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*An Exploration of Professional Coaches' Well-being Experiences within Football Club Contexts*

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**An Exploration of Professional Coaches' Well-being  
Experiences Within Football Club Contexts**

Andrew John Higham

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of

Sheffield Hallam University

for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

August 2024

## Candidate Declaration

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I hereby declare that:

1. I have not been enrolled for another award of the University, or other academic or professional organisation, whilst undertaking my research degree.
2. None of the material contained in the thesis has been used in any other submission for an academic award.
3. I am aware of and understand the University's policy on plagiarism and certify that this thesis is my own work. The use of all published or other sources of material consulted have been properly and fully acknowledged.
4. The work undertaken towards the thesis has been conducted in accordance with the SHU Principles of Integrity in Research and the SHU Research Ethics Policy.
5. The word count of the thesis is 107,202.

**Signature:**

Name	Andrew John Higham
Date	August 2024
Award	Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)
Research Institute	Academy of Sport and Physical Activity: Sport and Human Performance
Director of Studies	Dr Joseph Stone

## Abstract

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This thesis explores how coaches experience and make sense of well-being within men's professional football clubs. **Chapter One** introduces and provides a structural overview of the programme of work. **Chapter Two** presents a literature review which highlights the necessity for a (bio)ecological and qualitative exploration of coaches' well-being experiences and sensemaking. **Chapter Three** explores how coaches experience and make sense of well-being within the context of football using an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) approach. Participant narratives are harnessed and presented to reflect their well-being experiences and sensemaking capabilities. This chapter is important as it provides the first detailed exploration as to how football coaches make sense of and experience well-being without proxy constructs, concepts, and/or measurements such as, but not limited to, stress, burnout and coping. **Chapter Four** advances the IPA approach by adapting and applying it to coaching video docuseries, utilising them 'as a window' through which professional head coaches' well-being experiences could be captured. This novel approach accesses a seldom heard group in professional head coaches and explores their well-being experiences throughout a season illuminating temporal fluctuations and contextual demands. **Chapter Five** builds upon four and three by exploring how football coaches experience and make sense of well-being throughout a season using a combined longitudinal IPA and auto-driven photo-elicitation approach. This chapter is pertinent as it is the first to explore and enrich coaches sensemaking throughout a season using a photo-elicitation approach. Considering men's professional football contexts are replete with masculine cultural norms, such as suppressing vulnerability and emotive expressive behaviours, chapter five uses visual stimuli to counteract such norms and harness richer and more open narratives. **Chapter Six** extends and complements chapter five by adopting a similar methodological approach but with a sole woman coaching in a men's professional football club. Chapter six is the first to offer significant insight into a woman's lived experiences of well-being while coaching in a men's professional football club. **Chapter Seven** offers the participants' and author's reflections on the implementation of an auto-driven photo-elicitation approach throughout a football season. The reflections illustrate how the photo-elicitation approach inadvertently acted as a well-being management tool. Specifically, reflections are made on how participation in the study and the use of visual stimuli contributed to improved self-awareness and well-being management. **Chapter Eight** more broadly provides reflections about the general programme of research and how undertaking a PhD which focuses on well-being has directly shaped the author's understanding of the construct. **Chapter Nine** then concludes the programme of work in the form of an epilogue which addresses contributions to well-being theory and research, advances in methodological approaches exploring well-being, applied research and practice implications, strengths of the thesis, and areas for future research development.

## Acknowledgements

---

It is hard to know where to begin as there are so many people who have supported me throughout this three-and-a-half-year PhD journey, but I will try my best to pay tribute to those who have made this experience enjoyable and achievable. Firstly, I would like to thank my research supervisory team (or the ‘Triple J Dream Team’). Associate Professor Joseph Stone, Dr James Rumbold, and Dr James Newman, thank you for being the best supervisory team a PhD student could have asked for. You have given me your expertise, guidance, feedback, and what I consider the most valuable of all, your time. You have supported me during spikes of motivation and impulsivity, as well as through trenches of demotivation and uncertainty. From being taught at MSc level, to then teaching alongside you, I have enjoyed it all. You have truly made this PhD scholarship three of the best years of my life (the last six months have been a slog on my behalf) and you have contributed enormously to my academic development and competence as a researcher. I would also like to thank Sheffield Hallam University for enabling me to share and present my work around the world.

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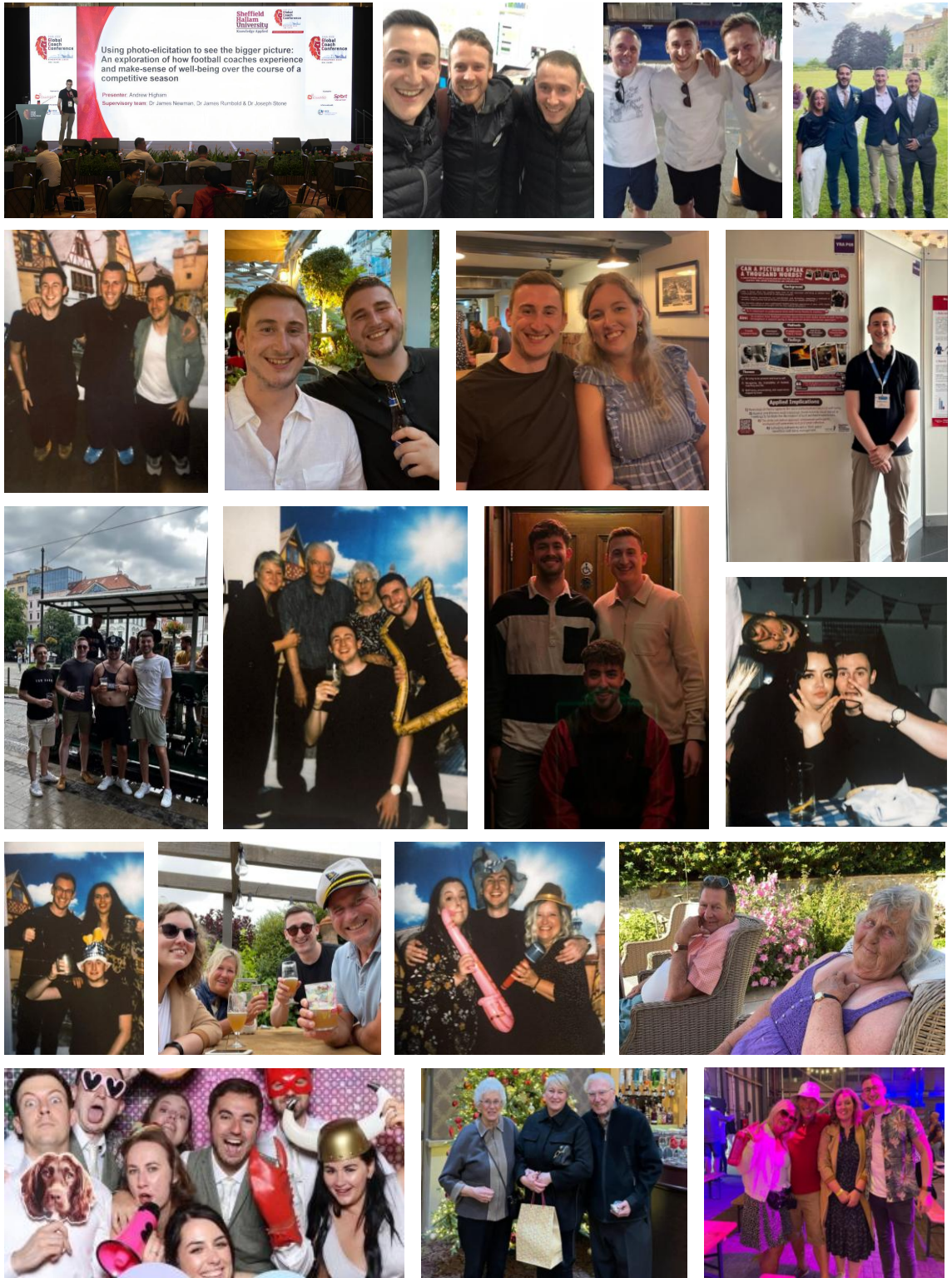
To my immediate family, Dad and Karen thank you for believing in me, checking in on me, and topping my drinks up. You have shown genuine interest in my endeavours and supported me from the very start of my PhD which I am grateful for. From trips ‘down south’ or the multiple holidays away, thank you for making this challenging and stressful period of my life more fun and actioned packed. In these final stages of the PhD, I want to especially thank you Dad for your motivating words of “Don’t forget, when you achieve your PhD, you’ll be in the top 2%.” To Bertie and my late Nan, Audrey. Thank

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All my love, Andy.





In keeping with this thesis' use of images to share lived experiences, it seems fitting to share some images of the PhD journey and of those who have supported me during it.

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## **List of Abbreviations**

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<b>ACT</b>	Acceptance-Commitment-Therapy
<b>AoN</b>	All or Nothing
<b>CBT</b>	Cognitive Behavioural Therapies
<b>CDC</b>	Centres for Disease Control and Prevention
<b>CPD</b>	Continuing Professional Development
<b>EFL</b>	English Football League
<b>EPL</b>	English Premier League
<b>FA</b>	Football Association
<b>GETs</b>	Group Experiential Themes
<b>IPA</b>	Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis
<b>JD-R</b>	Job Demand-Resource
<b>LCA</b>	League Coaches' Association
<b>LIPA</b>	Longitudinal Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis
<b>LMA</b>	League Managers' Association
<b>LMM</b>	Living Match by Match
<b>MAC</b>	Mindfulness-Acceptance-Commitment
<b>MBI</b>	Maslach Burnout Inventory
<b>MI</b>	Motivational Interviewing
<b>NGBs</b>	National Governing Bodies

<b>PERMA</b>	Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishment
<b>PERMA+4</b>	PERMA+ Physical Health, Economic Security, Mindset, and Environment
<b>PETs</b>	Personal Experiential Themes
<b>PFA</b>	Players' Football Association
<b>PPCT</b>	Process-Person-Context-Time
<b>PWB</b>	Psychological Well-Being
<b>SDT</b>	Self-Determination Theory
<b>SWB</b>	Subjective Well-Being
<b>UEFA</b>	Union of European Football Associations
<b>WHO</b>	World Health Organisation
<b>WSL</b>	Women's Super League

## Research Outputs During Scholarship

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### Thesis Peer-Reviewed Journal Articles:

Higham, A. J., Newman, J. A., Rumbold, J. L., & Stone, J. A. (2023a). You wouldn't let your phone run out of battery: an interpretative phenomenological analysis of male professional football coaches' well-being. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*, 16(2), 213–227. <https://doi.org/kvd9>

Higham, A. J., Rumbold, J. L., Newman, J. A., & Stone, J. A. (2023b). Using video docuseries to explore male professional football head coaches' well-being experiences throughout a season. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, 69, 102488. <https://doi.org/kshj>

Higham, A. J., Rumbold, J. L., Newman, J. A., & Stone, J. A. (Under Review). "Being a woman in the men's game, it's brutal": A longitudinal photo-elicitation exploration of a woman football coach's well-being experiences. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*.

### Additional Peer-Reviewed Journal Articles:

Higham, A. J., Newman, J. A., Stone, J. A., & Rumbold, J. L. (2021). Coaches' experiences of morality in English professional football environments: Recommendations for creating a moral atmosphere. *International Sport Coaching Journal*, 9(2), 211-221. <https://doi.org/gn943j>

Newman, J. A., Lickess, A., & Higham, A. J. (2024). Fighting the system: Psychology consultants' experiences of working with cases of maltreatment in sport. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*, 36(2), 210-230. <https://doi.org/mmc5>

## **Presentations and Conference Proceedings:**

Higham, A. J. (2022, September). *Put your head in a tumble dryer and f\*\*king turn it on*: A phenomenological exploration of male professional football coaches' well-being. Northern Research and Applied Practice Showcase, Leeds Beckett University, Leeds, UK.

