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'The Dividing Line': conceptualising bullying, banter and teasing in professional football [abstract only]

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The purpose of this presentation is to explore how professional footballers conceptualise the terms bullying, banter and teasing. More specifically, this presentation seeks to explore the extent to which bullying, banter and teasing are conceptually distinct within professional football.

The study adopted a phenomenological approach, which focused on the essences of the participants' perceptions and experiences. This approach was selected due to its aim of unearthing individual conceptualisations of these terms, as well as its ability to reflect the convergences and divergences both within and across the participants' accounts.

Guided by Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) individual semi-structured interviews (*M*Duration = 44.10, *SD* =10.81) were conducted with 18 professional footballers (*M*age=19.83, *SD*=2.96) from three Premier League and Championship football clubs. Given IPA research calls for a homogenous sample, a purposive approach was adopted to recruit the study's participants.

The findings from this study revealed several key superordinate themes in relation to the dividing line between bullying, banter and teasing. These themes included 'perception', 'intentionality', 'detecting the line', 'masculinity' and 'bantering'.

Although the findings support parts of the existing literature on the differences between bullying, banter and teasing, they also demonstrate how these concepts are nuanced by individual differences and context. From an applied perspective, these findings highlight the need for coaches, players and football clubs more broadly, to be aware of the individualistic nature of perception in relation to bullying, banter and teasing. Moreover, in places they challenge the typically positive view of the concept of banter in this environment.