

## Chapter 8: The Role of Drugs and Alcohol

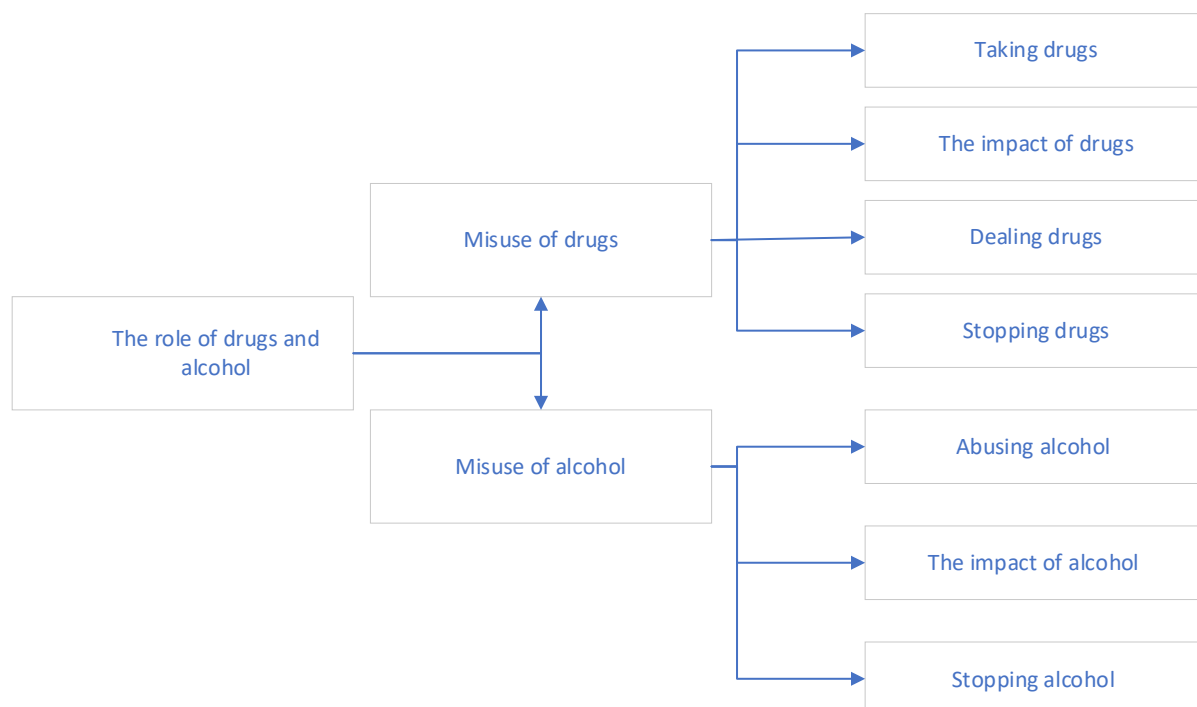
*“Smoking pot, taking E’s, taking whizz, mushrooms, stuff like that... recreational drugs”* (George).

*“Some people don’t even get addicted to drugs, and some people can take one ecstasy pill and die, it’s just Russian roulette... you’re best leaving it alone”* (Isaac).

*“The sort of level I wanted to play football at, you can’t take heroin and play”* (George).

### Introduction

This chapter considers the role that both drugs and alcohol have played in the participants’ lives. Within this analysis ‘drug’ is taken to describe an illegal substance, although it is acknowledged that alcohol is also a drug. For the purpose of analysis, drugs and alcohol were explored separately although one participant, Archie, often talked about using both substances at one time. The way in which participants discussed both drugs and alcohol show similarities and the sub themes below illustrate this. The only exception is the sub theme ‘Dealing-drugs’ as this was something that played a part in a number of the participants’ criminal experiences. Participants discussed their reasons behind taking drugs and alcohol, the impact that drugs and alcohol had on them, particularly on their sport and their criminal activities, and finally ending their addictions.



## Misuse of Drugs

Throughout the interviews it emerged that a number of the participants had been involved in drug-taking or drug dealing. Archie received a ban for drug misuse; Billy turned to drugs during a break from his sport; Dougie smoked drugs with friends; Finn went to prison for smuggling drugs; George became a heroin addict; Isaac was arrested for possession; and finally, Joshua was caught smuggling drugs through customs. For some, their activities with drugs directly resulted in gaining a criminal record, for others their crimes came as a consequence of their addiction, or taking drugs just appeared to be something they chose to do that was seemingly unrelated to further criminal activity. The participants gave an insight into their reasons behind becoming involved in drugs and the impact that this had on their sport and lives in general. Those involved in dealing and smuggling drugs described how this made them feel, and finally several of the participants detailed how they finally stopped taking drugs.

The issue of drugs and crime can be a little hazy, and this was true for the participants in this study. For some of the participants it was clear that the crimes they committed, and described to me, were directly related to possession or dealing, but those who described taking drugs did not refer to this as a criminal act in itself. While George highlighted in detail how his heroin addiction fuelled his criminal activity, he did not describe the act of drug-taking as a crime. Both Billy and Dougie referred to taking drugs with friends, but when asked about their criminal activities they never mentioned the fact they had also committed offences under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971.

There appeared to be a clear distinction for the participants between certain types of drugs, with 'hard drugs' seen as something different from socially smoking cannabis or taking amphetamines with friends. Interestingly when describing taking drugs, Isaac said he had never done drugs, despite then immediately describing smoking cannabis:

*"I've never done drugs but I went through a stage of my life when I smoked way too much weed ... I started smoking a bit of pot and stuff like that, but even with that I saw how that affected me... but to be honest if I didn't do that maybe I would have done the harder drugs... you never know".*

It is clear from speaking to the participants that there was evidence of them normalising drug-taking, with Billy actually referring to his behaviour (going out and taking drugs with his friends) as "*like normal lads*". This is consistent with the studies by Measham et al. (2011) and Aldridge et al. (2011) who emphasise that the social and cultural acceptance of drugs in everyday life is commonplace for many adolescents as they enter adult life.

## Taking Drugs

A number of the participants gave an insight to how they started taking drugs. It was clear that the act of taking drugs was something they did primarily when they were younger, for the majority during the latter stages of their adolescence or early adulthood. Archie specified that he first took drugs at the age of seventeen, while Isaac and George were also aged approximately sixteen/seventeen. This is consistent with theory that suggests that the majority of people are exposed to psychoactive substances such as cannabis during adolescence (Hindocha et al. 2015; Donoghue et al. 2017).

George described the way in which his drug-taking progressed quickly:

*“By the time I was... seventeen, the drugs I was taking had changed... quite quickly it seems... I'd try drugs and they'd sort of do it for me, I'd feel great but quite quickly it seemed that the effects of them wouldn't last. Or by the 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> time I've taken something it's not quite done it in the same way that it was in the beginning. So I'd move onto a new one, not consciously, just if something was there I'd try it, there's nothing I've ever said no to”.*

The 'gateway sequence' of drugs suggests that invariably the use of illicit drugs increases the likelihood of a person progressing to taking 'harder' drugs (Kandel and Faust 1975; Kandel et al. 1992). It is assumed that there is a sequence to drug-taking which begins with alcohol and tobacco and progresses to cannabis and then to stronger class drugs. Archie, Billy and George's drug-taking behaviour appears to fit this model, however, while the theory continues to receive support (Williams 2020) not all theorists agree. Critics of the 'gateway' hypothesis theory believe it oversimplifies the dynamics of drug-taking, and that in reality there are many causes of substance misuse such as trauma, genetics, psychological issues, and environmental risk factors (Kleining 2015). While a number of the participants in the current study did progress from 'softer' to 'harder' drugs in a sequence, not all did, and it is also evident that their reasons for taking drugs were diverse.

George detailed his reckless attitude towards taking drugs and described the intensity with which he approached drug-taking : *“I started off taking recreational drugs but by that time I was taking drugs with the same sort of fervour that used to be reserved for football”.* George highlighted that when he began taking heroin his drug-taking escalated to the point where he no longer had control:

*“At that time I still had some sort of like control over it, at that time it was still a choice, but by the time it had got to the point where I was... taking heroin every day... So by the time I was seventeen I was addicted to heroin... physically addicted to heroin, and I was taking that every day”.*

George's addiction to drugs happened very quickly and was characterised by compulsive and uncontrollable behaviour that continued regardless of negative consequences (Ben-Shahar 2004). Not all drug users will develop a habitual use of drugs and ultimately an addiction (Wagner and Anthony 2002); addictions tend to be linked to continuing failure to exercise control over drug-taking (Volkow et al. 2013; Everitt and Robbins 2016). Eventually there is a switch between control and compulsion, as described by George, and this progression into full blown drug addiction is recognised as a neurobiological and cognitive brain disorder (Mathis and Kenny 2019).

Participants gave a number of reasons for taking, or being involved in, drugs. For a number of the participants it was clear that their motive for taking drugs was social. Billy for example saw taking drugs as integral to spending time with his friends. George described how taking drugs was something he enjoyed with his friends:

*"I had a close group of mates, lads who I'd grown up with playing football with... we'd experienced the highs and lows of football together, school mates... We'd also experienced a whole new set of feelings and emotions through music and also through taking drugs together".*

The influence of friends on drug-taking behaviour was clear for a number of the participants. Dougie revealed that he took drugs to fit in with his friends, despite not enjoying it. He found that taking drugs provided him with a sense of belonging:

*"I love the smell of it for some reason, but cigarettes, I can't stand it... Why would I do it? I think everyone else was doing it, and that's sad cause I don't really see myself as a follower, but if everyone else is doing it and you're sat there... It's that same scenario, it's like the sheep where they are like falling off the cliff, or if someone jumped off a cliff would I do it? So why do that? It was being part of the crowd... it's belonging I suppose".*

Similarly, Isaac was able to identify that he became involved with drugs initially because it was something that his close friends were doing: *"I found myself getting drunk a lot, having what I thought was fun... being a bit of a bad boy... A lot of my friends were selling drugs... taking drugs... I was always around it"*. Peer groups act as a source of both attraction and influence, and enable people to discover their own interests while maintaining a sense of belonging and permanency with their friends (Steinberg and Silverberg 1986). In terms of drug-taking, peers are acknowledged to influence drug use at each stage of addiction (Hofford et al. 2020). Peers have a clear role in both attitudes and behaviours when it comes to drugs, and many will abuse drugs either because of peer alliances or peer encouragement (Ong 1989; Bauman and Ennett 1996; Robin and Johnson 1996), as Dougie acknowledged.

The majority of the participants began their drug-taking as adolescents, when they were particularly prone to peer influence; one of the most powerful predictors of drug misuse in adolescence (Branstetter et al. 2011). Adolescence is also associated with increased risk-taking in addition to vulnerability to peer pressure (Weiss et al. 2020) and this is particularly evident in young men (Gardner and Steinberg 2005). The role of peers evolves during an individual's drug-taking journey, as addicts tend to gravitate towards other addicts, something George described. Studies suggest that one of the key determinants of effective drug recovery is the need to break away from drug-taking friends and be around 'safe people' (Davey-Rothwell et al. 2009; Thurgood et al. 2014); a number of the participants stated that in order to stop taking drugs they needed to distance themselves from certain friends.

In addition to social reasons, it was clear that some of the participants took drugs as a solution to various personal issues. Some of the participants detailed how their drug-taking worked as a type of coping mechanism, for Billy taking drugs gave him a way of dealing with his mental health: *"Turning to a bit of drugs... just to solve my head... it's not clever... it doesn't solve anything but at the time it was giving me the buzz and it was taking away the depression"*. Isaac discussed how he used drugs as a way to avoid dealing with the abuse he has suffered as a child: *"It was something that really, I didn't want to do, but it really helped me at the time with all the things going on inside my head. It was the only thing that silenced it"*.

George also spoke about the freedom and distraction that drugs provided. Drugs enabled him to diminish the negative image he had of himself as a result of rejection from his sport:

*"It also meant that any sort of negative image that I did have of myself, that I wasn't physically strong enough or I wasn't good enough to mix it... that I wasn't enough of a man perhaps... I always felt that was a big thing in that environment, when I took drugs, not only did I not feel any of those negative images of myself, I didn't feel anything negative... It was the ultimate relief from any sort of concerns about anything"*.

For Archie drugs provided a number of positives. Firstly, he felt that taking drugs not only improved his confidence, but also helped keep his anger at bay:

*"And the reason I took it was... because I wanted something to give me confidence without making me angry, which the alcohol had obviously was doing. So taking speed obviously gave me the confidence and I didn't have to drink with it. I could go out and have a good time and I could talk and I could be... a happy chappie, so I thought"*.

Archie also spoke about the way in which he needed drugs (among other things) to fill the gap left when he wasn't able to play football: *"It wasn't long before I was able to go*

*into public houses, and go into town... so it was inevitable I was going to find something to void that gap. Alcohol, drugs, women, whatever”.*

While young people often take drugs for enjoyment or to alleviate boredom (McIntosh et al. 2005), the motives for adolescents or young adults can be more complex. Numerous factors can influence drug-taking behaviour, and the likelihood of that behaviour developing into addiction. Genetics and personality can play a part (Muscat et al. 2009) as well as unemployment (O’Kelly et al. 1988), marginalisation (McCrystal et al. 2007) and poverty or social exclusion (Comiskey 1998) which were all touched upon by the participants in the current study. Additionally, and most relevantly for the current sample, is the suggestion that drug use and addiction can develop as a result of an inability to cope with emotional pain, and stressful incidents (Cleary 2012). Whittington (2007) refers to the tendency of men, in particular, to self-medicate when dealing with a history of violence or emotional trauma. For some, drug use is linked to an individual’s need to take risk or a propensity for sensation-seeking (Thom 2003) which is applicable to several of the current participants. Drug use is also linked to an inability to express emotion, or share emotional pain (Cleary 2012), often due to displays of emotion being associated with ‘weakness’ (Kilmartin 2000; Seidler 2006). Darcy (2020) found that several of the men in his study utilised drugs to cope with anxieties, and also to seek freedom from daily constraints. George in particular spoke in detail about how his drug use made him feel more of a man after being released from his professional contract, which is consistent with the finding that for some, drug use can be linked with masculine identities (Lash et al. 1998; Copenhaver et al. 2000), and a rejection of healthy behaviours in a bid to demonstrate ‘manhood’ (Courtenay 2000).