Higham, A. J., Newman, J. A., Rumbold, J. L., & Stone, J. A. (2023, December). *Using photo-elicitation to see the bigger picture: An exploration of how football coaches experience and make-sense of well-being over the course of a competitive season*. 14th International Council for Coaching Excellence (ICCE) Global Coach Conference, Marina Bay, Singapore.

Higham, A. J., Newman, J. A., Rumbold, J. L., & Stone, J. A. (2024, June). *Reflections on how an online longitudinal photo-elicitation approach aided football coaches' well-being awareness and management*. 6th International Coaching Conference (CRiC), Northumbria University, Newcastle, UK.

Higham, A. J., Newman, J. A., Rumbold, J. L., & Stone, J. A. (2024, July). *Can a picture speak a thousand words? A longitudinal photo-elicitation exploration of football coaches' well-being experiences and sensemaking*. 17<sup>th</sup> European Congress of Sport and Exercise Psychology (FEPSAC), Innsbruck, Austria.

Newman, J. A., Lickess, A., & Higham, A. J. (2024, July). *Tackling cases of maltreatment in sport: The experiences and recommendations of sport psychology consultants*. 17<sup>th</sup> European Congress of Sport and Exercise Psychology (FEPSAC), Innsbruck, Austria.

### **Research Outputs via Media:**

Higham, A. (2024, January 31). *Jürgen Klopp's decision to leave Liverpool may herald a new era for wellbeing in football.* The Conversation. <https://theconversation.com/jurgen-klopps-decision-to-leave-liverpool-may-herald-a-new-era-for-wellbeing-in-football-222170>

Higham, A. (2024, May 12). *Making sense of coaches' well-being within football contexts with Andy Higham.* The Sport Research Rundown Podcast. <https://tinyurl.com/fcxjbre>

Higham, A. (2024, June 20). *CRiC 2024 Bitesize: Andrew Higham.* The Sports Coaching Hub Podcast. <https://tinyurl.com/4wr7xr2h>



# **Chapter 1: Introduction and Thesis Structure**

## **1.1 Chapter Abstract**

This chapter begins by introducing the topic area of football coaches' well-being as the focus for this thesis and then addresses the general scope of the programme of research. Afterwards, the significance of the thesis will be discussed and how the programme of research will aim to contribute new knowledge to both theory and practice. Finally, the overall structure of the thesis will be outlined, followed by the aims and objectives of the thesis.

## 1.2 Setting the Scene: Thesis Topic and Scope

Men's professional football club organisations (e.g., first team and academy contexts) are highly demanding and volatile (Baldock et al., 2021, 2022; Kelly & Waddington, 2006), where a 'win at all costs' mentality is commonplace (Higham et al., 2021; Newman & Rumbold, 2024). Not only are there external challenges outside of one's club for football coaches to manage, like facing opposition and news media or balancing homelife (Baldock et al., 2021; Dixon & Turner, 2018; Roderick et al., 2012), but also internally within their own clubs, such as infighting and micro-political conflicts (Adams & Carr, 2019; Gibson & Groom, 2019; Potrac et al., 2012; Thompson et al., 2015). Operating in such unstable and challenging environments will therefore take its toll on coaches' well-being (Baldock et al. 2021, 2022; Manley et al., 2016). A widely accepted description of well-being is proposed by the New Economics Foundation (2012):

“Well-being can be understood as how people feel and how they function, both on a personal and a social level, and how they evaluate their lives as a whole.”

This description is advocated by the Mental Health Foundation (2015) and is adopted by England's Football Association (FA) (The FA, 2024), hence it can be used as a starting point to discuss well-being in relation to the football context. For instance, within football club contexts coaches regularly compete externally and internally for their jobs (Bentzen et al., 2020; Higham et al., 2021; Salley, 2022), which would suggest that their personal and social functioning is often compromised, with bouts of emotional instability and job insecurity. The demands and insecurity associated with professional football clubs is not easing as evidenced within the League Manager Association's (LMA) managerial dismissals data (see [Table 1.1](#)) spanning the 2019-2023 seasons (Froston, 2023). Within the 2019-20 season across all four of England's professional leagues (e.g.,

Premier League, Championship, League One, and League Two) 27 head coaches were relieved of their duty, with the figure increasing each year since (Froston, 2023).

**Table 1.1.**

*Head coaches dismissed (up to February 2023)*

	<b>2022-23</b>	<b>2021-22</b>	<b>2020-21</b>	<b>2019-20</b>
Premier League	8	8	2	6
Championship	15	10	10	6
League One	6	5	9	5
League Two	7	9	9	10
<b>Total</b>	36	32	30	27

Richard Bevan, the chief executive of the LMA states that such “volatility can be attributed to the relentless pursuit of promotion to the Premier League”, and that “the competition for promotion and play-off places is extreme, and clubs sitting outside of these positions continue to search for short-term solutions”. The short-term solution is often dismissing the head coach which can have a negative impact on daily functioning within work and home life (Froston, 2023). This reiterates how the volatile, unstable, and unpredictable nature of football environments can have deleterious consequences for well-being (Bentzen et al., 2020, Manley et al., 2016). For instance, the average tenure of a Premier League head coach has gone from approximately four years in 2012 to two years in 2022 (Salley, 2022), which in this 10-year timespan has seen multiple head coach changes within the same club and season becoming the norm. Such instability within professional football club organisations has been identified to take its toll mentally on coaches, as Bevan states:

“There are also personal and career implications of a culture that sees managers and coaches as disposable...The management and coaching workforce is highly qualified, dedicated and passionate and yet has to operate in an overly volatile and pressurised environment. This has significant consequences on individuals’ mental well-being, self-esteem, self-identity and a range of other negative physical and mental health effects, including stress, anxiety, depression, burnout and cardiovascular risk” (Froston, 2023).

The LMA is a trade union for football managers and head coaches, hence it speaks volumes when the chief executive is publicly communicating that coaches’ mental and physical health is at risk due to the contexts (e.g., environments) they work within. Bevan continues “[the LMA] runs a significant programme of physical and mental health support for managers and coaches” via the LMA Wellness programme, and that “the ‘hire-fire’ culture in football management is unproductive from a performance perspective and damaging to the health of a talented and dedicated workforce” (Froston, 2023). This can be seen when Graham Potter was Chelsea manager in 2023 as he disclosed to the media, he and his family were struggling due to his dismissal. Potter specifically stated, “your family life suffers, your mental health suffers, your personality... it is hard” (Steinberg, 2023). Potter continued:

“You suffer... And you get upset. When you’re in private you show real emotion with your family. My job is to try and act how I think I should act the best way for the team and for Chelsea. And act with an integrity that is right for me. I never want to be anybody else. I don’t want to be fake. I’ll be me. I’ll do my best and if my best isn’t good enough, OK” (Steinberg, 2023).

Within 2022, David Moyes revealed the impact pundits, media and fans can have on his well-being when discussing whether he should remain in his job role (Shearer, 2022). Moyes proclaimed:

“There’s all the stuff we talk about with mental health nowadays, and I think we’re getting closer to understanding that, yet it’s still OK to discuss a football manager’s job on television or radio and people talk about it as if it’s a jokey matter...Did it have an effect? It did. But look, ultimately, I’ve got a strong family, a great wife behind me, and we got through it fine.”

Evidently, from the accounts of high performing football coaches, working within professional football contexts is not only challenging for their well-being but also their families’. This was evidenced over three years ago by Mikel Arteta, who similarly to Graham Potter experienced death threats towards himself and his family (Ames & MacInnes, 2021). News stories that focus on head coaches’ impeded well-being can date back even further and continue to be published, which demonstrates the prevalence of this issue. For example, the football coaching role in general is demanding, with little opportunity for rest due to unrelenting seasonal cycles (Baldock et al., 2021, 2022). This was recently discussed in the media by Jürgen Klopp (at the time of writing the thesis) who conveyed that his well-being had become depleted over time, stating “It is that I am, how can I say it, running out of energy” (Liverpool FC, 2024). Consequently, Klopp felt the need to step down from his coaching role and leave the club, and the way he tried to convey this was by comparing himself to a sports car:

“I’m like a proper sports car... not the best one but a pretty good one, can still drive 160, 170, 180 mph but I’m the only one who sees the tank meter is going

down. The outside world doesn't see that... so you go until as long as we have to go, but then you need a break. In this case, you need to go to the petrol station.”

Within 24 hours of Klopp's announcement, Barcelona head coach, Xavi made a similar announcement about his well-being struggles and how he too would be stepping down from his role (BBC Sport, 2023). Xavi stated, “I've been a man of the club. I've prioritised it above even myself. I've given everything I have... From a mental health level, it's tough... the battery levels keep running out.” Both Klopp's and Xavi's announcements signify the toll being a football coach takes on well-being, to the point where coaches are no longer waiting to be dismissed but are actively stepping down themselves to preserve their well-being.

There have been calls in the media (Nassoori, 2022; Sky Sports, 2020) and research domains (Baldock et al., 2021, Elsey et al., 2024) for better well-being support for football personnel. There have been initiatives like the 2019 “Heads Up” campaign (Heads Together, 2024) with the key objective to raise awareness about the importance of UK adult male mental health and well-being (Elsey et al., 2024), as men are less likely to disclose well-being related issues and have higher rates of suicide compared to women (Schumacher, 2019; Souter et al., 2018). As a result of the campaign, The FA (2019) began providing coaches guidance on how they can best support their players' mental health and well-being. However, guidance and support on how football coaches could manage their own well-being was limited because out of a 36-page guidance document titled ‘The FA mental health guide on mental health for coaches and managers’ only two pages referred to coaches' well-being (The FA, 2024). The two pages that refer to how coaches can manage their own well-being cite the 2011 New Economics Foundation's ‘Five Ways to Well-being’ document (Aked & Thompson, 2011), which is a step in the right direction.

Though, it could be argued the guidance and five recommendations provided are decontextualised from the professional football context. For instance, one suggestion is to connect with other coaches, which is not always feasible considering football is replete with competition, both internally within one's own club and externally, whereby coaches fight for jobs and navigate the micro-politics of the sport (Gibson & Groom, 2019; Thompson et al., 2015). Furthermore, the document states that feeling close and valued by others is important for well-being, yet football coaches, in particular head coaches, receive vast amounts of psychological and physical abuse in person (Bryson, 2023) and online (Ames & MacInnes, 2021). Even when managers and head coaches who remove themselves from social media platforms, people endeavour to find a way to abuse them, such as via family members' social media accounts or email addresses (Edwards & Morgan, 2011; Steinberg, 2023). Thus, it is not sufficient to tell football coaches to follow five decontextualised well-being guidance points when the football context is significantly different to everyday life. It also highlights how clubs, national governing bodies (NGBs) and trade unions need to reconsider how they can better support coaches and their well-being.

A simple Google search of "football coaches' well-being support" returns a plethora of links as to how coaches can support their players well-being as opposed to their own, with the first returned tab from the FA titled "Supporting footballers' mental health: Guidance" (The FA, 2019). This then raises the question regarding where coaches receive contextualised well-being support. The League Coaches' Association (LCA) states through their website, using well-being related terminology, to provide "advice on positive mental and physical health awareness, as well as coping strategies and support, providing a foundation for members to operate effectively and flourish" (LCA, 2023). Yet



the League Managers' Association (LMA) website has currently removed all public access and information on well-being support (LMA, 2024). As a result of the ongoing issues around football coaches' well-being and its support, this thesis aims to explore how football coaches' experience and make sense of well-being to better understand it within the context of men's professional football organisations.