Both Dougie and George discussed the physical effects of drugs. Dougie described how taking drugs relaxed him after training:

*“My brother used to smoke weed a lot, and he used to give me some... I’d be training hard, I thought, I needed to relax... and I thought that would be the best thing for it, so I used to smoke weed”.*

George spoke very eloquently about how heroin made him feel; taking drugs gave him freedom, something he had previously gained through sport. He was very open about enjoying the sensation of his favourite drug, heroin, and how much he liked taking drugs when he first started:

*“I like to read... John Milton describes the underworld in Paradise Lost and there’s seven rivers in it and one of them is called Lethe... some people say if you touch it, some people say you have to drink from it, but you experience a complete sensation of numbness. You will feel no feelings of sadness or depression or loss or sorrow, but on the flip side you will also feel like absolutely*



*no feelings of joy or elation or anything like that, and that's how I would describe using heroin”.*

Darcy (2020) also found that participants expressed their enjoyment in taking drugs, be that the ‘buzz’ of a stimulant or feeling ‘chilled’ or relaxed with a hallucinogen. Only George discussed how his enjoyment of taking drugs progressed into addiction, although Archie was openly addicted to cocaine and was admitted to a rehabilitation facility to recover. George’s drug use was characterised by stages, and can be viewed as a drug-taking cycle (Volkow et al. 2016) which begins with pleasure. After the effects of a drug wear off the user will experience withdrawal and when their drug of choice is not available will enter a phase of preoccupation, anticipating access to the drug so the cycle can begin again. For George, the more heroin he took, the more intense each of these stages became, and his preoccupation with accessing heroin even stronger (Ben-Shahar 2004); he met this need by committing crime.

### **The Impact of Drugs**

One of the clearest impacts of drugs for those participants involved in drugs to any degree was the role it played in them committing crime, and ultimately receiving a conviction. Teitelbaum (2005) discusses the self-destructive nature of drug-taking and highlights that being involved in drugs can often expose the athlete to higher risk behaviour and criminal connections. For those arrested directly for drug offences this is obvious however, for George it was clear that his drug addiction resulted in him needing to commit crime to feed his ever increasing “*expensive habit*”. He stated that by the age of 17 he was a heroin addict and at the age of 18 was no longer able to sustain employment. Crime to him became a necessity: “*Very quickly I was happy to embrace the crime, and again that became a part of it, that went hand in hand with the drugs*”.

While not all drug users will become criminals (Stevens 2011), individuals who take drugs are more likely to hold criminal records, and those with criminal records are more likely to be drug users (Fridell et al. 2008). Bennett et al. (2008) note that drug use and criminal offences are often committed by the same people in the same places, with drug users more likely to commit crime during periods of severe drug use (Hanlon et al. 1990). Communities rife with drug use may become crime attractors (Brantingham et al. 2016) drawing in outsiders (Ford and Beveridge 2006) and attracting serious offenders (Chaiken and Chaiken 1990).

Participants discussed the impact that their involvement in drugs had on their sport. For Finn and Joshua their involvement in drug smuggling, and their subsequent incarceration

directly prevented them from being able to play sport. For those participants who were using drugs, the impact on their sport was also significant. George and Dougie discussed the effect that taking drugs had on their athletic performance. By the time George was a heroin addict he was playing football semi-professionally, but his addiction was having a direct effect on his ability to play well. He identified that he *“didn’t have the same engine”* and that he couldn’t perform the best of his ability anymore: *“I’d just do these cameos based on previous reputation... people must have looked at me and “I thought you told us he was fucking mustard like...he’s an absolute liability, get him off” (laughs)”*.

George described how the process of withdrawing from heroin also impacted his performance significantly:

*“There were times that I played when I was in physical withdrawals from heroin, and I’d get paid and I’d just be straight off without a shower or anything to go and score (drugs)... If I was playing and I was actually withdrawing from heroin, I’ve been sick on the pitch... it clouded my judgement”*.

The physical withdrawal from heroin that George described impacted directly on his sporting performance. Heroin withdrawal is associated with dysphoria, anxiety, nausea and arrhythmia (Nikfarjam et al. 2015) and many users fear this process so much (Eiser and Gossop 1979) that avoidance of it may serve as a motive to continue usage (Lindesmith 1968).

When Dougie opened up about his drug-taking to his coach he made it clear that there was no place for drug-taking in professional sport, and that it would harm his performance and ultimately his boxing career:

*“I think once I told him (coach) that and the next day I was boxing in the final in (location) and I won that... he said “(name) don’t ever do that again, not only do you shame yourself, you’re embarrassing the club, you’re embarrassing your family” ... that struck home... cause I never needed to do it, and he went “well why do you do it...why, do you want to ruin your career?”... He sort of mentored me into making me realise what I was doing was wrong... He said “you need to start getting yourself clean, if you want to do anything with this boxing”*.

While Dougie felt comfortable confiding in his coach about his drug-taking, Isaac found it impossible to speak to anyone in his sport about it. He found that the elite nature of sport meant that he wasn’t able to explain what he was doing and consequently continued his behaviour:

*“If I was able to tell someone “I’ve started smoking (drugs)”... I probably could have dealt with it much, much quicker but because of the people that I was around, I was in such a high level of elite athletes and “smoking’s terrible”... I couldn’t tell no-one”*.

Archie stated that when he was taking drugs he did not consider his athletic career, or the impact that his drug-taking was having on his performance and behaviour: *“When I had a drug... nothing bothered me. I didn’t care about football, I didn’t care about my family, I didn’t care about me mum... I cared about an image, I cared about... just being me”*. However, once the effects of the drugs had worn off, Archie identified that he often acted violently, when he began to consider the potential ramifications of his actions:

*“I’d think about the consequences afterwards, it really didn’t bother me. Taking the drugs didn’t bother me, I never thought about football ever, not until a Monday morning. I would wake up on a Monday morning... I used to have a mirror on my bathroom wall, and I’d be smashing up the mirror and crying because I knew that there was going to be a danger if I go into work I’m gonna get tested. Why have I done that to myself again, gone out all weekend... filled myself with drugs, and now I’m gonna, I could lose my job”*.

For many, the social side of sport is a motivating factor for participation however, George highlighted that his need for drugs also negatively impacted the social aspect of his sport:

*“It had a negative effect on my involvement socially in a game, because I wasn’t interested in having it with any of the lads after football... they just wanted to go to the pub and have a few beers and that was the opposite of what I ever wanted to do, ever. I couldn’t even grasp the concept of having a couple of beers and then going home to watch match of the day”*.

George’s desire to socialise with other users is consistent with social selection theory (Dohrenwend et al. 1992) which suggests that a drug addict would actively change their social network to spend more time with other drug users (Reifman et al. 2006).

Archie and Isaac described the *“double life”* that they found themselves living as a result of using drugs while elite athletes, as Isaac noted:

*“I found that hard because then I started leading a separate life... I had like a double life. I had me the skater... in front of people, then me... that no-one knew about that I kept completely secret... that was hard”*.

In his work with drug users, Schafer (2011) found that often they kept an emotional and physical distance from people who knew them, partly because of the shame they felt, but also to enable their drug-taking behaviour to continue. Schafer (2011) found that, as Archie and Isaac described, drug users referred to *‘wearing a mask’* in order to continue their secret addictions.

The notion of a double life was also raised by George. He discussed the nature of heroin and how inconsistent it was with the perceived image of an athlete:

*“It makes me laugh a bit now just because that’s so unusual... Sometimes you hear about a footballer being addicted, but it’s always something like cocaine and it’s never like heroin... it just makes me laugh a little bit now. It’s a bit extreme really isn’t it... but it’s like the opposite, it’s probably the drug that everybody says*

*“oh the fucking horriblest drug you can think of, junkie scum bags” ... I know the reasons why people say that, and people associate it with like needles, and blood borne viruses and amputation and death, and for good reason (laughs). It’s the opposite to... a footballer really and... professional sports people”.*

Heroin does not have performance enhancing qualities, and as George suggests, is not a drug commonly associated with athletes. Several studies have considered athletes and their recreational use of cannabis (Darling 2005; Dawkins et al. 2006) with findings indicating that a negative relationship exists. Generally, it has been assumed that involvement in sport is a protective factor against drug usage (Terry-McElrath and O’Malley 2011).

Participants also talked about the impact that being involved in drugs had on their general behaviour. Isaac and Archie detailed the levels of deceit needed to mask their drug-taking while competing professionally. Isaac described how secretive he became to ensure no one in his sport found out about what he was doing in his spare time: *“People would find out certain things... “you smoke, I never knew that?” ... I had to keep things real hush hush. I had amazing chewing gum and eye drops, they went everywhere with me... and no one knew the difference”.*

After a positive drugs test, Archie spoke about the extreme lengths he went to in order to be able to continue taking drugs:

*“I failed my test so I got taken to London and I had to speak to the people there and I couldn’t believe that no one had actually said their drink had been spiked and used that as an excuse. So I paid a friend, to use that as an excuse, because I knew if I got off with it I could carry on taking drugs and playing football. And we got away with it”.*

Archie divulged that when drug testing became random, he had to be more inventive in his methods to avoid detection:

*“They told me then that now the drug tests aren’t going to be on a Monday morning, they are going to be random so now I had to be a little bit more clever. So what I did then was to go to every day to training, to work, with my own wee in a box. Because that’s how the mind works. I’d become very devious, I’d become the best liar in the world... I used to carry my wee around with me”.*

When the drug testing team finally caught up with Archie, rather than take a test that would prove he had used cocaine in the last twenty-four hours, he ran away:

*“They come down to the training ground, they point out who they want to test, apparently you are drawn out of a hat, they pulled me out... I got my car running, got my phone in my car and... I did a runner. I thought if I don’t do the test then I don’t fail it, then you can’t ban me”.*

Drug users, particularly addicts, are often viewed undesirably by society, as either deviant or sick (Reith 2007), so it is understandable that the participants described themselves negatively during their drug-taking periods. The participants, and in particular Archie, described the extreme behaviours they demonstrated in order to continue their drug-taking. Kemp (2009) explains that addicts tend to become focussed on the 'now' and as such often suffer with depression, distorted life rhythms and, most applicably for the current participants, impulsivity. The participants described the shame they felt, and the lies they were prepared to tell, to keep their drug-taking hidden. Kemp and Butler (2014, p.2014) identify that telling lies is a common feature of an addict's behaviour: "*The addict is well aware of the lies they are telling you, but woefully ignorant (unconscious) of those lies that they are telling themselves*".

## **Dealing Drugs**

Several of the participants spoke about the experience of dealing drugs. For Isaac, dealing drugs was something he did when he spent time with friends; the buying and selling of drugs became part of their ordinary social activity. When Isaac spoke about drug dealing, he was very matter of fact:

*"I'm round my mates house and he's like "you need to take this to your friend's for me", it's a big bag of something. I put it in my car, and I'm driving along, I go to meet my mate at the car park, and he's there but with a police car next to him, and I pull up and was like "oh my god I'm screwed".*

The way in which Isaac described his drug dealing is consistent with 'social supply' (Parker and Measham 1994; Parker et al. 1998) which involves the supply of drugs between friends and acquaintances rather than for significant commercial gain. Coomber and Turnbull (2007) found that the majority of individuals selling cannabis, like Isaac, very rarely came into contact with the 'drug market proper'. Finn's involvement however, developed as a form of employment. In impoverished communities, such as the area where Finn grew up, a lack of legitimate employment makes drug dealing as a source of stable income an attractive prospect (Friedman et al. 2003). As Finn explained, he was able to make more money dealing and smuggling drugs than playing professional football.

Isaac alluded to the fact that his drug dealing activities carried significant risk. Finn expanded on this and described the dangerous nature of drug dealing:

*"On the streets? I hated it. I hated it... It's the high-risk part but you'll get three years, if you get nicked, at the other end you'll get twelve years plus... It's a horrible way of life. The other part, you do your work... you send stuff on, you get paid...you're not out on the streets... The streets is... it wasn't for me".*

Finn described different levels of drug dealing and how ultimately, he preferred to be involved in higher level activities. He identified how drug dealing had resulted in him being drawn into unpleasant and hazardous situations:

*“I was still playing football, I was involved with some heavy stuff. I was going abroad, I was involved in importation... I'd set things up over in this country where I was getting money off other people... I was involved with a couple of things around the area where we didn't get on with people and then... we were arguing with other drug dealers and... things you're better off reading about, not being involved in”.*

Drug dealing, particularly of Class A substances, can offer a high value return but only for as long as an individual is able to avoid the considerable risk of arrest or violence from competitors (MacCoun and Reuter 2001). It is suggested that those who sell drugs are more likely to use drugs (Werb et al. 2008) and that drug dealing occurs alongside other high-risk behaviours (Steinman 2005). As Finn alluded to, violence is a common feature at all levels of drug dealing (Martin et al. 2009) with those dealing at street level more vulnerable to violence (Kerr et al. 2008; Small et al. 2013).

Both Isaac and Finn discussed the impact that drug dealing can have on people. Finn described how dealing on the streets was something he wanted to get away from: *“Don't get me wrong, I've dealt on the streets, I've seen what it does to people. I took my way out of that bit... I've been involved in every part”.* Isaac pointed out that it is easy to judge a drug dealer, but that in his experience, drug dealing is not something that people want to do – for many it is simply a way to make money:

*“People who end up in situations and are selling drugs... no one wakes up in the morning and goes “That's what I want to do”. They are pushed into a situation, and they make a choice a lot of them. You don't realise you're making it, it's probably harder to make a negative choice than it is to make a positive choice sometimes but you just don't realise you're doing it”.*

For many young people drug dealing is a job, and can become the primary occupation particularly for young men who leave school with low literacy and minimal qualifications (Johnson et al. 2000).

## **Stopping Drugs**

None of the participants have continued to take drugs (or did not disclose this to me), and for some this was extremely significant, and had life altering consequences. Archie and George required drug rehabilitation to end their drug-taking, and spoke about this transition point in their interviews. They discussed deciding to stop taking drugs, and interestingly highlighted that there was not a decisive moment. For Archie, the decision was seemingly taken out of his hands, as he was caught by the Football Association –

something that he now reflects on positively: *"I never actually gave up...I was actually caught out... which tells me I would have carried on, until I was caught... so I thank god that I was caught out"*.

For George, there was no turning point, he simply no longer felt the desired effects of his drug of choice. He stated that his desire for freedom, something that he sought initially through football, and latterly through drug-taking, was no longer being met through drugs: *"So I stopped playing football when I didn't feel free anymore, stopped taking drugs when I didn't feel free anymore. Although it was harder to put than the drugs than it was to put down the football (laughs)"*. He identified that for a long-time taking drugs had prevented him from dealing with the consequences of his actions, and once heroin no longer provided this escape, he knew he had to stop:

*"It wasn't a big thing, it wasn't like "oh I went to jail", or "oh I went to hospital", or "oh I saw someone get killed"... it wasn't anything like that... The only way I can describe it is that the drugs stopped working for me... It didn't matter how much I took, of my favourite drug, this thing that had always been the key... it just wasn't doing it anymore. It wasn't putting that pane of misty glass between me and reality anymore. So then I was confronted with all the things that I should have experienced when I was committing crime, when I was making my mother cry, when I was abandoning such and such a girl, or, betraying a friend... All the things that I should have felt probably at those times, I didn't because of the mask of...the drugs, particularly... my favourite drug which was heroin... And, when it stopped doing that... I couldn't live with it, I was faced with what the reality of my life was, what I'd made it... the actual reality right in front of me, how I was living, who I was surrounding myself with, and also, all the things that I had done"*.

Archie mentioned that faced with his career ending, he finally acknowledged that he needed help to stop taking drugs, and it was not something he could achieve alone:

*"Eventually I have to phone the PFA up and I asked for help. I said I need help... I've got myself into a bit of a pickle, I need to speak to you... I need to be open about what I've been doing"*.

George had been told to stop taking drugs many times, but he did not want to: *"I didn't think I needed to go into rehab... I still wanted to use drugs"*. He was only able to stop once he acknowledged that he needed to and wanted to, and when he was willing to accept the help available to him:

*"I just asked. I knew lots about detoxes, rehabilitation... I knew there was one up on (location) that will take anyone, it's a crisis centre. You don't need any funding to get in there, its reserved for people who are particularly fucked, and I knew that I fitted that criteria. I even knew people that worked in there, and... for the first time, I self-referred myself to a detox, to a rehab. I'd washed up in a lot of these places but usually I'd been put there, I'd never willingly done anything like that"*.

Studies suggest that treatment readiness is a predictor of success in drug rehabilitation, an individual needs to be ready if they are to fully engage in the process (Longshore and

Teruya 2006). While Archie and George see their desire to stop as key, there may also have been an element of age and the demands placed upon them that played a part. Vervaeke and Korf (2006) acknowledge that for many, drug use declines as the demands of life increase. The adoption and importance of adult roles, such as employment and family, can act as key turning points for drug users (Measham et al. 2011), and can reduce drug-taking behaviour (Vervaeke and Korf 2006; Shiner 2009). Since stopping taking drugs both Archie and George have become fathers and maintain stable employment, and while neither directly credit these roles with their decision to stop, it is possible that their desire to pursue such normality played a part.

Archie and George touched upon their experiences in rehabilitation. George described how he had been to rehabilitation centres many times previously, and how easily he would go back to using drugs immediately upon his release:

*"I got a habit back upon release (from prison) cause I was out for about a month, and then I've gone off to this place. I came out of there and they said "right now you've done the detox you need to go to proper rehab"... I said "I thought that was", and they said no ...so I came to (location)... did a rehab... came out, started using again straight away".*

Archie however, went into rehab only once and identified the significant impact it had on him: *"I was in there for four months, residential, which was, well how was it, soul searching would be one thing I'd say, very scary, very scary place"*. He was aware of the importance of adhering to rehabilitation if he were to save his career, and his life, so he made the decision to utilise the opportunity, and has been clean since:

*"When I was sent to the clinic, it cost an awful lot of money and I knew I could never afford to, so I realise then that it's an opportunity I will probably never ever get again so I better take it. Erm, so I just grasped it and you know I hope, I jumped into it with both hands really".*

Drug users who enter rehabilitation facilities will often be those who have the most extreme levels of problems with their drug usage, including offending behaviour (Stevens 2011). Addicts will often need numerous attempts at recovery before they eventually succeed (Kemp and Butler 2014) as George demonstrated. In the UK, the majority of people in rehabilitation for drug misuse are those with opium addictions, like George however, these patients have the lowest rates of successful recovery at approximately 25%. Since leaving rehabilitation neither Archie nor George have relapsed which indicates that for them intervention occurred at the right time, with both acknowledging that their recovery is an ongoing process (Best et al. 2011).



## Misuse of Alcohol

A number of participants discussed the role that alcohol had played in their lives in general and during their sporting careers. The misuse of alcohol had a direct part to play in the offences they were convicted of, both alcohol crimes, such as driving under the influence of alcohol, and alcohol-related crimes, such as offences against the person (Allen and Jacques 2013). Archie, Ethan and Harry were all convicted of violence related offences after consuming vast quantities of alcohol, Harry was also convicted of drink-driving. The significance of alcohol in the lives of a number of the participants came as no surprise given that it has been identified as the most prevalently used 'drug' in the athlete population (O'Brien and Lyons 2000). Charlie discussed the role that alcohol had played in his life during and after his career, and a number of the other participants described the position of alcohol as a social activity either within their sport or with peers away from sport.

## Abusing Alcohol

Participants offered a number of reasons for alcohol being such a significant drug in their lives. Several described the inextricable link between sport and drinking, labelling alcohol as part of sport. Ethan described drinking alcohol as part of the "*rugby culture*" and how it fuelled certain types of behaviour in his teammates and himself: "*We'd been away all day... just drinking. We had an away game, so on the coach on the way back we used to come back with no clothes on or something stupid, just being... rugby boys*".

Charlie also described the prevalence of alcohol in professional football during his career, and built upon the notion of drinking and masculinity highlighted by Ethan:

*"Someone said to me "Never trust a footballer who doesn't drink" (laughs)... they would actually ostracise (someone)... in that time I came across one footballer who didn't drink... it was very much... a macho thing to do, and it was the norm".*

The way in which Charlie and Ethan describe the status of alcohol and sport is consistent with the view of drinking as a cultural symbol of masculinity (Lemle and Mishkind 1989). It has been suggested, and was evident in this study, that consuming alcohol is intertwined with 'doing' masculinity, and the act of drinking plays a significant role in the gender performances of some men (Lloyd 2000; Darcy 2019).

Charlie described drinking alcohol as the '*norm*' within his sport, with Ethan also highlighting the level of expectation to consume alcohol in rugby:

*"When you play rugby you're sort of made to drink, it's a big part of rugby. It doesn't matter what level you play at... even International players. I've seen some*

*of them crawling across the street in Cardiff... it's just a big drinking culture and obviously I had a bit too much and maybe the rugby was maybe a bit of a factor".*

Both Charlie and Ethan's resignation to drinking alcohol as part of their sport is consistent with studies suggesting that alcohol is linked in some part to athlete identity and an athlete's need to emulate the behaviour of athletes around them (Thombs and Hamilton 2002). The link between playing sport and an increased use of alcohol has been found in numerous studies of athletes (Lisha and Sussman 2010; Mays et al. 2010; Diehl et al. 2012; Cadigan et al. 2013). Student athletes in particular are believed to engage more often in binge drinking, and suffer more adverse outcomes from their alcohol use than those that do not participate in sport (Leichleter et al. 1998). Far from sport acting as a protector from alcohol misuse, individuals involved in sport in their adolescence may be more likely to consume alcohol to excess in early adulthood (Kwan et al. 2014). Most pertinently for the current study and athletes such as Archie, Charlie, Ethan and Harry, is the notion that those who participate in team sports are more likely to over use alcohol than those who compete in individual sports (Wichstrom and Wichstrom 2009, Partington et al. 2012) and are more likely to become 'hazardous drinkers' (Zhou et al. 2015).

The need for an athlete to drink alcohol to 'fit in' with their sport was also highlighted by Joshua. As a non-drinker who shunned the social side of his sport, Joshua often found himself on the outside of the social group within his sport, and he felt that often this put him at a disadvantage:

*"In a lot of sports there's a whole host of politics that goes on... and meetings are had in pubs and you are not a part of those meetings and you're not there (laughs). So eventually you've excluded yourself without necessarily being aware, from a whole world... there's negotiations going on nightly and you're not even part of the negotiations, and the effects that that potentially has".*

He felt that his inability to fit in with this side of his sporting culture was never understood by his teammates:

*"It was always interesting because it seemed that they were coming from a point where "well this is how we play (sport), we play (sport) and then afterward you go to the pub" so who's this strange little boy that doesn't know that?"*

One of the reasons that alcohol consumption is such a feature in team sports is its role as a socially acceptable celebration (Kwan et al. 2014), which enables peer-group interaction. Alcohol is believed to form an integral part of socialising process of a team, creating social norms and facilitating team cohesion (Douglas 1987; Dams-O'Connor et al. 2007; O'Brien et al. 2010). By not indulging in drinking, Joshua often found himself on the outside, and by shunning something his teammates considered socially acceptable their disdain towards him increased.

While Charlie and Joshua's experiences occurred largely in the 1990s, it was clear from Ethan that alcohol still has a place within elite sport today. Kwan et al. (2014) conducted a review of studies into alcohol use and athletes and found that 82% identified that sport was correlated with an increase in alcohol use. Lisha and Sussman (2010) and Musselman and Rutledge (2010) refer to the paradoxical relationship between sport as a means to enhance health and the clearly destructive engagement of drinking often witnessed in athletes.

A number of the participants identified the role that alcohol played as a solution for various issues. Archie described how alcohol became a crutch for him, something he felt he needed in order to enjoy himself: *"Things kind of escalated from there, it wasn't long before I realised that... I was needing alcohol... to think I was having a good time. And trying to be this confident person that... I wasn't"*. Alcohol enabled him to be confident in social situations: *"My first drink and my first taste, it was like a light went off in my head... that was the answer"*.

In the same way that taking drugs provided him with a solution, Isaac described how alcohol served as a distraction from the issues he was facing in his personal life: *"The more I grew up, the more I started finding things out, the harder it got to deal with, to the point where... I would just go out, get drunk and get stoned"*.

Although Harry was reluctant to discuss his use of alcohol, and the role it played in his criminal offences, he did identify that his offences occurred at a time when he was dealing with a number of stresses in his life. He had been arrested for a brawl outside a pub and had also been suspended from the police force while investigations into his misconduct were ongoing. Charlie also spoke about alcohol providing a solution, as a way to escape from the issues he was dealing with: *"I just thought by getting drunk most days it would ease the pain... What I did was just hide behind the drink... that was my way of getting out of things"*.

For Charlie alcohol became a coping mechanism and something he turned to when he knew his professional career was coming to an end. His use of alcohol could be termed self-medication (Pappas et al. 2004) as he prepared to cope with a life outside football:

*"I knew my career (voice breaks) my career was over... that last year at (club)... that's when the drinking started, and I ended up getting divorced... The second year of my contract at (final club)... I knew I had nothing... my marriage was failing, I knew I didn't have any money, so... I just thought by getting drunk most days it would ease the pain"*.

Dougie also turned to alcohol when he experienced his within career transition:

*“I was... slowly drinking and going into a depression. Looking at newspapers and seeing my mates at the back of the newspaper, boxing news... it was frustrating... it was a matter of drowning my sorrows all the time. I’d speak to my girlfriend and say “Do you think I’ve got a drinking problem cause all I’m doing is drinking” and she goes “No no no, you’re just relaxing and chilling”... but I was hitting it big, it was bad”.*

It has been suggested that athletes may use alcohol as a coping mechanism because they experience a significant number of stressors through their sports (Doumas 2013), and the pressure they feel to perform. Cadigan et al. (2013) and Green et al. (2014) reinforce that the hazardous consumption of alcohol displayed by many athletes appears to continue long after they stop competing in their sports; as was the case for Charlie and Dougie. Career termination, and other events that involve significant life changes for athletes, are known to be linked with the development of depressive conditions (Sanders and Stevinson 2017; Lundqvist and Gustafsson 2020; Lundqvist 2020) and many people, like Charlie, will utilise alcohol to mitigate, or cope with, these depressive feelings (Maisto et al. 1999; Merrill et al. 2014). It is not uncommon for athletes to use alcohol as a maladaptive coping strategy following career termination (Schwenk et al. 2007; Wippert and Wippert 2008; Douglas and Carless 2009).