To reiterate why research into well-being and specifically sports coaches' well-being is necessary is because of its complexity and contextual nature (Dodge et al., 2012; Lundqvist, 2011; Mead et al., 2021; Ryan & Deci, 2001; Wilcock et al., 1998). For instance, the conceptualisation of well-being has been debated for many years, across various research domains (Bone, 2015; Dodge et al., 2012; Kiefer, 2008; Penedo & Dahn, 2005). One domain which has gained attention over recent years is sports coaches' well-being (Carson et al., 2019; Norris et al., 2017; Potts et al., 2021a; Simova et al., 2024; Tait et al., 2020), mainly due to the appreciation that coaches are performers just like the athletes and players they train (Gould et al., 2002). However, a coach can be considered much more than just a performer, they are also key decision makers, employees, educators, and mentors whose well-being should be supported as they can greatly shape the environments and relationships they interact with (Didymus et al., 2018). Appreciating the multitude of roles a coach upholds highlights the wide variety of personal and professional stressors they will be exposed to that can challenge well-being and daily functioning (Norris et al., 2017; Potts et al., 2021a; Thelwell et al., 2008). For example, competition and training demands, leadership challenges, and work-life conflicts can greatly shape a coaches well-being state (Baldock et al., 2020; Thelwell et al., 2008). Similarly, like athletes who partake in differing sports, so do coaches, which necessitates the need to explore well-being experiences within differing contexts (e.g.,

sports and levels), which has been advocated to be explored from a qualitative lens (Hefferon et al., 2017; Trainor & Bundon, 2023). This is opposed to positivist quantitative measures because they risk representing average estimations of numerous undefined aspects of a person's current state or life (Schwarz & Strack, 1999) and lacks contextualisation (Trainor & Bundon, 2023).

The context of the present programme of research is men's professional football organisations, which to reiterate can be considered volatile and unrelenting, whereby job insecurity and masculinity is replete (Baldock et al., 2021, 2022; Bentzen et al., 2020b; Kelly & Waddington, 2006; Newman & Rumbold, 2024). Football club institutional and cultural norms typically instigate employees (e.g., players and coaches, among others) to conform to inured masculine practices, such as suppression of emotive expressive behaviours and vulnerabilities which in turn hinder help-seeking behaviours like seeking support (Cronin et al., 2020; Parker, 2006; Parker & Manley, 2016). Although it could be argued that football coaches as a sample are represented well in the research literature, their well-being related narratives and lived experiences are seldom (Baldock et al., 2021), which could be because of masculine norms that have engrained suppression of voice and vulnerabilities overtime (Newman & Rumbold, 2024; Parker & Manley, 2016). Thus, it is important that such a seldom heard group's (Smith et al., 2023) voices and lived experiences of well-being are shared so that it can be better contextually understood.

### **1.3 Significance of the Thesis**

The program of research contained within this thesis aims to progress methodological and theoretical insights and provide new practical knowledge as to how well-being can be contextually explored, made sense of, and potentially managed within men's professional football club organisations. Firstly, the thesis will appraise well-being research and

methodological approaches to exploring the construct addressing some limitations linked with current approaches, such as objective measures and generalised standards which risk the representation of average estimations of numerous undefined aspects of a person's current state or life (Ryff et al., 2020; Schwarz & Strack, 1999). To overcome such methodological problems and to address the lack of contextuality when exploring well-being, this program of research aims to implement an array of qualitative approaches to capture the person-in-context interactions and lived experiences of coaches' well-being, specifically within football contexts.

Theoretically, to complement the methodological exploration of well-being within context, Ecological Systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 2000), specifically the bioecological model, which later informed the Process-Person-Context-Time (PPCT) model, is proposed as a theoretical lens to enrich interpretations and understanding of the multiple contextual layers that can shape well-being experiences and comprehension. Bioecological theory and the PPCT model are of use for exploring well-being given the constructs dynamism and multifaceted nature (Dodge et al., 2012; Lundqvist, 2011; Mead et al., 2021) which can be shaped by a multitude of interactional systems, such as place of work, homelife, culture, and policy (Purcell et al., 2022; Schinke et al., 2024). Therefore, the programme of work will aim to exhibit how the bioecological approach and PPCT model are appropriate theoretical lenses to convey well-being contextually and enrich how it is shaped and understood.

The body of research also has important practical implications as it highlights how talking openly about personal well-being and using images to convey related experiences can improve perceived self-awareness and management of well-being. Specifically, the thesis uses visual stimuli to illuminate coaches' seasonal experiences of well-being and

how they endeavour to manage the construct over prolonged periods. This in turn prompts coaches to engage in reflective practices, increasing their awareness of well-being which is often taken for granted and pre-reflectively experienced (Seamon, 2018). These findings go on to illustrate the importance of well-being for effective functioning within sports coaching and the significant role an applied practitioner (e.g., sport psychologist) can play in facilitating well-being management if one-to-one access was provided. In sum, and for clarity regarding the programme of work, at the time of submission, this thesis has yielded two published peer-reviewed journal articles, with one under review, two others in production, and multiple conference communications.

#### **1.4 Structure of the Thesis**

This programme of work is submitted as a traditional monologue thesis, which includes a combination of background literature, chapters based on published peer-reviewed journal articles and work being finalised for peer-review. Each chapter can be read as a standalone article and demonstrates the contribution given to the well-being, sports psychology, and football research fields. Where chapters have been published as journal articles, language, formatting and referencing edits have been made to ensure consistency.

Chapter 1 of the thesis is the introduction which addresses the thesis scope, significance, and structure. Chapter 2 is a review of well-being literature with a focus on sport coaches' well-being and football club culture. Chapter 3 is an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) of eight male football coaches' well-being. The aim of the study was to explore how professional coaches experience and make sense of well-being within the context of football club environments. The study helps conceptualise the idiosyncratic and multi-layered dynamic interactions within and between an individual's environment and well-being. Chapter 4 builds on Chapter 3 as it is an adapted IPA of four

coaching docuseries which captures a seldom heard groups' (e.g., first team head coaches in the Premier League and LaLiga) well-being accounts and experiences over time, highlighting temporal aspects. This study aimed to use coaching docuseries 'as a window' to explore and illuminate male professional football head coaches' well-being experiences throughout a season. Findings demonstrated that coaches' well-being can become thwarted due to obsessive-like tendencies, persistent ruminations, consumption in role, lived obliviousness, and identity confictions.

Chapter 5 is a combined longitudinal IPA (LIPA), and photo-elicitation approach conducted with seven male football coaches across an entire football season. The study aimed to explore how football coaches temporally experience and make sense of well-being using auto-driven photo-elicitation. The study builds upon both those in Chapters 3 and 4 as it was acknowledged that well-being is not a static state but fluctuates in relation to proximal processes over time. The study demonstrates how 'third spaces', authenticity, sociohistorical events, and familial interactions shape well-being experiences. Chapter 6 is a LIPA of a woman coach's well-being experiences whilst working in a men's professional football club context. This chapter endeavours to illuminate the seldom heard voice and well-being experiences of a woman coach working in a men's professional football club. Chapter 6 complements Chapter 5, as it focuses on the woman participant as a single case to richly explore well-being experiences across a season. Auto-driven photo-elicitation is also used to enrich sensemaking and unearth 'gems' (i.e., potent accounts) which may otherwise have remained tacit or latent. Findings converge and diverge from Chapter 5, with similar references to 'third spaces', authenticity, and obsessive-like tendencies, but contrasting discussions around how marginalisation, workaholism (e.g., perceived need to work excessively to progress in

men's football) and having children or starting a family shapes well-being. Chapter 7 consolidates Chapters 5 and 6 as it is a reflective piece on the practicalities and implementation of the LIPA and auto-driven photo-elicitation approach to capture football coaches' well-being experiences. Chapter 7 utilises the coaches' reflective accounts and the author's (i.e., researcher's) reflective diary logs to explore the well-being management benefits of engaging in a photo-elicitation approach, as it actively encouraged reflective practices and increased coaches' self-awareness. Chapter 8 reflects more broadly on the PhD thesis journey and how it has shaped the author's understanding of well-being and related experiences. Finally, Chapter 9 concludes the independent programme of research with the epilogue which discusses the pertinent contributions to well-being knowledge.

# **Chapter 2: Review of Literature**

## **2.1 Chapter Abstract**

Firstly, within this chapter the construct of well-being will be discussed and then how it has traditionally been conceptualised is explored. Then, cultural influences on well-being within and outside of sport will be addressed, which then leads into a discussion around sports coaching and well-being within this domain. Attention will then be given to the specific context of football and related well-being research in this area. Specifically, the men's professional football context and how such an environment influences well-being sensemaking and experiences. Next, traditional theoretical approaches to exploring well-being related experiences will be discussed and critiqued, which is then followed by a rationale to explore sports coaches' well-being contextually. At this stage, particular emphasis will be given to theoretical and methodological approaches which are conducive to exploring well-being contextually. Finally, a rationale summary is provided which concludes with the aims of the programme of research.



## 2.2 The Construct of Well-Being

Research on the construct of well-being has seen significant interest over many decades, whereby it has been discussed and critiqued regarding its definition (Dodge et al., 2012), conceptualisation (Mead et al., 2021), terminology (VanderWeele & Lomas, 2022), and measurement (Ryff et al., 2020). For instance, well-being has been debated, explored, and measured across various research areas, such as sport (Lundqvist, 2011), exercise (Penedo & Dahn, 2005), health (Kiefer, 2008), organisational (Bone, 2015), and cultural (Christopher, 1999) to name but a few. However, due to such research domains often working in silos it has resulted in varying definitions, descriptions, and a lack of consensus which has fuelled critiques and disputes of the construct (Mead et al., 2021; Ryan & Deci, 2001). The critique and perplexity around well-being can range from factors as small as its spelling (e.g., well-being or wellbeing), to more significant aspects such as its theoretical foundations (Dodge et al., 2012). The only consensus which still seems to exist is that well-being is a complex, amorphous, and intangible construct, with perception differing from one individual or discipline to another (Dodge et al., 2012; Mead et al., 2021; Ryan & Deci, 2001; Wilcock et al., 1998). This has resulted in calls for more qualitative research which incorporates an idiographic approach to better understand well-being (Hefferon et al., 2017). Thus, due to well-being's complexity and varying research domain perceptions, it is important to understand what well-being means to individuals within their given context and how they conceptualise it (Trainor & Bundon, 2023).

### **2.2.1 Conceptualising Well-Being**

According to the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC, 2022), due to the multitude of contrasting views on well-being, there is no consensus around a single definition. Yet the Oxford English dictionary (2023) attempts to simply define well-being as “the state of being healthy, happy, or prosperous”, which is of interest given traditional conceptualisations have tended to discount physical health and prosperity features (Diener, 1984; Ryff et al., 1989). It is widely advocated that well-being is far broader and complex than moment to moment happiness and health (Deci & Ryan, 2008; Mental Health Foundation, 2015). For instance, while happiness is a key component, The New Economics Foundation (2012) adds that “well-being can be understood as how people feel and how they function, both on a personal and a social level, and how they evaluate their lives as a whole.” (p. 6). While the World Health Organization (WHO, 2021) outlines:

“Well-being is a positive state experienced by individuals and societies. Similar to health, it is a resource for daily life and is determined by social, economic and environmental conditions. Well-being encompasses quality of life and the ability of people and societies to contribute to the world with a sense of meaning and purpose.”