### **The Impact of Alcohol**

It was clear that their use of alcohol had a significant impact for a number of the participants. Archie made the distinction between his sober self and the person who abused alcohol, identifying that drinking alcohol to excess affected his decision making: *“When I’m sober I wouldn’t make the decisions that I would make when I was drunk or when I’d had my first drink”.*

Most significantly for a number of participants, abusing alcohol directly influenced their criminal behaviour. It is unsurprising that participants made this correlation as evidence of a link between alcohol consumption and a broad range of crime is plentiful (Joksch and Jones 1993; Graham and West 2001). Archie described how committing crime became an inevitability once he began abusing alcohol: *“My first introduction to the police was always going to come, especially when alcohol came into my life”.*

Archie stated how drinking alcohol made him unpredictable and resulted in him not being afraid of the police or what may happen if he encountered them. Ethan and Isaac discussed how situations escalated quickly when they had been drinking. Isaac described how an interaction with the police deteriorated because he and his friends

were so drunk – this incident resulted in him being arrested for criminal damage and drug offences:

*“So we went out one night and we all got really really drunk and we were coming back... the police they pull us over and start chatting to us... but everything got out of hand, everything went a bit weird. Everyone had things in their pockets they shouldn't have had... when the police started searching people everything got a bit... heated to say the least”.*

Ethan acknowledged that had he not been drinking to excess, the incident that resulted in his incarceration would more than likely not have occurred: *“Just drinking all day and I probably had a bit too much... maybe that was a factor of why I did get in a bit of trouble... If I was sober, it probably wouldn't have happened”.*

Across all societies, there exists a strong relationship between excessive alcohol consumption and crime (Rehm et al. 2009) with alcohol associated with a significant proportion of all injuries and criminal events (Anderson and Bushman 2002). Most apt for the current study is the fact that alcohol related crime is highly associated with being young and male (Palk et al. 2007; Collins 2016). Alcohol has disinhibiting effects, as described by both Ethan and Isaac, and results in making individuals more likely to both commit crime, or to become a victim of crime (Bryan et al. 2016; Naimi et al. 2016).

Participants discussed the role that alcohol played in their own violent behaviour. Alcohol has often been linked with men's tendency to be violent (Messerschmidt 1993) and to commit violent offences (Lipton and Gruenewald 2002; Gruenewald et al. 2006; Mazerolle et al. 2012), and this was clear in the behaviour displayed by Ethan, Archie and Harry. Alcohol has been found to accompany a significant proportion of violent crimes (Rossow 2001; Gorman et al. 2017).

Ethan's offence occurred after binge drinking following a rugby match. This type of drinking is particularly prevalent within sporting communities (Martens et al. 2006) and is classified as five or more drinks in a row for a man (Brenner and Swanik 2007). Binge drinking is also common as individuals emerge into adulthood (Kwan et al. 2012). Ethan identified that being drunk affected his judgement of the situation and resulted in a greater display of violence:

*“I'd do it again, I'd stick up for him again... but if I wasn't intoxicated and hadn't been drinking all day, and maybe I was a bit older, a bit wiser then maybe I wouldn't have started assaulting the other guy... So you are aware of what you've done but then it's sort of how far you take it really”.*

Archie described how drinking alcohol and behaving violently went hand in hand: *“Thing is, I didn't know then, but obviously I know now that things were snowballing, getting*

worse. *The next thing would be the violence would rear its ugly head... obviously when I'd had a few drinks, always*".

The link between excess alcohol consumption and violence in athletes has been documented (Pappas et al. 2004), with alcohol described as a 'catalyst' for athletes, particularly those already prone to displays of aggression (Kudlac 2010).

It was clear that excess alcohol consumption also had a negative impact on the participants' sporting performance. For Isaac, consuming alcohol resulted in him sustaining a serious injury which not only interrupted his sporting career, but resulted in him being afraid to leave the house:

*"I wasn't applying myself in the right way... partying too much... And when I was nineteen I had an accident, because I was basically hung over and not thinking straight... I've got scars all over my lip where my lip just went into a thousand places, these (takes teeth out) 2 front teeth aren't real... that was for me the biggest wakeup call... It was an absolute low... I didn't want to go out, a child saw me in a shop and started tugging on his Mums jumper and was like "what's wrong with that man?"*

Evidence suggests that alcohol negatively affects athletic performance. As a depressant, alcohol reduces the body's functional activity (Ramniwas 2014), impairing recovery (Barnes 2014) and reducing cognitive function and motor skill (Shireffs and Maughan 2006). As Isaac demonstrated, the negative effects of alcohol can persist for hours after consumption.

## **Stopping Alcohol**

Unlike taking drugs, the participants did not describe a finite end to their use of alcohol, so it can be assumed that for most alcohol is still a feature of their lives in some form, albeit in a more controlled manner. The only exception was Archie who stated that since his period in rehab he has been completely sober. He described how he felt about stopping drinking alcohol, and how he was concerned that alcohol had actually been helping his performance rather than hindering it:

*"I was always worried that when I stopped drinking, I wouldn't have that edge. And I was a bit scared about that... It took me a while really... when I stopped drinking to get used to actually playing without, not a hang over, but just without that fuzziness, without that edge and without that anger"*.

Dougie described how he needed to replace alcohol with training, and how training has become vitally important to his wellbeing as a result: *"I had to use fitness and training to draw me out of that, otherwise I would have gone mad. And it's even now, I trained this morning, I had to, I had to train otherwise I'd just go mad"*. The way in which Dougie used

exercise to counter his misuse of alcohol is well supported in the literature. It is believed that physical exercise can positively affect alcohol use and can reduce overall alcohol intake (Manthou et al. 2016). Exercise can provide a safe and accessible intervention for those who are misusing alcohol, and is associated with physical and psychological benefits (Craft and Perna 2004; Hallgren et al. 2017).

## **Conclusion**

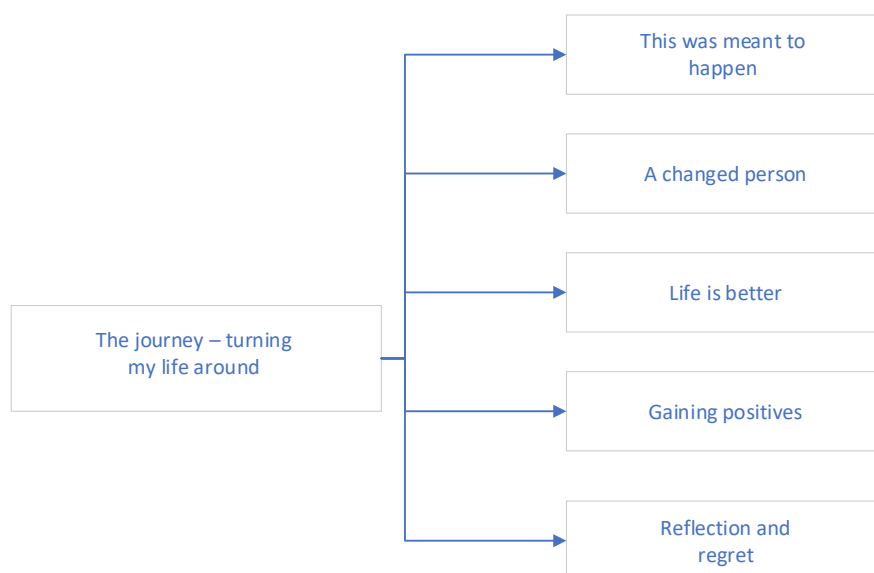
This chapter has provided an insight into the influence that drugs and alcohol had on the participants' lives. Particularly for George, drug-taking and dealing entirely consumed his life. For others such as Finn and Joshua, their decision to become involved at the higher levels of drug smuggling had a profound effect on the future course of their lives. Participants reflected on their reasons for taking drugs, which were diverse, and described the impact that drugs had on their lives. The role that alcohol played in the commission of a number of crimes was evident, particularly for those who committed violent offences. Both drugs and alcohol clearly impacted the participants' judgement and resulted in unpredictable and in many cases, high-risk behaviour. Participants described the role that alcohol played in their lives as athletes and the degree of expectation to be involved in drinking in their sports. Participants discussed the end of their journey with drugs and alcohol although it was clear that for a number of participants, alcohol still has a continued role in their life, albeit at a manageable level.

## Chapter 9: The Journey – Turning my Life Around

*“This has been my journey, not all of it I’m proud of, but still...it’s been my journey”*  
(Joshua).

### Introduction

This chapter explores the ways in which the participants reflected on their criminal journeys. Participants appeared keen to demonstrate how they had learnt from their experiences, there were five sub-themes within their narratives: participants tended to state that their journey was meant to happen, that they were a changed person as a result, that their life was better now than before their criminal activity, and that they had gained positives from the experience. Finally, participants reflected on their journeys and while many attempted to view their criminal experiences positively, many also expressed regret over the way they had conducted themselves and the decisions they had made.



### This was Meant to Happen

The athletes spoke openly about the impact of their criminal experiences, and how their lives have been influenced. One of the most significant observations was that a number of the athletes felt that the criminal incident needed to happen, as Billy stated:

*“If I didn’t go through what I went through then I don’t think I’d be in this position what I am now...If I didn’t go through that, then I’d probably be the same person I was back then... everything happens for a reason, and everybody’s got a plan in life. Everybody’s... set to do something in life... that was part of my life which probably needed to happen for me”.*



Billy and Finn described being arrested as a “*blessing*”. Finn was not the intended target of surveillance on the day he was arrested:

*“Me and another lad got arrested first... and I’ll be honest I wasn’t supposed to get arrested then, that was a freak incident where I was supposed to be getting watched and other police have come involved and just picked me up... I was supposed to just get watched that day, so was it a blessing in disguise”.*

Billy rationalised what had happened to him by considering religion: “*At that time I was thinking to myself why me, why me, what have I done to deserve this? But the big man upstairs must have thought this is your storyline, this is going to improve you here*”.

Despite the significant impact that their criminal incident(s) had on their sporting careers, and wider lives, Isaac and Finn identified that they were glad they had been arrested before things could get worse, as described by Finn: “*I knew I was getting jailed... I’m made up I got arrested... Or things would have been really bad, things can always get worse... I do believe things could have been worse... twelve years I’d take all day*”. Isaac also identified that he was pleased he had been arrested:

*“I’m glad it happened... it was a wakeup call, and it wasn’t severe... we all just got cautions... we all got done for possession... the things I was up to with my mates, it could have been a lot worse (laughs)... So for me it was lucky... I feel really happy it happened; a bit annoyed that it didn’t happen sooner but I don’t know that I would have listened any sooner”.*

The notion of a desire to get caught was first suggested by Freud in 1916, who stated that criminals possess an unconscious desire to be caught and punished. Later research has however, seemingly dismissed this notion as folklore, with Samenow (2002) stating that in all his years of work with offenders, he has never once met one who wished to be caught.

After his arrest, Joshua was deemed to be a flight risk and denied bail, yet he still believes this was a positive decision:

*“It was one of those things that actually worked out in my best interest. At that time I was so keen just to, even if it was to spend an hour in my own bed, just for what would seem like a bit of respite, from being in that alien place. But in truth, if I had managed to get bail, it would have been doubly hard when I had to come back in, to actually start my sentence. So... it worked out, in that sense, that was the best thing”.*

Isaac stated that he needed to go through the experiences he did to be able to move forward with his life in a positive way:

*“If I’m being deadly serious... and I could give advice to me sitting there, I would go and give myself a high five and be like “Everything will work out”. I think I had to go through all them things to figure out what it is that I wanted to do, how important things are to me... I think if I wasn’t in that prison cell I probably would have carried on with the same behaviour, thinking I could get away with*

*everything and I probably would have ended up in an even worse situation... Everything happens for the best possible reason... I don't think I could change it".*

Both Billy and Harry stated that they “haven't looked back” since their criminal experiences, as Harry highlighted:

*“Ultimately rugby's got me to where I am now because through people hearing my circumstances another friend said come and help out with a charity I work with, so I did. And then that's evolved into working full time, so arguably, not looked back since that incident... apart from the year and a half of slight darkness (laughs) as you can imagine”.*

The ways in which the participants constructed their stories could be considered as examples of redemption narratives. Maruna (2004) identified that ex-offenders who managed to recover from their transgressions tended to adopt more positive self-stories than those who reoffended. The construction of ‘positive illusions’ (Aspden and Hayward 2015) and prosocial identities enabled ex-offenders to ‘rebiograph’ themselves, thus creating redemption selves, as Maruna (2004, p.85) explains: “*If such an enormous life transformation is to be believed, the person needs a coherent narrative to explain and justify this turnaround*”. The academic Kester Aspden described his own criminal experiences and identified how he used a positive self-story in attempt to rise above those who had rejected and ousted him following his conviction (Aspden and Hayward 2015).

## **A Changed Person**

The athletes discussed how their criminal activities and punishments had caused changes in them. A number reflected on how different they are now as a person compared to previously. Finn highlighted that he doesn't feel like the person he was when he committed his crimes: “*I reflect back and... I can't put my head how I think now for back then. I feel like a completely different person*”.