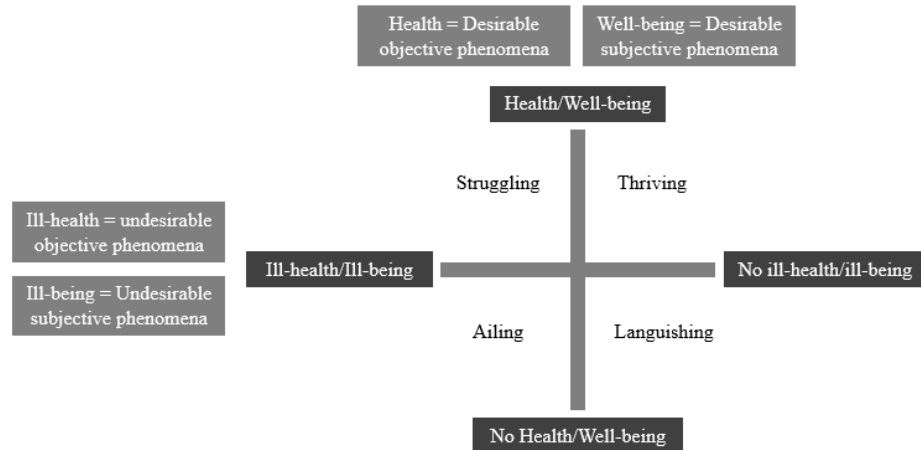
Moreover, the CDC (2022) adds “well-being can be described as judging life positively and feeling good” incorporating a multitude of well-being dimensions (e.g., mental, physical, social, emotional, economic and life or domain satisfaction). Therefore, it can be seen over time, that more holistic and interdisciplinary conceptualisations of well-being, which capture multiple dimensions (e.g., mental, physical, social, and

spiritual) and its contextualised nature (e.g., influence of social, economic, and environmental factors) are being adopted within society and the research field (Kiefer, 2008; Mead et al., 2021; Trainor & Bundon, 2023; VanderWeele & Lomas, 2022).

Prior to further exploration of well-being in this chapter, it is of worth to address terms related to and discussed in the same space as well-being literature, such as health, mental health, flourishing, ill-being, and burnout. A prominent feature in policy and the research field is how health and well-being are used in conjunction with one another. Lomas et al. (2023) provides a comprehensive overview of the ontological and epistemological pitfalls and trepidations with health and well-being comprehension. However, Lomas et al. (2023) infer in most (but not all) cases, health aligns with objective aspects of the person, such as how well a person's body is functioning. Whereas, well-being aligns with subjective aspects of the person, such as how the person feels, whether physically or mentally (Lomas et al., 2023). The ontological subjective-objective position Lomas et al. (2023, p. 10) take extends to mental health, whereby they state the term mental health can be used for "objective manifestations" (i.e., the quality of one's personal objective mental state). [Figure 2.1](#) taken from Lomas et al. (2023) conveys the subjective-objective relations in terminology.

**Figure 2.1**

*Conceptual relationships between health and well-being (taken from Lomas et al., 2023)*



Mental health, which has seen growing attention within general society (Galderisi et al., 2015; Moreno et al., 2020; WHO, 2022b) and the sport coaching field (Frost et al. 2024; Gorczynski et al., 2020, 2021; Kegelaers et al., 2021; Kenttä et al., 2024; Pankow et al. 2022), is according to The World Health Organisation’s (WHO, 2022a) world mental health report:

“a state of well-being in which an individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and is able to make a contribution to his or her community.”

Considering the WHO’s definition, mental health incorporates well-being, or more so the positive dimensions associated with ‘flourishing’, which according to VanderWeele and Lomas (2022) is defined as “the relative attainment of a state in which all aspects of a person’s life are good including the contexts in which that person lives.” (p. 3). Flourishing and well-being are sometimes used interchangeably or in combination, but VanderWeele and Lomas (2022) state a contextual connection to flourishing. Specifically, they state that flourishing is closely related to how well one’s context (e.g.,

environment and community) is doing, whilst implying well-being is more so focused on subjective qualities like, “the relative attainment of a state in which all aspects of a person’s life are good *as they pertain to that individual*” (VanderWeele & Lomas, 2022 p. 3). Regarding mental health, it is suggested that if a person experiences low or no well-being over prolonged time, they are more likely to develop a mental health problem (Frost et al., 2024; Wood & Joseph, 2010), as well as experiences of ill-being, such as stress and burnout (Kenttä et al., 2024; Olusoga et al., 2019; Olusoga, & Kenttä, 2017). Ill-being is often associated with experiences of negative affect, stress, burnout, and dissatisfaction (Stebbing et al., 2015). Burnout encompasses a wide array of ill-being related components and is considered “a psychological syndrome emerging as a prolonged response to chronic interpersonal stressors” (Maslach & Leiter, 2016, p. 103). There are three core dimensions of burnout, such as overwhelming exhaustion, feelings of cynicism, and detachment (Maslach & Leiter, 2016), all of which can impede well-being and lead to instances of ill-being. Therefore, it can be seen how well-being is associated with such varying terms and how inevitably transitions and permeations between them will occur throughout the life course of a person.

Traditionally within the well-being research field there has been some general agreement that well-being comprises of hedonic (Diener, 1984), and eudaimonic (Keyes, 1998; Ryff, 1989) components (Huta & Waterman, 2014)<sup>1</sup>. Hedonia is typically defined as the pursuit of pleasure and is often labelled as subjective well-being (SWB) (Diener & Ryan, 2009; Huta, 2016; Ryan & Deci, 2001). The hedonic perspective places emphasis on people’s appraisals and evaluations of their own lives (Diener, 1984). It incorporates

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<sup>1</sup>It must also be noted that there is some agreement that well-being and ill-being can be considered largely independent concepts (Ryff et al. 2006). Thus, the thesis will focus on well-being and contexts which may facilitate or thwart it, as opposed to cause distinct ill-being.

both reflective cognitive judgements (e.g., life satisfaction), and emotional responses (e.g., positive affect versus negative affect) to ongoing life (Diener et al., 2018). According to Kahneman, et al. (1999) an operational definition of SWB is often interpreted to mean experiencing a high level of positive affect, a low level of negative affect, and a high degree of satisfaction with one's life. These three components thus comprise the contemporary formulation of hedonia (Ryan & Deci, 2001; Ryff et al., 2021) and if strongly endorsed, one is said to be high in SWB (Deci & Ryan, 2008).

The evaluations associated with SWB about one's life can both be positive or negative (Diener & Ryan, 2009). Life satisfaction is important for SWB, but so is interest and engagement in the present, positive affective responses to life events, and satisfaction with work, relationships, recreation, health, meaning and purpose within life domains (Diener & Ryan, 2009). We as humans tend to strive for high SWB as we aim to live the 'good life', of which Aristotle, Confucius and Buddha provide their ideologies (see Diener et al., 2018). The 'good life' is whereby an individual will subjectively judge and compare their entire life, or certain life domains (e.g., work and health) against a set of standards that they have for the 'good life' (Diener et al., 2018). It can therefore be seen that the hedonic tradition sees well-being as subjective because it is experiential due to being informed by a person's experiences (Diener & Ryan, 2009). In sum, the terms which are generally used when discussing or defining hedonic well-being are the 'good life' (Diener et al., 2018), SWB, life satisfaction, happiness, and more positive and less negative affect (Ryff et al., 2021).

In comparison to hedonia, eudaimonia is associated with psychological well-being (PWB), which suggests that well-being is more than just happiness, and that purely

experiencing more positive affect, opposed to less negative affect does not necessarily mean that someone is psychologically well (Deci & Ryan, 2008). More specifically, eudaimonia revolves around positive human functioning encompassed by various psychological characteristics such as personal growth, positive relationships, and the pursuit of excellence (Ryan et al., 2008; Ryff, 1989). Eudaimonia came to life from the workings of Aristotle (2009), where he asserted that the highest of all human goods is not happiness, feeling good or satisfying appetites. Instead, it is about activities of the soul that are in harmony with virtue, which when elaborated, means living well, actualizing one's human potential and striving to achieve the best within us (Aristotle, 2009; Ryff, 2014; Waterman, 1993). Therefore, from a eudaimonistic perspective, well-being is not so much an outcome or an end state but is a process of fulfilling one's virtuous potentials and living as inherently intended (Deci & Ryan, 2008). PWB is linked to a person living in a way which is congruent with their deeply held values (Neil et al., 2016), and engaging in a meaningful life characterized by personal growth, in contrast to a pleasurable life characterized by hedonic enjoyment (Ryan & Deci, 2001).

PWB is defined more broadly in terms of the fully functioning person and their purpose in life. For instance, McGregor and Little (1998) operationalised PWB as happiness and meaningfulness, while Ryan and Deci (2000) state the importance of self-actualization and vitality. However, a widely adopted eudaimonic perspective which is still applied within contemporary research is Ryff's (1989; Ryff & Keyes, 1995) multidimensional model of PWB. The model comprises of six dimensions; purpose in life, autonomy, personal growth, environmental mastery, positive relationships, and self-acceptance (see Ryff, 2014). To experience self-realisation and purpose in life, individuals must actively strive to satisfy the six PWB dimensions (Ryff & Singer, 2008). The

integration of the six dimensions is to capture how well-being is *challenged thriving*, in the sense that each dimension conveys various challenges an individual encounters as they pursue positive functioning (Ryff et al., 2021). A specific example as Ryff et al. (2021) highlight is how individuals will attempt to maintain a positive outlook about themselves (thriving) even whilst aware of their own limitations (challenged), which captures how well-being can be portrayed as *challenged thriving*. Thus, it is argued that ‘hedonia’ focuses on the ‘feeling’ component of well-being (e.g., happiness), whereas ‘eudaimonia’ focuses on the ‘thinking’ component of well-being regarding how we are ‘doing’ (e.g., fulfilment) (Ryan & Deci, 2001; Ryff et al., 2021; Ryff & Keyes, 1995).

In contrast to polarising hedonic and eudaimonic perspectives, evidence suggests a multidimensional well-being approach which combines aspects of hedonia and eudaimonia is of worth (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Within positive psychology the Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishment (PERMA) model (Seligman, 2011, 2018) characterises well-being as a combination of hedonia and eudaimonia. Seligman’s (2018) PERMA model captures subjective emotional components in combination with psychological self-actualisation aspects such as meaning and accomplishments. The PERMA model also identifies how relationships (interacting with others) and engaging in activities (contextual demands) shape general well-being (Seligman, 2011). Since Seligman’s first conception of the PERMA model it has been built upon, whereby the PERMA+4 model has been proposed as a more holistic framework for capturing well-being (Donaldson & Donaldson, 2020). The PERMA+4 continues to adopt the initial five dimensions but then adds; physical health, economic security, mindset, and environment (Cabrera & Donaldson, 2023). Therefore, well-being is not purely psychological and comprises of contextual dimensions such as engagement



in activities, relationships and environments with consideration for physical health. For instance, Schinke et al. (2024) postulate well-being as:

A dynamic state or experience of quality of life in one or more of life's many domains, such as physical, psychological, spiritual, emotional, interpersonal, social, familial, cultural, financial, occupational/professional, recreational, intellectual, existential, and environmental (p. 3).

Kiefer (2008) adopts a similar view conceptualising well-being in terms of “an individual's physical, mental, social, and environmental status with each aspect interacting with the other and having differing levels of importance and impact according to each individual.” (p. 224). Kiefer (2008) suggests that components such as individual characteristics, physical, environmental, and social factors, as well as life changes (e.g., significant events over time) are relevant to well-being. The outlooks proposed here by Schinke et al. (2024) and Kiefer (2008) are more holistic in nature as they account for how several dimensions interact to shape well-being experiences.

When discussing well-being which comprises multiple dimensions (e.g., mental, physical, and social) it is often referred to as ‘human well-being’ (VanderWeele et al., 2021; VanderWeele & Lomas, 2022). For instance, Simons and Baldwin (2021) argue that to prefix the word well-being with either mental, physical or social is emblematic of the lack of well-being definition. They continue stating that for well-being to be holistic (i.e., multidimensional) it should be “freed from the unhelpful false dichotomy of physical and mental, as no part of the human experience, and no determinant, is purely physical or mental” (Simons & Baldwin, 2021, p.985). Moreover, Mead et al. (2021) argues that “well-being should be conceptualised as a system, within which the interconnectedness of the individual in relation to their communities and environments must be explored

while appreciating the impacts of socio-contextual factors (e.g., inequality, culture) that influence wellbeing” (p. 2.). Mead et al. (2021) also goes on to discuss the psychophysiological nature of well-being, signifying the mind-body connection element. Thus, there appears to be a drive towards more multidimensional and ecological descriptions of well-being that account for various aspects of a person’s life, as such descriptions acknowledge that well-being can permeate and traverse a multitude of life domains and contexts (Purcell et al., 2022; Schinke et al., 2024; Trainor & Bundon, 2023).

From a phenomenological perspective, Todres and Galvin (2010) propose that well-being “is a way of being-in-the-world, as well as how this way of being-in the-world is felt as an experience” (p. 5). Todres and Galvin’s (2010) work particularly focused on ‘dwelling’ and ‘mobility’ and how it shapes well-being experiences. For instance, mobility refers to the existential possibilities of ‘moving forward’ with time, space, others, and mood. Whereas dwelling depicts how an individual existentially ‘comes home’ to what they have been given in time, space, others, and mood. Thus, well-being can be experienced spatially, temporally, inter-personally, bodily, in mood and in terms of personal identity (Galvin & Todres, 2011). For well-being to thrive possibilities for mobility (e.g., energised flow and aliveness) and dwelling (e.g., rootedness and peace) must be facilitated (Todres & Galvin, 2010). Consequently, well-being as an experience is multi-faceted and influenced by reciprocal interactions within one’s world, because as human beings we are inextricably linked and entwined within our environments and contexts (Sarvimäki, 2011; Seamon, 2018). For instance, there is no ‘being’ without ‘place’, because it serves as the condition of all existing things spatially, environmentally, and temporally (Seamon, 2018). Thus, the interconnectedness of the individual in relation to biopsychosocial (e.g., health, behavioural habits, and relationships) and socio-

contextual factors (e.g., environments and cultures) is critical as to whether well-being thrives (Lomas & VanderWeele, 2022; Mead et al., 2021; Trainor & Bundon, 2023).

Although composite constructs and measures of well-being have the benefit of capturing various dimensions of well-being, it is argued that they can lose some understanding and granularity (VanderWeele & Lomas, 2022). However, Holst (2022) argues that such atomism (granularity) is due to the lack of explanations of the possible interrelations between elements, with most conceptualisations of well-being ignoring what is meant by '*being*' when referring to well-being. For instance, as we existentially navigate life and lived experiences they are not neatly predisposed into isolated cases, but they interact, influence and mould how we make sense of well-being because we are always '*being-in-place*', so we will be influenced by our connections to various domains and dimensions of well-being (Seamon, 2018). Holst (2022) makes the argument that if we leave out a critical investigation of well-*being* (i.e., being-in-the-world), then we are simply discussing wellness as it has no foundations or structure to sustain it. For example, Holst (2022) states:

“If human well-being stands in no relation to humans finding themselves well according to certain spatial, temporal and interpersonal coordinates in their lives, then it would seem to be reducible to fleeting appearances of ‘wellness’ that comes and goes, unstructured and unconditioned, without any states or modes of being to uphold it.” (p. 2).

‘Being-in-the-world’ is therefore paramount to how we experience and understand well-being (Galvin & Todres 2011; Holst, 2022; Sarvimäki, 2011; Seamon, 2018; Todres & Galvin 2010). Consequently, well-being as an experience has a temporal flow, is multi-

faceted and idiosyncratic (see Rush & Grouzet, 2012) which is influenced by reciprocal interactions within one's various life domains (Sarvimäki, 2011; Seamon, 2018). When discussing temporality regarding well-being one can consider momentary and periodic well-being, and the relationship between them (Hersch, 2022). Specifically, the life narrative of an individual can shape perceptions of well-being (Hersch, 2022), suggesting that the amalgamation of past experiences, present thinking and future anticipations are pivotal in well-being comprehension (Rush & Grouzet, 2012). Overall, it is established that being embedded in or interacting with a multitude of contexts over time will shape well-being experiences differently. A core component of any context which can shape well-being comprehension over time is culture (Christopher, 1999; Diener & Ryan, 2009; Joshanloo et al., 2021).

### **2.2.2 Culture and Well-Being**

Humans are embedded within the world and its many differing cultures, all of which influence our conceptions and understandings. Diener and Ryan (2009) propose that an area which requires more attention is exploring well-being in a cultural context. For instance, there is much to be found in the culture of any human population concerning optimal functioning and well-being (Joshanloo et al., 2021). Culture enables us to collectively “meet basic needs of survival, by coordinating social behaviour to achieve a viable existence, to transmit successful social behaviours, to pursue happiness and well-being, and to derive meaning from life” (Matsumoto, 2009, p. 5). It is therefore argued that views and interpretations of well-being will be inherently culturally rooted, and that there can be no such thing as a value-free assessment of well-being (Christopher, 1999). For instance, all understandings of well-being are moral visions, based on individuals' judgements about what it means to be well (Christopher, 1999; Ryan & Deci, 2001).

Consequently, we live in culturally specific ways that influence how we exist, act, and engage in strategies to enhance well-being (Kitayama & Markus, 2000).

Cultural psychology more generally has revealed that well-being is conceptualised and experienced differently across sociocultural contexts (Ryff et al., 2020). For example, within independent contexts (e.g., United Kingdom), well-being is personal and individualistic, and higher levels of dimensions of well-being (e.g., hedonic and eudaimonic) predict greater mental and physical health. Whereas, in interdependent contexts (e.g., Japan), well-being is relational and collective, which places greater emphasis of social relatedness as an essential aspect of well-being (Yoo et al., 2016). Thus, the idea of entirely culture-free measurements, theories and interventions of well-being seems misguided, as any notion of well-being will always be, in some way, a conception of the good or ideal person formulated from a particular vantage point (Christopher, 1999). Therefore, we must become aware of our cultural embeddedness and its relation to our ideas of well-being (Christopher, 1999) so that well-being can be better understood and managed. For instance, hermeneutically, what is worthwhile, healthy and good is understood via mutual dialogues within and between socio-contextual interactions (Christopher, 1999). Thus, cultural embeddedness should not be seen as a shortcoming or a harmful limitation, but rather it is a precondition for us to know anything at all or participate meaningfully in human life and its struggles (Gadamer, 2013).

Ryff et al. (2020) highlights that researchers, policymakers, and practitioners need to recognise that the time has long since passed for believing that well-being can be adequately understood and assessed with single items (e.g., life satisfaction). Likewise, Schwarz and Strack (1999), argued decades ago that pure reliance on global estimations

of well-being present risks, such as representing estimations of underdefined personal life aspects or gross estimation of current states. Therefore, we must ensure our guiding scientific questions, methods, and the contextual considerations are considered when attempting to understand well-being (Ryff et al., 2020), as ultimately well-being is conceptualised differently from one culture to another (Taris & Schaufeli, 2018). Thus, an exploration of well-being which is situated in the sports coaching context, culture, and literature is necessary.

### **2.3 Sports Coaching**

According to Lyle (2011), the purpose of sports coaching is to improve the performance of an athlete or sports team. Achieving improved performances is attempted by manipulating behaviours and creating practice environments that facilitate improvement (Nicholls, 2017). The individual(s) who try to facilitate athletes' and sports teams' performances are often titled 'coaches' and they perform a multitude of roles. For instance, coaches can be considered, but not limited to, decision-makers, educators, employees, and mentors (Didymus et al., 2018). However, most importantly it has been argued that like athletes, coaches should be deemed performers (Gould et al., 2002) as they play an influential role in improving athlete performances and achieving positive sporting results. Moreover, sports coaching has the potential to enhance the psychological well-being of athletes through making sport participation a positive experience for athletes (Côté et al., 2010) which signifies the importance of the coaching role and its interpersonal nature.

Sports coaching generally develops an individual's skills for competition (Lyle, 2011) and is orientated around performance enhancement for competitive sport (Nicholls,

2017). However, in combination with performance enhancement many coaches also view themselves as educators due to developing and educating their athletes (Jones et al., 2004). Such a holistic approach to coaching places emphasis on acknowledging that each athlete is a unique individual, with their own idiosyncrasies (Purdy, 2017). The same can be said for coaches and sports coaching, as idiosyncratic sociocultural interactions that occur within context-specific environments and domains will shape coaching practices and ideologies (Groom et al., 2012).

According to Lyle (2002; Lyle & Cushion, 2017) sports coaching domains are organised around the commonalities in practices, assumptions and expectations that frame coaches' work, with particular emphasis on sporting contexts. Sports coaching contexts vary, ranging from school sport and amateur levels all the way to professional and elite environments (Purdy, 2017). Such domains are often categorised into participation and performance (Lyle, 1999; Lyle & Cushion, 2017). Participation coaching does not orientate around success, while performance coaching prioritises competition (Lyle, 2002). However, other coaching categories in the literature exist, such as recreational, developmental, elite, and grassroots (Trudel & Gilbert, 2006). For example, recreational coaching contexts are not determined by athletes' ages, but focus on participation and leisure; developmental coaching comprise of formal competitive structures whilst emphasis is on athlete development; elite coaching is characterised by intense preparation, public performative objectives and challenging/restrictive selection criteria; and grassroots coaching captures organised sport that is practised regularly by amateur sportspeople (Purdy, 2017; Trudel & Gilbert, 2006). An explicit exploration of such semantics and terminology is beyond the scope of this thesis, but a combined characterisation of developmental and elite sports coaching (e.g., high performance)

aligns with the proposed programme of research due to coaches engaging in intense preparation and striving for results in a professional organisation whilst developing athletic performances.

Recognizing the complexities of coaching and the domains in which coaches operate initiated calls for research to focus more on the social world of coaching (Purdy, 2017). This then led to the notion that coaching is a dynamic process, opposed to a set of predetermined behaviours or series of isolated events (Jones et al., 2004; Lyle, 1999). This acknowledges that all coaching contexts are dependent on situational, cultural, ideological, ethical and social pressures (Purdy, 2017). For instance, high performance coaching is challenging as coaches are exposed to sustained periods of performance related pressure and job insecurity (Didymus, 2017; Mallett & Lara-Bercial, 2016). Consequently, coaching involves complex interactions between social agents (e.g., athletes and colleagues) within socio-culturally defined spheres (e.g., sporting practices and norms), and the contextual factors which shape coaches' well-being experiences would suit future research exploration (Stebbing & Taylor, 2016).

### **2.3.1 Sports Coaching: Well-Being and Culture**

Well-being in competitive sports is considered a subjective, dynamic, and complex construct, that is unspecified, inconsistently defined, and is assessed via a variety of theoretically questionable indicators (Lundqvist, 2011). Moreover, Jarden and Roache (2023) claimed in general there are differences in how laypeople (e.g., coaches) conceptualise well-being compared to academics. For instance, for a layperson mental health, feeling valued, work-life balance and inner harmony is considered central for well-being, but are not always apparent in academic models (Jarden & Roache, 2023).



Therefore, given the confliction of knowledge around what constitutes well-being in general and more so specifically within sport (Lundqvist et al., 2011), there have been calls to explore what well-being means for sport coaches (Norris et al., 2017).

One reason for the lack of coaches' well-being understanding is due to the dearth of qualitative research exploring coaches' well-being (Norris et al., 2017) and well-being more generally (Hefferon et al., 2017). For instance, without qualitative work the *person* becomes neglected, which in turn restricts the ways in which we understand how individuals make sense of and experience well-being (Hefferon et al., 2017). To circumvent the issue around the lack of well-being understanding, researchers have typically investigated proxy indicators of well-being, such as life satisfaction, affect, subjective vitality, psychological needs, self-esteem, and psychological distress (Giles et al., 2020). This led Potts et al. (2021a) to conduct a meta-synthesis of qualitative research on concepts related to coaches' well-being (e.g., experiences of stressors, emotions, and coping) as little, if any, work had explicitly focused on sport coaches' well-being understanding. Conversely, as Giles et al. (2020) argues, although such concepts are necessary to understand well-being, individually they are not adequate to provide a complete representation of the construct, meaning the use of proxy indicators engenders conceptual ambiguity. However, the meta-synthesis concluded that future research should work with coaches to capture and co-construct experiences relating to well-being so that a more comprehensive understanding can be developed (Potts et al., 2021a).