Billy detailed that the incident had affected the way he thinks about things now, and how he sees himself as a nicer person:

*“I'm a bit more cautious about things.. things what used to bother me... little things, I don't let them bother me anymore... I don't go out no more, I just stay settled, I'm at home, I'm in the gym, I literally live the life of a professional athlete... Now I look back and... I'm a lot nicer person, I'm a down to earth guy, its completely changed my attitude”.*

A number of the athletes talked about specific positive outcomes from their experiences. Archie identified that as a result of his experiences he learned to love himself. George described how he no longer feels conflicted: “*I don't have that sort of... conflict now that*

*I used to have... almost feeling like I'm two people, leaving one of me outside when I go to play football, but I think that comes with age and self-acceptance".*

Isaac identified that the criminal incident meant that he had developed skills that stand him in good stead as an athlete. He stated that his mistakes don't need to be seen negatively:

*"I've gone through all these different things, and I haven't been great with the things I've done in my life, but... I've always stuck to it, and I think that's a really important thing... True athletes do stick to their sports but we're not angels, we're not perfect... we're not always going to be this perfect role model. To become a good role model you have to make all these mistakes... and I'm probably still not finished. But... from the severity of the things I did as a young man, they're definitely all done, I'm just trying to live a much more positive and happy life nowadays".*

Finn acknowledged that his experiences have aided his decision making and also his relationships with others:

*"Incidents have an impact on you, and how you react and how your actions come across. I had a lot of stuff go on while I was in prison. I realised that you've got to think on things before you make a choice, and I never used to, I used to just (clicks fingers) choose, never think about it. I do think a lot more on situations, and realise that there's only a couple of people who are real in your life... I stick with them now... I don't have loads of friends, I don't go out to places, my life is, I get up, I train, and I come and do my stuff in football, that's my life... I don't even drink...none. That twelve years of prison...I'm a ball like now (laughs)".*

Archie and Isaac identified that they had learned from their experiences. Archie learned a lot about himself throughout his addiction, criminality, and recovery:

*"I learnt that... I'm an ok person. I'm a good person. I've learnt that obviously I don't need alcohol; I don't need drugs to enjoy myself. I've learnt to love myself. I've learnt to love other people. I've learnt to be caring. I've learnt to not put me first, to put other people first. I have my family now to put first as well. So, I've learnt an incredible amount".*

In addition to learning about himself, Isaac believes his experiences helped him develop a better understanding of others:

*"Just because someone sells drugs doesn't mean they are a bad person, just because someone's a politician doesn't mean they're a good person... it's about understanding people, it's not about telling who's right, who's wrong, what's good, what's bad. It's about understanding people's situations and I think that's the art of learning".*

This focus of the participants on their ability to derive positives from their negative experiences is further evidence of redemption narratives being utilised. Papathomas (2016) identifies that athletes who discuss their ability to overcome adversity and subsequently succeed tend to construct their identity based on the qualities of resilience and heroism. The utilisation of heroism in the stories of criminals was also noted by

Presser (2009) who identified the common narrative of the criminal as a lone hero, facing hostility and defying the odds. Aspden and Hayward (2015, p.253) described how criminals often “*revelled in their bravery and heroism*”.

## **Life is Better**

A number of the athletes identified that far from their criminal experiences ruining their lives, their lives are better now than they were before they were arrested or sent to prison. Billy told me that he genuinely believes he is a better and more respectful person, and Archie spoke about the improvements in his personal and family relationships. Ethan credits his arrest and prison sentence with getting to where he is now in his life:

*“I don’t have any resentment of what happened... if it happened again then I’d probably do it again to be honest... maybe not as bad... It did affect me but it hasn’t really affected the outcome now. At the time you think... fucking hell, that’s probably messed things up for me but when you think now, if that’s what it’s taken for me to get where I am now, cause I’m pretty happy at the moment”.*

Finn, whose main motivation for committing crime was money, highlighted that he is happier now despite earning significantly less: “*Now I’m not on anything what I earnt, or what I could earn... and I’m happy*”.

Some of the participants described the ways in which their experiences had improved their performances and relationships with their sports. Ethan found that the way he was accepted back into rugby made him appreciate and love the sport even more, whereas Billy stated that his improved mental strength has meant that he can now train harder and compete at an enhanced level. George described how he is now a much better footballer as a consequence of his experiences:

*“I started playing football again, better than I ever have done... I don’t dribble in the same way I used to, I play further back... I play a sweeper now, or I play centre midfield... I’m much more composed on a football pitch than I ever was, I don’t feel pressure in the same way that I did when it felt structured... I don’t doubt my physicality against bigger people... my brain moves faster than most people’s feet”.*

Isaac highlighted how his experience has made him more confident at trying new things:

*“I’m always about pushing to try things new now, I never used to do anything new. I used to have quite a set life... skate, see my friends and that’s about it, but now anything new, I push myself to do it, even if I’m scared as hell”.*

This tendency to describe life being better as a consequence of their criminal actions and to construct negative events resulting in advantageous consequences (Chase 2005) is further evidence of the adoption of a redemption narrative.

Both Ethan and Finn identified that their involvement in crime led to the path they are now on in terms of employment. Ethan took part in a rugby programme with career development as a result of his conviction: *“I’m in a really good job now and if that all didn’t happen then maybe I wouldn’t be where I am now... I suppose, people say oh everything happens for a reason”*.

Finn’s football career ended as a result of his crimes, but he has now been able to use his criminal experience to get a job that would never have been an option before:

*“As soon as I come out of prison... I remember the probation coming round to me and saying “What are you doing?”... I went “This is what I’m going to do” and they were like “What are you going to do for money?”... and I went “Look, I’m being dead honest with you here... if you try and stop me, take me off that path, I’m going to be honest, I’ll go and sell drugs” (laughs). He was took back, the probation worker, and he’s like “Just do what you’ve got a do”.... I’ve never really been that much into something where I was a million % on it... within three years of me getting out I’m sitting in footie clubs, sitting with people... I love what I do now and I love being able to give advice to young lads and progress lads football wise, because I’ve progressed a few... I wouldn’t change that bit”*.

Finn’s attitude is consistent with the findings of Farrall and Calverley (2006) who followed individuals on probation in England. They found that the desistance from crime was generally the product of motivated individuals with a desire to change and improve, social support, and to a certain extent probation supervision. A later study credited the positive impact of the probation system further still (Farrall 2012) and it is evident that several of the participants in the current study responded constructively while on probation. The low recidivism rate of the participants may also provide support for the findings of Farrall et al. (2014) who identified that probation may not deliver immediate positive effects, but it may leave a lasting impact which in time provides individuals with the skills and motivation to desist from crime.

During the interviews, the athletes often talked about ‘low’ points in their careers. While they were able to identify their low points, the way that both Isaac and Joshua framed them was interesting. Rather than consider these as ‘low’ points, they preferred to see these as opportunities, or positive events, as Isaac highlighted: *“(about lows) Yeah, plenty (laughs) that’s how you get to the highs isn’t it!... I call it the best low”*. Joshua preferred to view his low points as opportunities to learn: *“So the low points aren’t really low points, they just sit there and they are actually learning curves”*. This attitude toward low points is consistent with the findings of Fletcher and Sarkar (2012) who identify that elite athletes tend to perceive stressors as prospects for growth and development. Participants provided examples of adversarial growth (Howells and Fletcher 2016; Wadey et al. 2019) in their desire to draw positives from their negative experiences.

Additionally, the way in which the participants explained their experiences to me, and how they were keen to frame them positively could also be seen as further evidence of attempts at image repair from the participants (Benoit 1995).

## **Gaining Positives**

The athletes discussed the positives they had gained from their experiences. A number talked about the notion of strength and how going through their experiences had made them understand how strong they are. Billy believed that his experiences, and the challenges he faced, have improved his mental strength: *“I think it made me... mentally a lot stronger person... before that incident happened, I was one of them people that always thought they had something laid on a plate... Now I’m very appreciative, everything’s working out now”*.

Harry described how when he was convicted of drink-driving, he felt he lost everything, yet the way in which he navigated the experience demonstrated to him how strong he was:

*“I’ve got lots of good friends... I’m quite popular... I’m quite strong, because I’ve had friends say to me “I would not have got through this like you have”... I never gave up, it was very close, from the day I lost my job, I dug holes, I painted fences... I just made sure that I’d go to work... no matter how bad things got. And I know other people have much worse lives, but in my comparable life I know that I will always get out of it, somehow, by a network of good people around me and my own willingness to not lie down and die type scenario”*.

For Joshua, the experience of being in prison enabled him to draw on the strength he already had, and helped him see that he was strong enough to get through his sentence:

*“And I simply learn to look at it differently which, not gave me the strength because I had the strength, but it allowed me to experience it at a level where I went “I can do this now” where before it was “I can’t, I don’t even want to be here for a day”. And just thinking, this is going to be long, I’m not going to enjoy it, but actually, I can do this, I know I can do this. I might not want to do it but actually...I’ve seen enough that actually I know I can do this”*.

Finn believes that by talking about and sharing criminal experiences, and the mistakes he made, he is actively influencing future athletes positively, something he would never have been able to do had he not been to prison:

*“I wake up every day with regrets, for myself personally... but as I’ve said I know I’ve caused a ripple effect in the game, I know I have... I’ve done the interviews on the telly, and it weren’t happening before that... so I’m happy for that bit... I know when I came out of jail and the stuff I was talking about; it’s been all over the country... I’ve seen things on websites, I’ve seen things on accounts and I know it’s my doing, and I’ve heard people saying things what I said, about Plan B... and I know it’s my ripple effect”*.

In addition to the utilisation of redemption narratives, it was evident that some participants, particularly Finn, demonstrated the quest narrative (Frank 1995). Holloway and Freshwater (2007) identify that this form of narrative is often utilised by those who accept the need to learn from their experiences and desire to transfer their learning to others. Finn's experiences with other 'would be' offenders also demonstrate the values of schemes that utilise the sharing of lived experiences, or the use of 'peer mentors' within the Criminal Justice System (Gonzalez et al. 2019). Utilising the lived experiences of ex-offenders in order to reduce offending and support rehabilitation, has been employed to positive effect within the UK (for example UserVoice).

## Reflection and Regret

None of the interviews conducted were straightforward, none followed a clear chronology and at points the athletes were very reflective, almost philosophical about life and their experiences, as Isaac exemplifies: *"Life's an interesting thing, I don't think anyone goes through life and just finds it easy... if they do I'd like to speak to that person (laughs), I really would"*.

Throughout the interviews a number of the athletes were very contemplative about both their sporting and criminal journeys. Archie and Joshua talked about their sporting careers in their entirety and despite the mistakes they made, both stated that they were content when they reflected back. Archie reflected on all he had achieved despite his challenges: *"I was very happy with how it finished... a twenty-one year career, and the average career is eight-eleven years, so, considering I'm an alcoholic and addict and done the things that I've done, I must have been doing something right"*. Joshua described how the positives he draws from his career stem from both constructive and negative experiences:

*"The whole experience, what you might recall the good or bad of it... I'm good with it. There's some things I might do differently... and there's some things I simply didn't learn, I was learning on the job, so I put my foot in it a lot of times. But stories I remember and the things that make me laugh, more often or not are the times where I put my foot in it (laughs)"*.

Charlie and Joshua discussed how on reflection they have since realised that they didn't appreciate their sporting careers fully at the time, with Charlie stating:

*"You just sauntered along... you don't really realise back then what you did... It gave me a life that I hoped for but it also taught me a massive lesson... I always felt I was quite humble in what I did, and appreciated what I did but... I don't think I did to a certain extent"*.

Joshua also described how he now realises he should have allowed to himself to enjoy his experiences more:

*"It's all remembered with fondness and it was all experience and I look at it and I suppose the only thing I think about those times was perhaps I didn't necessarily fully enjoy it enough... They were good times but perhaps with a little realisation of how special those times were perhaps I would have just enjoyed all of those things, just that little touch more".*

As part of their reflection, a number of the athletes expressed regrets about a number different aspects such as their behaviour when they were an athlete, their actions while committing crime, or specifically the crime itself. Dougie identified that when he turned professional he continued to treat his sport as a hobby rather than as a business, and he felt he should have been more "ruthless". Charlie also felt he did not make the correct decisions during his career: *"When I injured me knee, I was out for eighteen months... so really... I should have packed up then and got a career... a coaching career, and developed that then, but all I ever wanted to do was play football".*

Harry expressed regrets about how little he had applied himself as a professional athlete: *"I played for two and half/three seasons as a professional, then realised probably regretfully that it wasn't for me or I didn't put as much effort into that professional side of the game as I should have done".* Similarly, Finn was regretful about wasting the many opportunities he had within his career:

*"My biggest low is not achieving what I should have achieved. That does me... I reflect on that a lot... I think back, it does my head in to be honest... It annoys me, because... if I would have just settled and just played... I turned down contracts... who does that? What kid does that? What lad does that?... One of the fellas said to me the other day "Imagine if you'd ever been like this when you were younger"... If I would have done this when I was younger, if I would have been 100%, give it 100%, things would have been different. But, you know, as I've said before you can't turn the clock back".*

Finn felt that he underachieved and made poor decisions in his early career, but also acknowledged that he was already distracted by his criminal activities at this stage: *"There was other incidents going on in life... I'm not blaming no one... it just happened, but I could have done something good".* Archie discussed the regrets he has over how he behaved when he was an addict, and how this impacted both his family and his sport. At one point he physically fought with his father and described this as his one regret.

To date, with the exception of Billy who was subsequently imprisoned for an offence very similar to that which he discussed with me, none of the athletes interviewed have reoffended. In fact, a significant number are now actively involved in programs or charities to encourage future athletes to avoid making the same mistakes as them. Finn and Joshua, discussed reoffending during their interviews. Finn highlighted that despite never wanting to return to that life, it could be easy to go back to crime: *"There's still*



*times in me when I think how easy is it to make money... cause it's easy to make money... no tax no nothing. I still see lads who are doing stuff and they earn vast amounts of money."*

When Joshua discussed reoffending, he made it clear that this is simply is not an option now. He stated that under no circumstances would he consider reoffending:

*"So as it stands now, although I'm here and free, any mucking around or anything, they can call me back to do the rest of that licence, but potentially add on for whatever mucking around is... potentially even to look that way, involves a life sentence to me so... it's not an option... There's a conversation that's had and its had a while ago, and its regardless of anything, whatever situation, its absolutely irrelevant, it simply does not matter. There's no special case about this, that's done, you did that – that was wrong, end of story. "Oh but what if the same circumstances arise?" it doesn't matter, it simply doesn't matter. That's regardless... Mum's dying, it doesn't matter, I will go and get a job... it's done".*

Dougie also discussed reoffending since his last arrest and told me that he has avoided crime where possible: *"I've been pretty clean... nothing I've been caught for (laughs), or nothing that I don't think I have been justified in doing"*.

Within the UK the reoffending rate for those who have been released from prison, received a non-custodial conviction in court, or who have received a caution, fluctuates between 29-32%. For the sample within this study the reoffending rate is markedly lower (10%). One reason for this could be to do with regret; links have been made between the concept of regret and desistance from crime (Warr 2016). Regret requires the acknowledgement that the cause of an event was due to a person's own actions, and an acceptance of moral responsibility (Camille et al. 2004; Lazare 2004). Coricelli et al. (2007, p.258) state that *"Regret embodies the painful lesson that things would have been better under a different choice, thus inducing a disposition to behavioral change"*. The actions of a number of the participants are consistent with what Warr (2016) describes as a change of heart from offender to desister, which is only possible once a person experiences true regret.

With the exception of Ethan, most of the athletes acknowledged that they regretted their criminal actions to some extent. While Ethan acknowledged that he took things 'too far' in his assault he did not express regret about committing crime:

*"I don't know really, it doesn't bother me, I don't think about it really... I suppose maybe I could have been somewhere else right now but I'm happy where I am now, so it just doesn't bother me at all if I'm honest... it's not something that I think oh I wish that didn't happen"*.

When discussing his drink-driving offence, Harry expressed regret immediately when he began discussing his crime:

*“A couple of things happened, one, I got in to trouble, again, out socially which is really stupid but it was one of those things that I got caught up in... alongside that I was suspended and alongside that, massively regrettably is... I got stopped with too much alcohol. So a combination of being suspended because of an incident outside a pub involving others... and then probably just for being stupid and whatever else, drove a car, got stopped, convicted for drink-driving. Awful, as you can imagine, not that I want any sympathy cause it was my fault”.*

Finn spoke about how his significant regrets have enabled him to help others, and they aid him in advising people against making the same mistakes as him:

*“I beat myself up over these things... like I always say to younger lads now “Don’t have regrets” cause I know what it’s like to have regrets... If I could go right back... if there was a time machine and I could go back, I’d go back to when I was fourteen, and start over again”.*

The expression of regret can also be considered as an additional image repair strategy (Benoit 1995). Hambrick et al. (2015) examined Lance Armstrong’s adoption of image repair strategies and identified that he often utilised retrospective regret as he attempted to justify his behaviours.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has provided an insight into how the participants have learnt to cope with their experiences. Perhaps their need to frame their criminal experiences positively has been essential for them, not only to be able to remain involved in their sports, but also to reconstruct their image following their conviction. Participants were consistent in the way they viewed eventually being caught as a positive, and for some essential. Rather than dwell on the areas of life that had been negatively affected, participants were keen to present themselves in a positive way and explain that their lives are better as a result, and that they had learnt valuable lessons or acquired essential skills. However, despite the way in which they projected the positives, it was clear that the participants had suffered losses, and that many had extreme regrets about the course their lives had taken as a result of the decisions they had made. At points their positive approach appeared at odds with their admission of regret, and clear emotion, which is consistent with the notion that some have chosen to adopt a redemption narrative and create a positive self-story.

## **Chapter 10: Conclusion and Recommendations**

### **Introduction**

This purpose of this final chapter is to demonstrate how the aim and objectives of the thesis have been met, and to provide evidence of how the study has successfully contributed to knowledge within the field of athlete criminality. It is my intent to illustrate the importance of the current study and how the findings can be used to positively influence practice and guide future impactful research.

The aim of this thesis was to explore the experiences of elite male athletes who commit crimes. In order to maintain a focus on the individual journeys of the participants, a qualitative approach was used, thus going against the trend within criminology which often has a focus on quantitative measures of crime (Helfgott 2008). In adopting narrative inquiry, recollections of crimes were provided, enabling an understanding of the whole picture of the offence, within the context of the participants' sport. This thesis fills a gap in research into athlete criminality, focusing on the specifics of the offences themselves, events leading up to and following the offences, and finally considering the role of sport as a potential contributor to criminality (Armstrong and Hodges-Ramon 2015). In order to move beyond anecdotal evidence, the study included analysis focussing on applying criminological perspectives (Di Ronco and Lavoragna 2014) wherever possible. In approaching the research question in this way, I was able to meet the objectives of the thesis and use the data to create a final conceptual framework which provides a number of potential paths to athlete criminality.

### **Emerging Themes**

Five themes emerged from the findings, and each of these spanned many different areas, producing a considerable amount of rich data. While providing support for existing research, a number of the suggestions previously presented for athlete criminality were also reinforced to some degree by the findings in the current study. Additionally, each of the themes offer contributions to existing knowledge.

### **The Sporting Experience**

This study demonstrated the high value that is attached to sport and there was evidence that it provided a sense of belonging (Lambert et al. 2013), and at points acted as a source of focus and deterrent from criminal activity (Nichols 2007). For some, sport provided much more than enjoyment or focus; particularly for those with negative home environments, their sport was their escape. There were signs of participants conforming

to the performance narrative (Douglas and Carless 2006, 2009) in the way they considered success, and described the importance that sport held in their lives.

There was evidence to suggest that violent actions were celebrated within sport, and had a positive effect on performance (Woodman et al. 2009). This study also suggested a link between acts of violence, or loss of control, from participants within their sports when they were younger, and later criminality. Risk-taking appeared to be valued (Langseth 2011) and it was clear that they felt their attitude to risk and acceptance of consequences differed from non-athletes. This study demonstrated that worth was attached to the notion of appearing tough and coping with pain, and these forms of masculine expression through sport were valued (Pappas et al. 2004). The formation of strong bonds with sporting friends (Carr 2012) was clear, and in some cases the compulsion to protect friends, and demonstrate loyalty, resulted in the commission of criminal acts.

This study demonstrated that rejection from sport had a momentous impact on a number of the participants, affecting their sense of identity (Brown and Potrac 2009) and impacting their future behaviours. Those experiencing injury demonstrated negative responses (Brewer 2001) with those whose careers were directly affected, suffering more intensely. Significant injuries incurred through sport had long lasting negative effects, in some cases these resulted in an income stream ending suddenly – which led to criminal acts. There was significant content surrounding sporting transitions, and a number struggled with a loss of structure and self-control (Lavalley and Robinson 2007) resulting in them going off the rails for a period of time. Some suffered extreme reactions to their careers ending (Park et al. 2013) and they were able to make links between this and their criminal behaviours.

There was evidence of participants occupying a 'special population' (Atkinson and Young 2008) where they were protected and entitled. For some this resulted in considering themselves as being above the law (Hartman and Massoglia 2007), and indicating a degree of ego and superiority (Jamieson and Orr 2009). It was also clear that cultural spill over (Baron et al. 1988) played a part in some violent, and criminal, behaviours, where activities that had been condoned within sports transferred negatively to other areas of life (Kudlac 2010).

Research into the language used within deselection of athletes is lacking (Capstick and Trudel 2010; Seifried and Casey 2012) and this study demonstrated how severe the consequences can be when an athlete is left with enduring negative feelings, particularly those that impair their image of masculinity. It was also evident that failing to fit in with

the culture of a sport resulted in a level of detachment and resentment that affected perceptions and morality. While the importance of, and challenges to, integration are documented (Frawley 2015), this study demonstrates the potential impacts when this is not achieved.

Although some work has been done regarding the potentially constraining nature of sport (Nixon 2004; Murphy and Waddington 2007) it was evident that the perceived 'shackles' of sport, and loss of control over their lives, promoted more extreme reactions in terms of eventual criminal behaviour in the participants. Unhappiness in sport was touched upon by Carter and Carter (2007) and it appears that the level of discontent experienced may have contributed in part to participants' criminality. The negative sporting events experienced can be considered contaminating events (McAdams 2001) or points of strain (Agnew 1992) and it was evident there were direct links between these and criminality. Experiences such as injustice, rejection, loss of enjoyment, chastisement, and being treated as a commodity, all impacted in some way on criminal behaviour.

### **The Criminal Experience**

Evidence for the seduction of crime (Katz 1988) was clear, with participants expressing enjoyment in the excitement and thrill of committing crime (Ferrell 1999; Miller 2005). This study provided clear support for the suggestion that athletes seek thrills. Links have been made between the sensation-seeking, hyper physical nature of sport (Hartmann and Massoglia 2007) and criminal behaviours, and in the participants' admission that they enjoyed the 'buzz' of crime, this study corroborates this suggestion. There was evidence to support Crabbe's (2000) proposal that athletes may seek to replicate the thrills they experience in sport, through crime and drugs.

The impact that boredom can have on the commission of criminal acts was reinforced, with crime acting as an antidote (Ferrell 2004). There was evidence of image repair strategies (Allison et al. 2020) being utilised with denial, corrective action, and mortification (Benoit 1995) proving popular. Recollections of crime were rife with expressions of guilt and given the low recidivism rate there was evidence for guilt acting as a protective factor (Tangney et al. 2011). Greed, and the need for money, was an influence for a number of the participants, even when they had made money they continued in their criminal acts to make more (Tunley 2011).

It was evident that criminal convictions resulted in a deterioration of mental health (Sharma et al. 2015), and this was exacerbated for the participants by their fall from grace which was well publicised within their sports. In addition to losing their livelihood,

their ability to perform the sport they loved, and the impact this had on those around them, they also had to deal with their own feelings of failure and guilt, which appeared more intense for those who also had to endure prison sentences. For many, their criminal behaviour changed how those around them viewed them, and for athletes used to being idolised this was particularly painful. Despite some finding prison easy, there was evidence from those serving long sentences, that their experiences were difficult and that this impacted significantly on their wellbeing (Yang et al. 2009). Finally, this study provided evidence of a lack of support from within sporting organisations when crimes were committed. Participants felt that this was largely due to a lack of protocol, and it is clear this fed their feelings of isolation.

### **The Impact of External Influences**

This study echoed those suggesting that sport can be all consuming for school age children (Ryba et al. 2015) with a number of the participants identifying that their sports distracted them from investing in their education. There was evidence that school connectedness serves as a protective factor from deviant and criminal behaviours (Bonell et al. 2016). There were examples of modelling behaviour leading to subsequent violent acts (Hogben and Byrne 1998) and perpetuation of domestic violence (Wallace 2002). Exposure to violence in the home environment was recollected by a number of the participants, and it is possible that this was linked to the social risks (Roy et al. 2007; Wiersma et al. 2009) they took. This study provides support for the suggestion that being a victim of sexual abuse as a child can be linked to latter criminal activity (Chen et al. 2010). There was also evidence to suggest that being a victim of racial discrimination may increase the likelihood of an individual to engage in risky behaviours (Benner et al. 2018).

This study provided numerous examples of the significance of friendships. It was clear that peers impacted on criminal behaviour (Brechtwald and Prinstein 2011; Weerman and Hoeve 2012), with some participants committing crime because it was just what they did routinely when spending time with friends. This study highlighted the intensity of old or childhood friendships, and that this cannot be understated, particularly for athletes. Non-sporting friends represented a much-valued escape from the pressurised environments of sports, and attempts to discourage participants from spending time with these perceived negative influences, only served to drive them close together; this provides a link to a previous suggested cause of athlete criminality, ghetto loyalty (Dohrmann and Evans 2007).

## **The Role of Drugs and Alcohol**

This study provided evidence of drug-taking being normalised (Aldridge et al. 2011; Measham et al. 2011). The participants' perceptions of drugs seemed at odds with legal definitions, they tended to not view Class C drugs as illegal substances, or taking these as illegal activities; at points they were also blasé about Class B drugs. The adolescent age at which drug-taking began was consistent with previous research (Branstetter et al. 2011) and the majority enjoyed the social nature of drug-taking with their peers (Hofford et al. 2020). Evidence indicated that drug-taking increased criminality which is consistent with findings suggesting that there is a link between the two acts (Fridell et al. 2008). Most dealt drugs at a lower level and their activities were consistent with 'social supply' (Parker and Measham 1994; Parker et al. 1998), they tended to be focussed on their own consumption rather than using drugs as a primary income. Those involved in drug-taking went to extreme lengths to keep their behaviours hidden from those within their sports. Schafer (2011) describes drug users as 'wearing a mask', and it was clear in this study, that for some time at least, participants were able to effectively live double lives and still perform in their sports while taking drugs.

It was evident that alcohol was a significant feature in the participants' lives and within their sports which is consistent with findings suggesting that alcohol is the most prevalent drug within sport (O'Brien and Lyons 2000; Cadigan et al. 2013). There were examples of alcohol being normalised within sport and for some it appeared to form part of their athletic identity (Thombs and Hamilton 2002) and served as a way to reinforce their masculinity (Lemle and Mishkind 1989). Alcohol is believed to form a key part in the socialising processes of team sports (O'Brien et al. 2010) and it was visible in this study, that by not engaging in such activities, participants found themselves on the outside of their social groups. Alcohol was used in similar ways to drugs, in part as a coping mechanism (Doumas 2013) and to deal with the reality of career termination (Douglas and Carless 2009). Participants identified that drinking alcohol to excess made them unpredictable, liable to react more recklessly, and often resulted in impaired judgement; their behaviours were consistent with findings that makes the direct correlation between excessive alcohol consumption and crime (Rehm et al. 2009). This study provided evidence of a relationship between heavy drinking and violence, which aligns to the suggestion that alcohol tends to accompany violent crimes (Gorman et al. 2017). It was also clear that alcohol consumption had a negative impact on athletic performance (Shireffs and Maughan 2006; Barnes 2014).

The ways in which the participants misused both alcohol and drugs, supports the previous suggestion that some athletes may be prone to self-destructive behaviours

(Teitelbaum 2005). It was evident that for some, their substance misuse formed part of a period of negative, destructive behaviour which directly impacted on their sports, and influenced their criminal behaviours. Evidence exists to suggest that individuals will engage in drug-taking in order to cope with emotional pain (Cleary 2012) and it was clear from this study that both drugs and alcohol, provided a solution for elements of stress. Finally, drug-taking was directly linked to feelings of rejection from sport, to block out feelings of inadequacy.