Greater well-being comprehension can be achieved according to Hefferon et al. (2017) via idiographic qualitative approaches as they can obtain in-depth access to personal experiences of phenomena and associated emotions, thoughts and behaviours.

Hefferon et al. (2017) goes on to propose how explorations of well-being can be advanced by qualitative research approaches as they: (i) dissect and contextualize generalized models; (ii) create new theories; (iii) ask different questions of the phenomena of interest and data produced; (iv) move beyond the individual to more contextualized understandings of well-being (e.g. historical and cultural influences); (v) provide explanations and help inform well-being processes; and (vi) offer diverse viewpoints.

Coaches who work and compete within professional sport organisations experience a wide array of performance (e.g., competition and training) and organisational (e.g., environmental and leadership) related stressors (Thelwell et al., 2008), which supports the argument that coaches should be considered performers (Gould et al., 2002). Specifically, coaches are performers who can significantly influence their environments and athletes which is why their well-being should be made a priority (Didymus et al., 2018). For instance, the role of a coach in the sporting environment is critical, as they have the potential to help change maladaptive cultures, such as normalising, destigmatising and supporting mental health and well-being (Bissett et al., 2020). Whereas, if coaches are contending with the performance culture and are under strain themselves, athletes have been known to detect such struggles and communicate that coach stressors can negatively affect coach-athlete relationships (Thelwell et al., 2017a; 2017b), which may lead to impeded performances. Coaching is also seen as a caring profession (Cronin et al., 2020; Jones, 2009), yet the well-being of coaches is rarely considered, often because coaches are encouraged to prioritise and support their athletes' well-being over their own (Côté & Gilbert, 2009; Olusoga & Kenttä, 2017; Thelwell et al., 2017a). This often results in a lack of self-care and poor well-being for coaches

(Kenttä et al., 2020b) which is exacerbated when they do not have access to the same level of support their athletes are given by employers (Roberts et al., 2019; The FA, 2019).

There are a multitude of idiosyncratic sociocultural interactions that occur within context-specific environments related to sports coaching (Groom et al., 2012) which will influence coaches' well-being states (Didymus et al., 2018). One example being the high-performance environments they work within which often focuses on outcomes of success and achievement (Kenttä et al., 2024). This has previously been termed as sport ethic (Hughes & Coackley, 1991) and the performance narrative (Douglas & Carless, 2009), whereby the pursuit of performance is prioritised above all else, such as care and attention for oneself, wider aspects of life, and other identities/roles. Purcell et al. (2022) report that outcome orientations systemically cultivate cultures which disregard sport personnels' (e.g., coaches and athletes) mental health and well-being. Thus, researchers and applied practitioners alike are calling for sporting organisations and personnel to change the performance narrative and speak more openly about the challenges they face to improve safeguarding practices (Frost et al., 2024; Hägglund et al., 2023; Kenttä et al., 2024).

Considering the toll high performance sport cultures and settings take on coaches, it is timely that a position paper (Kenttä et al., 2024) and scoping review (Frost et al., 2024) of sport coaches' mental health and well-being have recently been published. Given mental health comprises of positive well-being states, the findings and conclusions of such papers are pertinent. Frost et al. (2024) reviewed sport coaching mental health literature which yielded 42 studies, of which 40% explored themes associated with well-being. It was reported that a variety of individual-level factors could improve coaches'

well-being, such as effective coping strategies, proficient psychological skills, strong intrinsic regulations, consistent engagement with exercise and coaching experience (Frost et al., 2024). However, it was clearly communicated that sporting organisations and federations have a duty of care to support coaches' well-being, as the organisational and societal influences (e.g., job demands and culture) coaches are exposed to often pose a greater risk to well-being, due to their systemically entrenched nature (Frost et al., 2024). Kenttä et al. (2024) have a significant focus on coaches' well-being, addressing how it can be better supported but also influenced by the high-performance environment (e.g., working culture of long hours and work-home imbalance) and the personal and systemic consequences of inadequate professional support (e.g., experiences of burnout and a lack of psychological safety). The recommendations on how to best support coaches' mental health and well-being were; (i) reduce stigmatisation of mental health struggles; (ii) develop coach education around challenges and resources; (iii) provide access to care; and (iv) hold organisations accountable for support (Kenttä et al., 2024). Common themes between Frost et al. (2024) and Kenttä et al. (2024) is that organisations have a duty of care to support coaches and that socio-contextual influences play an important role in how well-being is shaped, managed and possibly understood by coaches, suggesting a requisite for further exploration.

### **2.3.2 Football Coaching: Well-Being and Culture**

As discussed in chapter 1.1, the football coaching context is volatile and demanding which takes its toll on coaches' well-being. The Football Association (FA) is the governing body for football in England and has promoted the importance of supporting players' and coaches' mental health and well-being through the 'The FA mental health guide on mental health for coaches and managers' (The FA, 2019, 2024). However, as

communicated in chapter 1.1, specific emphasis on coaches' well-being is limited and decontextualised. Within the FA mental health guide, inspired by the 'Heads Up' campaign, the FA describe well-being as:

“The wider set of feelings and thoughts that influence our emotions and day-to-day behaviour. It is influenced by a broad set of factors such as the quality of and engagement with: relationships, housing, employment, finances, physical and mental health, etc.”

The FA (2024) also suggest that well-being can change on a daily, monthly, and yearly basis and is “characterised by times when you are or aren't feeling confident, engaged with the world, living and working productively – and are or aren't coping with the stresses of everyday life.” (p. 5). How coaches can possibly maintain well-being is briefly mentioned, such as upkeeping their own physical and mental health, taking a break from coaching, putting football into context, and connecting with other coaches to reduce loneliness and improve support networks (The FA, 2019). However, detailed and contextualised guidance from the FA and trade unions for managing coaches' well-being is limited.

In the past decade research which focuses on the population of football coaches and explores factors which influence well-being, such as stress and coping (Baldock et al., 2021; 2022; Dixon & Turner, 2018; Kent et al., 2023), burnout (Bentzen et al., 2017; Hassmén et al., 2019; Hjalm et al., 2007; Lundkvist et al., 2012), job insecurity (Bentzen et al. 2020a), and job dismissal (Bentzen et al., 2020b; Nissen, 2016) has gained momentum, but research which explicitly focuses on football coaches' well-being and how they comprehend it is lacking. Baldock et al. (2021, 2022) has progressed knowledge

on the well-being domain in football by exploring its relationship with stressors, for example, reporting that football coaches experience a variety of stressors which influence their general well-being, ranging from performance (e.g., getting positive results, managing workload and time), organisational (e.g., micro-politics, job security) and personal (planning for the future, managing work-life balance) demands. Consequently, findings highlighted football coaches would try to cope with such demands by either problem solving (e.g., planning and managing time), escaping (e.g., changing focus and cognitive avoidance), relying on self (e.g., acceptance and emotional regulation or suppression), support seeking (e.g., gaining alternative perspectives), negotiating (e.g., engaging in mutual support), or information seeking (e.g., continuing professional development and speaking with other staff) (Baldock et al., 2021). Furthermore, Baldock et al. (2022) conducted a longitudinal mixed methods approach to explore the ill/well-being of football coaches which reported that coaches' well-being struggled at the beginning of a season due to negative appraisals of uncontrollable performance stressors and ineffective coping strategies. Additionally, burnout related symptoms (e.g., emotional exhaustion and depersonalisation) were scored higher during the end of season, but what seemed most apparent was that football coaches' well-being was constantly challenged throughout a season with some fluctuations (Baldock et al., 2022).

Baldock et al.'s (2021, 2022) research can be built upon and contains important future research recommendations, for instance participants were asked to discuss three stressors, which places emphasis on negative experiences and stress transactions opposed to positive well-being experiences. Baldock et al. (2021) also highlighted how the dynamic nature of stress was not captured over multiple timepoints, which is an issue given how transactional stress processes, environmental encounters, and well-being states

change over time (Hersch, 2023; Lazarus, 1999; Rush & Grouzet, 2012). This led to a follow up study (Baldock et al., 2022) where stress was explored longitudinally, again focusing on three perceived stressors (e.g., negative experiences) as opposed to general well-being states. Thus, Baldock et al. (2022) proposes future research designs within football coaching contexts to obtain a more complete understanding of the coaching role as it could lead to greater insights into factors which contribute to performance and well-being. This complete understanding could come in the form of exploring well-being more openly, without a focus on stressors which would allow coaches to explore and make sense of both positive and negative experiences that shape well-being.

The work of Baldock et al. (2022) used quantitative single item measures (e.g., Warwick–Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale) to explore components of stress and well-being. This approach to exploring well-being has been argued to be insufficient as it risks representing estimations of underdefined personal life aspects (Ryff et al., 2020), such as ignoring the complexity of the current and wider contexts within time. This is likely why Baldock et al. (2022) adopted a mixed methods design so that qualitative interviews could complement the quantitative data, although a limitation is that only 8 out of 18 coaches were able to engage in the interview process. Therefore, approximately half of the study's data (e.g., well-being scores) lacks contextualisation, which indicates that a more comprehensive and detailed qualitative exploration of football coaches' well-being experiences is warranted. Especially given contextual interactions (e.g., socio-cultural norms) within professional sports (e.g., football) often promote an unrelenting work ethic and need to win at all costs environment which can impede well-being states (Lara-Bercial & Mallett, 2016; Parker & Manley, 2016).

Within football, socialisation, coaching contexts, and culture contribute towards the formulation of identities, ideologies, and dispositions (Cushion & Jones, 2014). For example, McGillivray et al. (2005) argues that those within professional football are inhabited by the game they inhabit, which suggests that for many in professional football their world is centred around football because it is the only thing they have ever done and have ever known. Thus, the professional football culture that players and staff reside within can influence their behaviour, such as conformity to club social norms and values, so that they can be accepted and have a status (a viable existence) at the club (Horne et al., 2013; Parker & Manley, 2016). Said norms and values are often imposed and reinforced by the managers and coaches of the club by engineering the workplace culture through rhetoric's such as 'family' and 'team' to engender compliance (Roderick, 2006b). Mills and Boardley (2016) echoed this by highlighting the coach plays an essential role in cultivating the culture within a group. However, research conducted prior to this thesis by the author denotes that coaches' values can become conflicted depending on the context they find themselves in (Higham et al., 2021). This creates many problems for the well-being of a coach, because if they do not have the authority to cultivate the culture of the club and/or find themselves in a culture which they do not coincide with, it could negatively impact their well-being. For example, high-performance sport environments, which in professional football have been described as 'win at all costs' and 'need to win' contexts (Higham et al., 2021), have been shown to negatively impact coach well-being (Bentzen et al., 2020b).

The culture of professional football has been described as aggressive, masculine, tough, violent, and replete with 'images of maleness' (Kelly & Waddington, 2006; Parker, 2001). Combine the above with the 24/7, unceasing competition of football (Giulianotti,



1999) and how football personnel feel like they cannot escape the football bubble (Jones & Denison, 2017), it is unsurprising that well-being is often impeded. Moreover, wider occupational research indicates that the specific life context which surrounds an individual is paramount for understanding their perceived well-being (Page & Vella-Brodrick, 2009). Thus, there are valued insights to be gained from the exploration of a coach's lifeworld (e.g., world; Cronin & Armour, 2017) because everyday interactions within their world will shape experiences and sensemaking of well-being. For example, the culture coaches are exposed to will greatly shape coaching practices, ideologies and daily routines (Cushion & Jones, 2014).

The masculine culture within men's professional football contexts has been inured over several decades, whereby authoritarian and subservient behaviours are commonplace (Manely et al., 2016; Parker, 1996, 2006). Such cultural and behavioural norms often lead footballing personnel to suppress their thoughts, feelings and well-being issues (Manley et al., 2016). A reason for this engrained culture is because professional football organisations are viewed as total institutions (Goffman, 1959) which are closed social systems shaped by sociocultural norms that can cultivate narrow identities and hegemonic beliefs amongst personnel (Champ et al., 2020). This is of concern given many players who transition into coaching, and coaches who have resided within a club for many years, will have become ingrained and influenced by the culture of the club for a significant proportion of their lives. Consequently, football club culture over time can shape horizons (e.g. what one can see or understand) on a given concept or ideology (Gadamer, 2013), such as well-being.