### **The Journey – Turning my Life Around**

This study provided evidence of the type of redemption narratives that have proved popular with offenders in the past (Maruna 2004) and there were examples of the participants constructing positive illusions (Aspden and Hayward 2015) in order to move beyond the label of criminal. While redemption narratives have been utilised by athletes previously (Papathomas 2016), it was clear that creating an image of themselves responding positively, overcoming adversity (Wadey et al. 2019), dealing with hostility and defying the odds (Presser 2009) was a key feature in the stories of elite athletes who have committed crimes. Participants made it clear that in most cases their lives were better than they were before their criminal incidents. There were examples of participants framing negatives as positives and opportunities to learn from, which is consistent with the findings of Fletcher and Sarkar (2012) who highlight the tendency of elite athletes to see stressors as prospects for growth. For some, the events that unfolded as a consequence of their criminality resulted in opportunities arising that would not have been possible previously, and for a number there were improvements in their personal relationships as a result of taking responsibility for their nefarious behaviours.

It was clear that participants saw value in speaking about their experiences to others at risk from criminality, thus emphasising the value of peer mentors (Gonzalez et al. 2019). A great deal of regret was expressed during the interviews, which may have been an element of image repair strategy (Benoit 1995) but when considering the low recidivism rate of the sample, offers support for those who make links between regret and desistance from crime (Warr 2016).

### **Objectives Revisited**

#### **Objective 1: To investigate the reasons why athletes commit crimes.**

This study illustrates that a multitude of reasons exist for athlete criminality. Being under the influence of drugs or alcohol resulted in extreme behaviours, or errors in judgement, with anger at the police, and crime as an act of rebellion also evident. A tendency to react aggressively as an element of personality, and crime as a means to alleviate



boredom were significant, with some struggling to fill the void that was left when they were not competing or training. The sensation of crime was clearly a factor which while potentially not an initial motivator, was a reason for offences to be repeated. The need for money, and development of greed, were cited as reasons, as were periods of self-destructive behaviour. Repressed trauma from sexual abuse was also a contributory factor. Negative sporting experiences proved to be the catalyst for some criminal behaviours, and while not a direct reason, it was evident they played a contributory role. Experiences of rejection, failure and injustice provided sources of strain and ultimately set participants on a path towards criminality.

**Objective 2: To identify behaviours and circumstances within an athlete's life that may lead to the commission of a crime, with a focus on the role of sport.**

This study shows that while sport provided positives, it also played a contributory role in the crimes committed. It was clear that drug and alcohol misuse was in part influenced by involvement in sport, such as through the culture of drinking, or as a result of negative sporting experiences. There was evidence that negative sporting experiences impacted in some way on the criminal decisions of the participants. Loyalty to team-mates was considered an essential element of sport, and on occasion this desire to protect team mates resulted in criminal behaviours. Sport played an integral role in the finances of the participants' lives, and introduced them to the feeling of making money, igniting the desire to seek further opportunities to enable financial gain which were in some cases criminal. Some struggled with the restrictive and constraining nature of sport, resulting in them pushing against boundaries, and eventually committing crimes.

**Objective 3: To develop an understanding of the impact that involvement with crime has on an athlete's life.**

It was evident that crime impacted the participants in three main areas: their sport, their mental health, and their general day to day lives. In terms of their sports in the most extreme cases participants' sporting careers ended. Several of the participants were sold or transferred by managers as a direct response to their crimes, and there were practical issues of attempts to play and train while on electronic tag post release from prison. Crime had a negative impact on mental health, often as punishment coincided with loss of sports and livelihoods; those who were sent to prison explained how they battled periods of intense darkness. In terms of their general lives, crime placed considerable strain on personal relationships, isolating participants from family members.

## Conceptual Framework

In order to meet Objective 4, a conceptual framework for athlete criminality was developed, illustrating a variety of contributory factors to athletes committing crimes, and providing a holistic understanding of athlete criminality. The framework presents potential paths to criminality for male elite athletes: not all of the elements of the framework need to be traversed to progress to criminal activity.

The conceptual framework shown in Figure 10.1 builds on that presented by Sheppard-Marks et al. (2020), and encapsulates elements of Miller's (2005) Edgework Model of Delinquency, demonstrating that, much like juveniles, athletes may seek edgework activities in response to their position in society. When considering the experiences of the participants there appeared to be somewhat of a middle ground between their general behaviour and their criminal acts. While some clearly progressed directly to crime, others appeared to commit crime as a sort of 'fall out' from their social behaviour or as a consequence of the influence of sport. **While edgework has been used previously to examine behaviours within high-risk sport and also criminal activity, it has not previously been offered as an explanation for athletes committing crime. Using emergent themes<sup>5</sup>, and building on suggestions from the literature with examples from the current participants<sup>6</sup>, edgework is presented as a possible explanation for the criminal behaviours of some of the athletes in this sample.** The use of edgework as a guiding principle is a subjective interpretation, but given the key emergent themes from this study, I felt that the data led me to consider the pursuit of edgework as a potential factor – with criminal acts occurring as a consequence of edgework behaviour.

## Edgework, Crime and Sport

In the context of this current research, and exploring edgework as an explanation of athlete criminality, the concept of edgework is particularly applicable given its historic use in both sport and crime. Edgework was originally proposed as an account of voluntary risk-taking (Lyng 1990) and describes how individuals negotiate boundaries of order and chaos (McGovern and McGovern 2011; Newmahr 2011) in activities where threat exists (Lyng 1990). Far from being a way to describe all risk, edgework is distinct and occurs for the thrill of the action (Newmahr 2011). Edgework is characterised by risk and control (Lyng 1990), specifically the ability of an individual to effectively maintain control in a situation that most people would consider uncontrollable (McGovern and McGovern 2011). Individuals may feel exhilaration, omnipotence and an exaggerated

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<sup>5</sup> Restrictive nature of sport, need for excitement, risk appetite, alcohol and drugs, impact of social influence.

<sup>6</sup> Alienation, terminal adolescence.

sense of self (Lyng 1990), and for many, the edgework experience itself provides enough incentive for a person to engage in high-risk behaviours (Bengtsson 2012).

The concept of edgework was born within the context of high-risk sports. As such, its applicability to the risk behaviour of athletes is clear. Various extreme sports have been investigated including white water rafting (Holyfield et al. 2005); base jumping (Ferrell et al. 2001; Forsey 2012); and white-water kayaking (Fletcher 2008). In addition to sport, edgework theory has been, and continues to be, applied to a vast spectrum of contexts including: aid work (Roth 2015); S&M (Newmahr 2011); finance (Smith 2005); women in violent relationships (Rajah 2007). Edgework has also been offered as an explanation for criminal and deviant activity (Miller 2005; Anderson and Brown 2010; McGovern and McGovern 2011). Lyng (1993) acknowledges the potential of edgework to explain why individuals commit crime. In effect, crime is essentially a form of high-risk edgework. Crime shares many features of edgework behaviour, namely the chaotic and uncertain circumstances that many offenders will navigate. The application of edgework to criminal activity acknowledges the notion that the criminal experience can be exciting and pleasurable (Lyng 2005; Bengtsson 2012), which was evident in this study. Crime, like edgework, can offer a form of escape for people, and act as a form of cultural resistance and source of exhilaration (Anderson and Brown 2010).

### **Adolescents and Athletes**

In the same way that adolescents are constrained, controlled and ordered by others, athletes too are susceptible to feeling a lack of power and autonomy in their lives (Connor 2009), as was evident in this study. Edgework has been utilised to explore juvenile delinquency, with Miller (2005) advocating its power to explain the intricacies of offending behaviour in adolescents. Adolescents may be particularly susceptible to the seductive nature of edgework experiences, as they often carry a strong sense of immortality (Lyng 1990). Adolescents are also susceptible to anomie, as they may feel isolated and detached from the society to which they belong (Miller 2005).

Teitelbaum (2005) claims that some athletes are so indulged that they maintain a state of '**terminal adolescence**', never growing up because they don't have to. Participants in this study demonstrated features of 'spoiled athlete syndrome' (Ortiz 2004) in the ways they expected their problems to be taken care of for them, and the manner in which they felt certain rules did not apply to them; as such athletes may be highly susceptible to temptation, just as adolescents can be. Furthermore, through being sheltered in their sporting world, athletes may find it hard to identify social boundaries (Kudlac 2010), and this may contribute to feelings of **alienation**.

It was evident that the participants in this study demonstrated immaturity at times, particularly when discussing their friendships, and the roles that friends played in their commission of crime. It is believed that by the age of eighteen, resistance to peer influence is fully developed and does not increase beyond this age (Steinberg and Monahan 2007). Therefore, it was surprising to hear adult men speak about committing crimes to protect friends at an age where they might be expected to be sufficiently emotionally developed to resist the influence of peers (Collins and Steinberg 2006). There is no shortage of evidence for the importance of friendships and gravitas of peer influence and acceptance during adolescence (Weiss and Smith 2002; Steinberg and Monahan 2007) and in many circumstances, the way the athletes talked about their friends as adults echoed the ways in which an adolescent would view their friends.

### **Paths to Edgework and Crime**

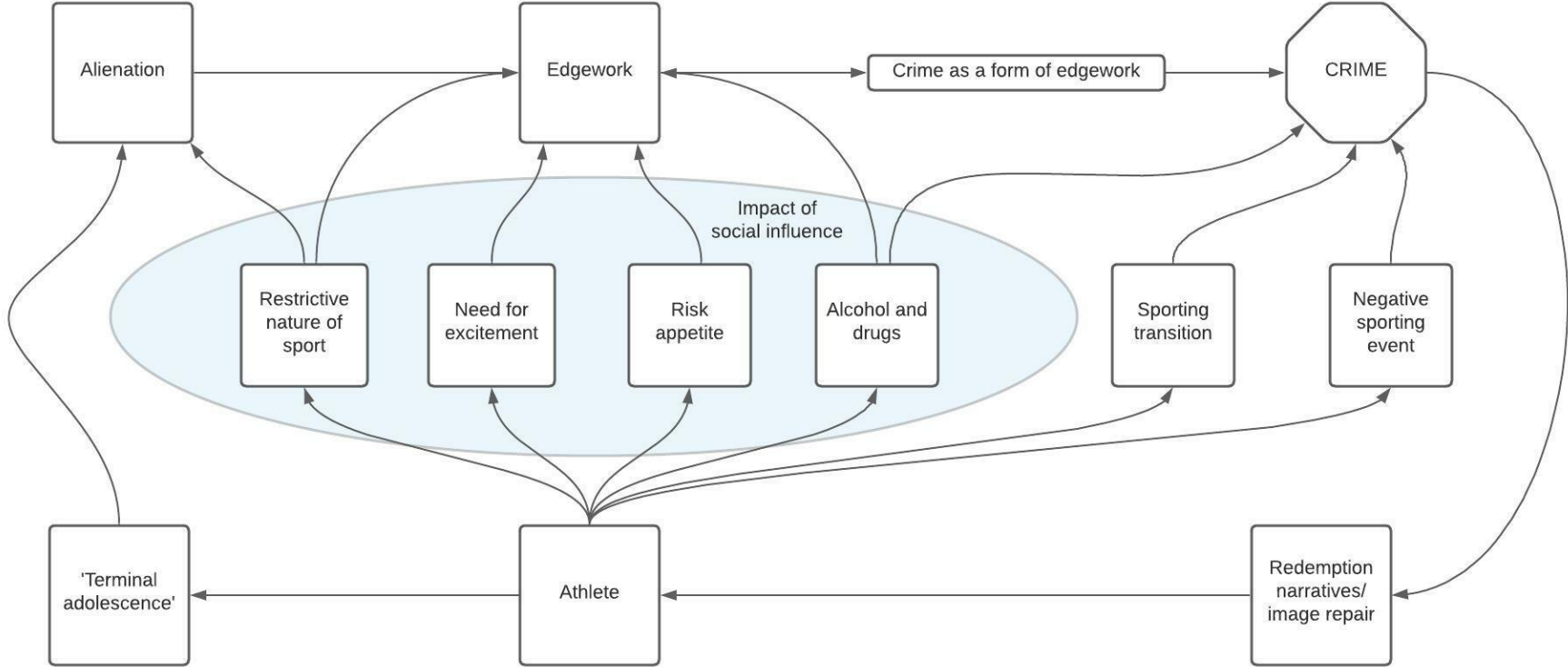
The conceptual framework works in two ways, firstly by presenting potential paths to edgework for male elite athletes, acknowledging that crime may be committed as a form of edgework. Edgework experiences allow individuals to feel a sense of control in their ordinary, largely constrained, lives (McGovern and McGovern 2011), and athletes may pursue edgework activities as they attempt to challenge and escape from the **restrictive nature of sport** and its' constraining structures (Lyng 2005). Seeking edgework experiences may be a compensatory response to the limited influence people have over their routine existence (Anderson and Brown 2010). Participants demonstrated a **need for excitement**. In certain circumstances, an athlete may view intense and thrilling edgework activities, and ultimately crime, as an alternative avenue to fulfil their need for excitement.

Participants within this study showed an awareness of, and acceptance of, risk. Their increased **risk-appetite** may have increased their likelihood to pursue edgework activities, with their crimes occurring as a form of this 'risky behaviour' (Dhami and Mandel 2012). This study demonstrated that some of the athletes were significantly influenced by friends and teammates in negative ways. Whilst friendships can be sustaining, for some athletes, **the impact of social influence** may be negative and place them in situations where edgework, and criminal, activities are pursued more freely. While **alcohol and drug use** clearly has a social element, and can lead an athlete towards edgework activities, substance misuse can also act as a route to crime directly.

Secondly, the framework illustrates how **sporting transitions** and **negative sporting events** may conspire to lead an athlete directly towards crime. Finally, the framework

demonstrates that subsequent to their criminal activity, athletes have proclivity to reframing their experiences in positive ways, indulging in *image repair* strategies and adopting *redemption narratives*.

Figure 10.1. A Conceptual Framework of the Experience of Athlete Criminality



## **Mapping Participant Experience**

In order to demonstrate the applicability of the conceptual framework, one participant's experience of committing crime as an elite athlete will be mapped. While each of the participant's experiences can be applied, George's map across a number of elements in the framework. While he loved his sport, George found the restrictive nature of professional football difficult, and he often found himself on the outside of his sporting culture which resulted in feelings of alienation. Within a social setting George experimented with drugs and began to pursue edgework activities with friends, ultimately committing crime to satisfy his need for these drugs. George identified that he enjoyed the feeling of committing crime and taking risks, and crime acted as the source of excitement that his sport had previously provided. George experienced a negative sporting event, reacting in an extreme way to his deselection, and struggled to find structure in his life when he transitioned from a professional to a semi-professional sporting environment. Finally, when describing his experiences, George adopted a redemption narrative, emphasising how much better his life was as a consequence of his crimes, and recovery.

## **Implications for Practice**

Criminal experiences were clearly traumatic for the participants in this study and had significant, and in many cases enduring, impacts on their lives. It is therefore essential to consider different methods that could reduce the likelihood of future athletes committing crimes. The implications for practice resulting from the study are based around a duty of care towards athletes; it is essential that sporting organisations support the wellbeing of their athletes and that measures are put in place to ensure they are protected (Kavanagh et al. 2021). It is also essential that consideration is given to *how* duty of care is achieved (Kavanagh et al. 2020), especially when an athlete may find themselves expelled from sport as a result of their criminality. When considering that sport may be in part accountable for their behaviours, it makes it all the more important that duty of care is considered for athletes who find themselves in this position.

Sporting organisations should consider harnessing the experiences of athletes who have previously committed crimes to enable future athletes to learn from their mistakes. The value of peer mentors (Gonzalez et al. 2019) cannot be understated, and enabling those who have offended the potential to 'give back' to their sports also provides convicted athletes with a focus, and possibly future opportunities.

Support through transitions has received considerable research attention, and it is evident that this is no less important for athletes who leave sport under a cloud. The Duty

of Care in Sport Review (Grey-Thompson 2017) identifies that all athletes should be linked to a sport's welfare department to ensure they are supported and able to retain links to their sport; consideration needs to be given about how this is done for athletes who could be perceived as having essentially sabotaged their own athletic futures. Failure to support an athlete who has committed a crime may well compound the issues they face as a consequence of their criminality. The impact of a loss of finance was significant for the participants. While Dual Career support (Grey-Thompson 2017) will go some way to help mitigate this, transitioning athletes need enduring support to secure legitimate, and legal, employment.

The participants struggled significantly with their mental health, either as a consequence of their criminal activity, or due to events occurring within their sports. Sebbens et al. (2016) identified that while coaches and support staff are best placed to spot the signs of poor mental health among athletes, they are not required to complete formal mental health training, and while the Mental Health Strategy (2018) created a vision to create a positive mental health environment for high performance sport, the impact of these ventures are not yet visible (Kavanagh et al. 2021). While direction has been given to NGBs to strengthen links with mental health organisations, it is not clear how this will be applied to those athletes who commit crimes; evidence from this study suggests ongoing support for athletes is vital if they are to recover from these events. It is essential that athletes who commit crimes are supported, and protocols are put in place that focus on potential recovery rather than the avoidance, shame and rejection largely experienced by the current participants.

Friendships played an integral role in the lives of the participants, consideration needs to be given to the importance of friends external to sport, rather than these being viewed simply as sources of potential distraction. It is evident that many young athletes live in worlds where there is ongoing access to criminal networks, and sporting organisations need to ensure they develop a coherent picture of the backgrounds, and social pressures, that are inescapable for many athletes.

While highlighted as an area for development (Grey-Thompson 2017), this study further underlines the need for consideration of language used during deselection. While transparency of selection criteria will help, the role of those delivering such information is vital, and coaches must not underestimate their part in influencing an athletes' development (Fraser-Thomas and Côté 2009). This study demonstrates that if handled poorly, rejection from a team, or non-selection, can result in a 'perfect storm' prompting negative self-image, a loss of focus, lack of structure, limited money, and a reduction of



social networks which results in an athlete being vulnerable to crime. Additionally, Grey-Thomson (2017) advises that the Government considers an insurance scheme for athletes that will cover catastrophic injury; had such a scheme been in place when Joshua became injured it is highly likely that he would not have had to turn to criminal means to survive financially.

The prevalence of drug and alcohol misuse was significant in this study, as was the influence this had on participants committing crimes. Education around drugs and alcohol is essential, and further usage of peer mentors in this area would be effective. There was evidence of an ambivalent attitude towards the use of class B and C drugs, and the negative impact these could have on their careers, or how these could result in a criminal record. Education should also be extended to coaches as it was clear that participants were adept at hiding their substance misuse.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

In conjunction with the implications for practice, this study suggests that the area of athlete criminality is a phenomenon that requires greater research attention. Given the gap in knowledge that the current study fills, and the dearth of research focusing on the athlete experience of crime, a number of implications for future research have been identified. While extensive efforts were made to obtain women in the original sample, the area of female athlete criminality was not probed. In my attempts to ensure the sample was reflective of UK criminality, I initially attempted to ensure that 25% of the sample were women. It was evident from discussions I had with gatekeepers at the start of the research journey that much female athlete criminality stemmed from gang activity however, despite being contacted by one woman, and being aware of a number of others, it was not possible to pursue interviews with these athletes. Gaining an understanding of female experiences of athlete criminality would enable a fuller picture to be produced regarding the reasons behind committing crime, the influence of sport on criminal behaviours, and the impact crimes have on female athletes' lives.

While the participants spoke about their prison experiences, it would be valuable to hear further from athletes who have been incarcerated to see how they coped in prison, and how they were able to be reintegrated into society. It was suggested that athletic experiences helped participants to cope in prison, and there would be merit in exploring this further. As previously stated 90% of the current sample have not committed further offences, but it would be useful to know the recidivism rates of athletes on a larger scale. Understanding the likelihood of reoffending, and further investigation of those athletes

that do, would further enhance measures that can be taken to reduce offending in the first place.

Although not directly related to athlete criminality, it would be illuminating to further examine the influence of language used in deselection. It was evident in this study that the implications of language are important, especially in dialogue with young athletes at a vulnerable stage in their development. The impact of selection and discourse surrounding this critical aspect of performance environments can be significant, and as a former athlete I am only too aware of the impact that some of my 'rejection' conversations had on me, and also on peers. Finally, an expansion on the significance of edgework on athlete criminality (Sheppard-Marks et al. 2020), and the long-term impacts of contaminating events on those who not only remain in sport, but who end their careers as a consequence, are worthy of further exploration.

### **Reflections on the Research Journey**

Throughout my research journey my interest in the subject area has never waned and I have considered myself lucky to be able to conduct research in such a unique and fascinating sphere. I was privileged to hear the stories of athletes who found themselves as outcasts from their sports, either permanently or temporarily, and I was inspired by some of their attempts to use their experiences to help others. Theirs are the stories that have previously gone unheard and I was honoured to help them unpack their behaviours and rationalise some of their decisions. While all of the interviews were insightful, it was particularly moving for me to hear Finn explain that speaking to me enabled him to see that not all of his actions had been selfish, and perhaps his desire to provide for others and not just simply a deep-seated greed, had influenced his criminality. I appreciate that in speaking with me, the participants placed a great deal of trust in me to represent their voice and accurately portray their stories: this is something I have taken great pleasure in doing.

By consciously shelving my previous knowledge and experiences, I found I was able to start viewing crime in a completely different way. I had previously only been involved in dealing with the outcomes of crime, and never taken the time to really consider the person behind the act. I never saw motives as anything beyond anger, greed or revenge. I saw crime as something to be processed, something to be solved and finalised. This study allowed me to stop and consider crime as a journey, a minefield of decisions, some conscious and some seemingly latent. It allowed me to get to know the people behind the criminal act, to see them as a person, an athlete, and someone not so different to me. It allowed me to see that there was so much more to a criminal than a criminal act.

It closed the gulf that had always existed between the criminal and me and I was able to consider how they formed their decisions, how they had come to pursue the paths they did, and how I had been fortunate as an athlete to not take the same route as them.

As a researcher I believe I became more patient, and more appreciative of the need to let the data guide me. I stopped trying to find solutions and found comfort in the subjective nature of reality – I fully conceded that I would never have all the answers and I did not need them. This thesis gave me a chance to appreciate the reality of interpretivism and not just view the advantages on paper. I increasingly saw that by giving these people a voice others would also have a chance to understand lived experiences from the participants' perspective, and hopefully there will also be a shift in the way that other people view individuals who take the 'wrong' path.

This PhD journey has been eventful. It has been interspersed with two babies, a career change, and a global pandemic which required me to master the art of juggling home-schooling with a full time job. At no point however, did I consider stopping; the lure of being able to complete what I had started was always too great. I am hopeful that this research will have a positive impact and future athletes are able to learn from the mistakes and experiences of others, and if an athlete does commit a crime, that they are supported through the process and beyond.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A – Participant Information Sheet

#### The title of the research project

An exploratory study of the relationship between crime and sport.

You are being invited to take part in a research project. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

#### What is the purpose of the project?

The project you have been asked to participate in will form the basis of my PhD. This project aims to examine the role sport can have in criminal activity, and the relationship between crime and sport. This project is interested in your experiences as a sports person, and also the criminal experiences you have had. The aim of the study is to develop a better understanding of sports people, and why some commit crimes. The purpose of the research is to ensure that sports people are fully supported at all times, and if necessary to recommend changes to ensure this support is improved. The duration of this project is anticipated to be 4 years.

#### Why have I been chosen?

You have been chosen to participate in this project as you have played sport at a serious level, and have at some point during or after your sporting career, committed a crime.

#### Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep (and be asked to sign a consent form) and you can still withdraw at any time without it affecting you in any way. You do not have to give a reason. Your data can be withdrawn until the point of transcription and anonymisation of the audio recordings.

#### What do I have to do?

Your participation will take the form of an interview with me; this interview will last as long as you wish to speak to me. I may wish to speak to you on a later date however, it is entirely up to you if you chose to meet with me on a subsequent occasion. We will meet at a mutually convenient location, where possible I will travel to a location in the vicinity of you so you do not need to incur travel expenses. The interview will consist of a number of open questions; I am interested in hearing your story and as such will keep interruptions to a minimum. I will be speaking to a number of other individuals who have also competed in sport at a serious level and who have committed crimes.

As previously stated I am interested in hearing about your sporting journey, and where your criminal activity fits in with this. **Please only discuss with me any spent convictions**, as a researcher I am obligated to report any new crimes you reveal to me.

I work as a Lecturer at Bournemouth University. I have studied both Sport Science and Criminology and previously served within the Military for 9 years. This research project is supported by Bournemouth University.

### **What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?**

You will dictate the tone of the interview and as such do not need to speak about anything you are uncomfortable with. You have the right to stop the interview at any time if you are feeling at all distressed or are not comfortable with sharing certain elements of your story.

### **What are the possible benefits of taking part?**

Whilst there are no immediate benefits for those people participating in the project, it is hoped that this work will improve the understanding of sports people who have been through similar experiences as you. Fundamentally it is hoped that gaining a greater understanding of the relationship between sport and crime will enable a greater level of support to be offered to sports people to either support them after the commission of a crime, or even to prevent criminal activity from occurring in the first place.

### **What will happen to the results of the research project?**

All the information that I collect about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential. You will not be able to be identified in any reports or publications.

The information gained from you will be used within my PhD and may be used in a number of academic papers - at no point will any of your personal details be revealed.

The audio recordings of the interviews made during this research will be used only for analysis; all audio records will be stored securely and will be destroyed once transcribed (at which point the data will be anonymous). Data will be kept securely for a period of 5 years after which it will be destroyed.

### **Contact for further information**

My contact details are:

Lucy Sheppard-Marks

[lshppard@bournemouth.ac.uk](mailto:lshppard@bournemouth.ac.uk) or [i7692638@bournemouth.ac.uk](mailto:i7692638@bournemouth.ac.uk)

01202 961261

If you have any complaints with this process please contact:

Professor Stephen Page

[spage@bournemouth.ac.uk](mailto:spage@bournemouth.ac.uk)

Faculty of Management,

Bournemouth University,

Talbot Campus, Poole. BH12 5BB.

Dorset. United Kingdom.

01202 962306

Thank you for taking the time to read this information, please keep a copy of this information sheet, in addition to a copy of your signed consent form.

## Appendix B – Informed Consent

### Consent Form

**Full title of project:** An exploratory study of the relationship between crime and sport.

**Name, position and contact details of researcher:** Lucy Sheppard-Marks –  
Lecturer Sport Management – Bournemouth University –  
[lsheppard@bournemouth.ac.uk](mailto:lsheppard@bournemouth.ac.uk)

**Please Initial Here**

I confirm that I have read and understood the participant information sheet for the above research project and have had the opportunity to ask questions.	
I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw up to the point of anonymisation of the data without giving reason and without there being any negative consequences. In addition, should I not wish to answer any particular question(s), I am free to decline.	
I give permission for members of the research team to have access to my anonymised responses. I understand that my name will not be linked with the research materials, and I will not be identified or identifiable in the report or reports that result from the research.	
I agree to take part in the above research project.	
I understand that the information I provide may be used within research subsequent, or alongside, the current research project.	

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Name of Participant   Date   Signature

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Name of Researcher   Date   Signature