Men's football and its masculine culture is not only arduous to navigate for men but also for the few women coaches who are leading the way in this context (Norman & Rankin-Wright, 2018). For instance, within powerful male orientated sports like football, women's participation remains contested (Fielding-Lloyd & Meân, 2011), with this lack of membership possibly in part due to the male discourses that dominate (Fielding-Lloyd & Meân, 2016). Sexist discourses towards women coaches have been reported within football, which often left them feeling marginalised and unsupported (Lewis et al., 2018; Norman & Rankin-Wright, 2018). Lewis et al. (2018) reported that such sexist instances specifically occurred during FA educational courses where one would presume support, and equality would be at its highest. This demonstrates how the masculine culture ingrained within various football contexts leads to the acceptance of malpractices which go on to impede coaches' well-being experiences.

#### **2.4 Approaches to Exploring Sports Coaches' Well-Being Related Experiences**

Norris et al.'s (2017) systematic review highlighted a range of theoretical approaches which were used to explore stress, coping and well-being within sport coaching populations. Regarding well-being, the review yielded no qualitative articles and five quantitative articles which implemented psychometric tests to measure well-being (Norris et al., 2017). Interestingly, all five studies utilised self-determination theory (SDT) (Ryan & Deci, 2000) to examine well-being. The complete systematic review also examined stress and coping components which captured a selection of other theories related to well-being and ill-being experiences (Norris et al., 2017). For example, the work of Bentzen et al. (2020) and Kaski and Kinnunen (2021) utilised the Job Demand-Resource (JD-R) Model (Demerouti et al., 2001) and Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) scale (Schaufeli

et al., 1996) to explore coaches' well-being and ill-being related experiences. Alternatively, Ryff's (1989; Ryff & Keyes, 1995) multidimensional model of well-being and Seligman's (2011) flourishing model of well-being have been applied in the sports domain to capture the positive aspects of well-being (Oshimi et al., 2023; Potts et al., 2021b). Without extensive repetition of Norris et al.'s (2017) comprehensive review, a selection of theoretical approaches to investigating coaches' well-being and related experiences are critically discussed.

#### **2.4.1 Self-Determination Theory (SDT)**

Ryan and Deci's (2000) SDT is considered a core theoretical approach to motivation, social development and well-being, which has been adopted within the sports coaches' well-being research domain (Alcaraz et al., 2015; Stebbings et al., 2012). SDT aims to investigate the inherent growth tendencies and innate psychological needs of individuals that are beneficial for self-motivation, personality, and for conditions that foster positive processes, such as well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2000). The SDT perspective proposes that for an individual to experience well-being three basic psychological needs must be met, these are autonomy, competency and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2001). According to SDT, when such needs are met an individual will self-actualise and experience eudaimonia and/or self-realization leading to well-being (e.g., life satisfaction and psychological health; Ryan & Deci, 2001). It is argued that the thwarting of these psychological needs will result in negative consequences for well-being in all social or cultural contexts (Ryan & Deci, 2001). For example, Alcaraz et al. (2015) examined the mediation between coaches' basic psychological needs and well-being and concluded that when a coach's basic psychological needs were thwarted their well-being was subsequently impeded. Importantly, Ryan & Deci (2001) state:

“As such, contextual and cultural, as well as developmental, factors continually influence the modes of expression, the means of satisfaction, and the ambient supports for these needs, and it is because of their effects on need satisfaction that they, in turn, influence growth, integrity, and well-being at both between-person and within-person levels of analysis.” (p.147).

Given, contextual, cultural and developmental factors are paramount as to how such psychological needs are met and cultivated (Ryan & Deci, 2001), it is problematic that SDT does not specifically account for them within its framework. This is even more so a problem when Ryan and Deci (2001, p.147) state “SDT does not, however, suggest that the basic needs are equally valued in all families, social groups, or cultures”. Thus, socio-contextual understanding is paramount for how well-being is understood, made sense of and experienced. Consequently, due to SDT’s a-cultural approach, research exploring specific contexts and cultural domains has had to reconceptualise SDT to take more of a ‘cultural direction’ (Cresswell et al., 2019). Thus, a core limitation of SDT is its self-contained individualist manner, which is concerning because there is no separation between actors (e.g., coaches) in a milieu (e.g., environment) and psychological performance (e.g., striving for well-being) (Cresswell et al., 2019). Shweder (1991) explains:

“No sociocultural environment exists or has identity independently of the way human beings seize meanings and resources from it, while, on the other hand, every human being’s subjectivity and mental lifeline altered through the process of seizing meanings and resources from the sociocultural environment and using them.” (p. 74).

Here, Shweder (1991) acknowledges the reciprocal interactions between a person and their environment (e.g., culture), and how it shapes subjectivity (e.g., sensemaking). However, some advocates of SDT do demonstrate an awareness of environmental importance, but as Ryan and Deci (2017, p.5) state, “SDT is deliberate in its embracing of empirical methods, placing emphasis on explicit hypotheses, operational definitions, observational methods, statistical inferences, as central and meaningful to its epistemological strategy.” This captures how SDT is often applied via statistical positivism and methodological practices which reifies its own presuppositions whilst ignoring subjective and contextual factors (Cresswell et al., 2019).

#### **2.4.2 Burnout**

Another concept that is often discussed in conjunction with well-being is burnout, but it is more so related to ill-being (Stebbing et al., 2015) and comprises of three core dimensions, overwhelming exhaustion, feelings of cynicism (e.g., depersonalisation), and reduced personal accomplishment (Kenttä et al., 2020b; Maslach & Leiter, 2016). Burnout typically occurs due to prolonged exposure to chronic interpersonal stressors which subsequently leads to impeded well-being states (Maslach & Leiter, 2016; Smith, 1986). Although, it is argued that prolonged exposure to stress will not always result in burnout as commitment factors such as attraction and entrapment can influence its incidence (Raedeke, 1977; Raedeke et al., 2000). Specifically, when coaches display characteristics and feelings of entrapment, they experience more symptoms of burnout (e.g., emotional exhaustion) (Raedeke et al., 2000). Work overload and lack of reward has also been associated with coaches’ burnout (Capel, 1986; Hjälm et al., 2007) which in part may be due to the intense and demanding nature of coach-athlete relationships (Jowett & Crockerill, 2003). For instance, Schutte et al. (2000) argued experiences of

burnout were more likely for those whose job roles are focused on interpersonal relationships (e.g., sports coaches), which has been the case for those working in high performance coaching contexts (Olusoga et al., 2019; Olusoga & Kenttä, 2017) like professional football, possibly due to the intense coach player relationships (Hassmén et al., 2019; Hjälml et al., 2007).

A critique of burnout research is its use of positivist psychometric measurements whereby concerns have been raised over the use and development of scales (e.g., Athlete Burnout Questionnaire and Maslach Burnout Inventory) which are informed from occupational research (Lundkvist et al., 2014; Pires et al., 2024). For example, foundational questionnaires (e.g., psychometric tests) have been modified to account for other occupations (e.g., sport coaches and athletes) and job role characteristics which have broadened the original concept of burnout (Piers et al., 2024). Another critique of burnout literature is that well-being is typically incorporated by proxy without being thoroughly explored (Baldock et al., 2020; Carson et al., 2018). Nevertheless, burnout is important for understanding one's general mental health and how instances of ill-being can occur, but it is important to acknowledge that well-being is considered a positive construct (Seligman, 2011), while burnout captures more so the negative components of mental health like ill-being (Konttä et al., 2020b). Therefore, it is essential to explore the positive aspects of mental health, specifically coaches' well-being, to create a more holistic account of their lived experiences. This approach would address a significant research gap, as the well-being of coaches has frequently been neglected in sports coaching literature (Konttä et al., 2020b).

### **2.4.3 Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model**

The Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model (Demerouti et al., 2001) is another approach to explore and explain coaches' well-being states as coaches regularly experience high levels of job demands and stressors which require resources to be managed more effectively (Kaski & Kinnunen, 2021). The JD-R model stems from occupational research and accentuates that employee health and well-being is obtained when a balance between positive (resources) and negative (demands) job characteristics is achieved (Schaufeli & Taris, 2014). Job demands encapsulate physical (e.g., exertion), psychological (e.g., stress), social (e.g., relationships), and organisational (e.g., leadership) aspects that require sustained psychological and/or physical effort which subsequently require psychological and/or physical costs (Kaski & Kinnunen, 2021). This results in costs such as the depletion of one's resources (e.g. energy) which then may lead to symptoms of strain and burnout.

Burnout is once more prevalent in this model because of its focus on demands (e.g., stressors) which reiterates the issue of focusing on the negative aspects that thwart well-being and ultimately lead to instances of ill-being. The JD-R model when broken down suggests that one's well-being will be good if demands are managed by sufficient resources, but this does not capture well-being's hedonic and eudaimonic elements, or the pursuit of self-actualisation and the desire to flourish (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Seligman, 2011). The JD-R model once more places emphasis on ill-being characteristics (e.g., stressors and demands) and how well-being could be mediated via resources, as opposed to what could fulfil well-being and lead it to thrive.

The job resources component of the JD-R model encompasses physical elements (e.g., adequate tools), psychological factors (e.g., control), social aspects (e.g., support from colleagues), and organizational features (e.g., innovative climate) that facilitate the achievement of work-related goals, mitigate job demands, and promote personal growth and development (Kaski & Kinnunen, 2021). These resources have the capacity to restore one's energy and other resources, suggesting motivation and well-being will be enhanced. However, a limitation of the JD-R model is that it purely focuses on job related demands and resources as opposed to the wider life systems a coach or person engages with. Demands and resources do not purely exist within work contexts as human beings exist in much more complex ecological systems and contexts that can influence well-being, such as life outside of work (Seamon, 2018; Simova et al., 2024; Tait et al., 2020). Moreover, personal values, beliefs and identity are important factors for how individuals (e.g., coaches) experience well-being (Simova et al., 2024), something which the JD-R model does not account for.

Another concern with the JD-R is that it proposes straightforward unidirectional causal relations among demands, resources, and outcomes (Schaufeli & Taris, 2014). This is an issue as there is evidence that reciprocal interactions and causation between resources and work engagement exists, suggesting they mutually influence one another (Schaufeli & Taris, 2014). Additionally, the JD-R model adopts an individual-level approach, yet working within organisations, especially in the coaching domain, is a social endeavour (Purdy, 2017; Stebbings & Taylor, 2016) meaning collective psycho-social principles are disregarded (Schaufeli & Taris, 2014). For instance, emotional contagion is prevalent within sporting contexts and will shape individual and collective well-being experiences (Rumbold et al., 2022). Consequently, the reciprocal socio-contextual



interactions within and between an individual's wider life are disregarded within the JD-R model.

#### **2.4.4 Ryff's Multidimensional Model of Well-Being**

Ryff's (1989; Ryff & Keyes, 1995) multidimensional model of well-being has already been outlined within chapter 2.2.1 but is not immune to critique. For example, Ryff's model (1989; Ryff & Keyes, 1995) and its classification has been criticised as there is no clarification as to why well-being should include the proposed six dimensions (e.g., purpose in life, autonomy, personal growth, environmental mastery, positive relationships, and self-acceptance). For example, it is argued that there could be more or less than six dimensions, or wholly different dimensions all together, suggesting the six dimensions seem to a degree arbitrary (Taris & Schaufeli, 2018). Furthermore, the personal growth dimension conceptualised by Ryff (1989) is most likely a culturally informed concept which has more concern to a westernised upper-middle class society than capturing the universal nature of well-being (Peterson, 2003), yet socio-contextual factors are not a focal point of the model. In addition, other dimensions such as autonomy, positive interpersonal relations, and environmental mastery may be interpreted better as antecedents of well-being as opposed to central features of the concept, which can equally be said for SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2001; Warr, 2007).

#### **2.4.5 Seligman's PERMA Model**

Alike Ryff's (1989; Ryff & Keyes, 1995) multidimensional model of well-being, Seligman's (2011) PERMA model has already been outlined in chapter 2.2.1, but concerns over this framework need to be addressed. For example, it is argued that PERMA is not a theory of well-being, as it only lists five factors that relate to well-being (Wong

& Roy, 2018) and there is no theoretical justification for why said five factors (e.g., Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishment) were included (Donaldson et al., 2022). Such critiques of the PERMA model prompted Seligman (2018) to clarify that PERMA was not a framework of what well-being *was*, but rather a set of elements required to *facilitate* well-being. Consequently, Seligman (2018) promoted development of the PERMA model to give it more flexibility (e.g., adding new criteria), which may lead to scientific advancement (van Zyl et al., 2024), but could also result in misuse and inappropriate applications. Additionally, Goodman et al. (2018) argued that PERMA did not offer anything different to that of Diener's (1984) model of subjective well-being (SWB) and concluded in their study which compared SWB with PERMA that they both represent the same type of well-being when measured with self-report scales. Concerns are also raised over the PERMA model's potential for cultural bias as it was developed primarily in westernised contexts and may not capture conceptions of well-being in other cultures (Donaldson et al., 2022), which suggests a more culturally sensitive approach to understanding well-being is warranted.

## **2.5 A Rationale for Exploring Contextualised Well-Being Lived Experiences and Sensemaking**

As discussed throughout chapter 2.4 there are limitations and concerns with common approaches of exploring well-being and related experiences. Specifically, how contextual, cultural and developmental factors tend to be neglected when considering how well-being is experienced amongst specific populations (Cresswell et al., 2019; Trainor & Bundon, 2023). Furthermore, the unidirectional approaches and explanations amongst the well-being research field are of concern, especially when reciprocal interactions within and

between a person's environment have been revealed (Schaufeli & Taris, 2014). However, even more concerning is the lack of research that aims to understand how individuals (e.g., coaches) make sense of the construct themselves. For instance, Norris et al. (2017, p.110) advocated that it is most "important to understand what well-being means to coaches and to ascertain the theoretical frameworks that are most relevant to this population." This suggests a requisite for qualitative approaches to explore coaches' well-being insights and narratives (Norris et al., 2017; Potts et al., 2021a). For instance, most of the research into coaches' well-being has traditionally adopted a positivist approach, whereby psychometric tests, that already align with a theoretical perspective on how well-being should be understood and measured, are administered with coaches (Norris et al., 2017; Potts et al., 2021a). Therefore, it seems necessary and of high importance to understand how certain coaching populations, within their given socio-contextual environments come to understand and make sense of well-being.

### **2.5.1 A (Bio)Ecological Theoretical Lens to Enrich Well-Being Sensemaking**

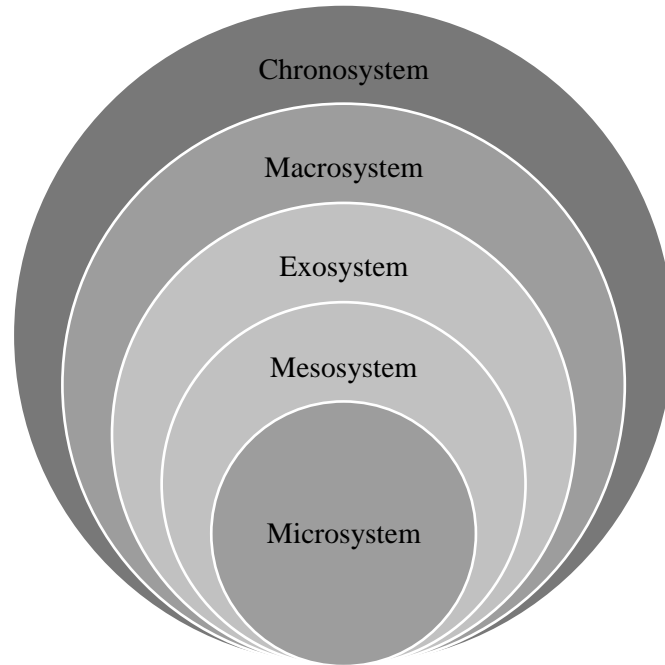
According to the World Health Organisation (2021), well-being is a positive state experienced by individuals and societies and it is determined by social, economic and environmental conditions. Therefore, well-being is moulded and shaped by reciprocal interactions within and between an individual's context over time. There have been calls for temporal and contextualized qualitative explorations of well-being (Hefferon et al., 2017; Kahneman, 2011; Lomas, 2015), with suggestions that exploring well-being through a non-contextual lens may have adverse consequences (e.g., misunderstandings and interpretations), as context changes the very nature of experiences (Hamling et al., 2020). An appropriate theoretical lens which considers the influence of socio-contextual factors on human development is Bronfenbrenner's (1979, 2000) ecological systems

theory. For instance, the primary intent of the ecological systems theory is not to claim answers but to offer a framework to advance the discovery of processes and conditions that delineate the scope and limits of human development (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). For the purpose of this thesis, human development relates to the development of how an individual (e.g., a coach) makes sense of well-being and related experiences (e.g., interactions) that come to shape such understanding. Hence, ecological methodologies are in ‘the discovery’ mode rather than the mode of verification, suggesting inductive enquiries are better suited to this model than deductive reasoning (Rosa & Tudge, 2013, p.254). Specifically, an ecological systems approach to exploring well-being facilitates the discovery of how individuals develop well-being comprehension without prior theoretical presuppositions and focuses on their lived experiences.

Ecological systems theory can address core limitations of traditional approaches such as the socio-contextual interactions of an individual and the reciprocal relations within and between environments (see Figure 2.2). For example, Bronfenbrenner and Ceci (1994) suggested that viewing a developing individual as an isolated entity is insufficient and counterproductive when describing the social world. Individuals do not exist in a vacuum; they continuously interpret, respond to, and modify their environment through interactions with its various components (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994).

**Figure 2.2**

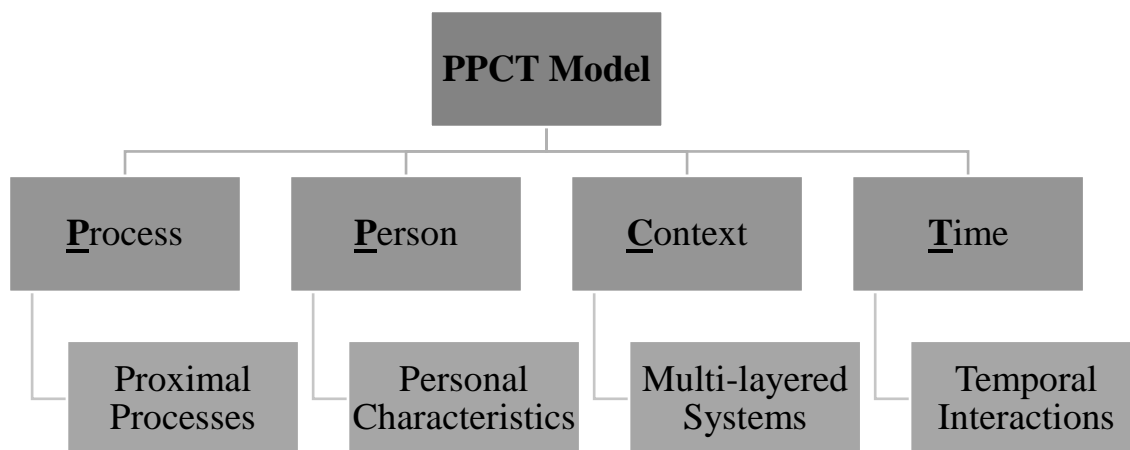
*Ecological Systems Theory (adapted from Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 2000)*



Ecological systems theory later developed into bioecological theory which acknowledges that human development is the result of continuity and change in the biopsychological characteristics of human beings, both as individuals and as groups which extends over the life course and through historical time (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). The most recent developments of bioecological theory lie with the Process-Person-Context-Time (PPCT) model (Bronfenbrenner, 1998, 2005; DiSanti & Erickson, 2021; Rosa & Tudge, 2013) which builds upon ecological systems theory, suggesting that proximal processes (i.e., sustained and prolonged reciprocal interactions), personal characteristics (e.g., knowledge and experience), contexts (e.g., interrelating socio-contextual environments), and time (e.g., temporal events and transitions over the life course) could shape well-being experiences and sensemaking (see [Figure 2.3](#)).

**Figure 2.3**

*The PPCT Model (adapted from Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998, 2006)*



The process element of the PPCT model exists to bridge the individual's attributes to the context surrounding them in an interactive manner (DiSanti & Erickson, 2021). This process is coined *proximal processes*, which occur when an individual interacts with their evolving surroundings over a prolonged period (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). For proximal processes to be most effective they must occur on a regular basis over prolonged periods of time, and they involve interpersonal interactions which also include interactions with objects and symbols (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). The objects and symbols aspect are to consider those proximal processes which occur without others present (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006) such as, engagement and interactions with cultural norms (e.g., symbols) and/or facilities (e.g., objects) within the coaching domain. Additional examples of proximal processes in the sports coaching realm could be the coach-athlete relationship, interacting with an organisation's culture, participation in competitions, and/or club facilities.

The person aspect of the PPCT model recognises the personal characteristics of an individual and how they may influence a social situation (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). This is important because a person will exist, interact and potentially change their environment (DiSanti & Erickson, 2021). Bronfenbrenner describes three core personal characteristics that will influence a person's development which are force, demand and resource (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994). Force characteristics refer to personal attributes that influence how an individual engages with their environment and processes, affecting their own development and that of others (DiSanti & Erickson, 2021). In sports coaching this could be a coach's passion or resilience. For example, obsessive passion and overt immersion in or engagement with work has been known to impede coaches' well-being as it can result in excessive ruminations, which subsequently lead to symptoms like emotional exhaustion (Donahue et al., 2012; Yukhymenko-Lescroart & Sharma, 2022). Whereas harmonious passion was deemed to mitigate against excessive ruminations and emotional exhaustion, hence facilitating well-being (Kenttä et al., 2020b).

Demand characteristics are attributes that invite or discourage reactions from the social environment, influencing interactions and relationships (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994). In sports coaching this could be the coach's openness to vulnerability and help-seeking. For instance, it is widely reported within high performance sport domains (e.g., professional football) that mental health and well-being is stigmatised, and help-seeking behaviours (e.g., asking for support) are often seen as signs of weakness (Hägglund et al., 2023; Kenttä et al., 2020b; Souter et al., 2018). Resource characteristics are the mental, emotional, social, and material resources that individuals have access to, which affect their ability to engage in proximal processes (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). In sports coaching this could be the coach's knowledge and expertise, as well as their access to

social support. For example, a coach's access to social support is important in mitigating stressors and mediating coping, insofar it can aid well-being experiences (Norris et al., 2022). Thus, when combining the examples of demand, resource, and force characteristics, it becomes visible how individuals (e.g., coaches) working within the same sporting context (e.g., a professional football club) may still have divergent experiences based on personal features (e.g., force, demand and resource characteristics) (DiSanti & Erickson, 2021; Tudge et al., 2009).

The context component of the PPCT model was core to Bronfenbrenner's initial ecological systems conceptualisation where an individual exists and interacts within and between multi-layered socio-contextual environments (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1994). The interrelating socio-contextual environments which can and will influence well-being are the microsystem (e.g., workplace), mesosystem (e.g., player-colleague relations), exosystem (e.g., governing bodies), macrosystem (e.g., cultural norms), and chronosystem (e.g., life transitions). These systems begin with the most local and proximal in terms of scope and magnitude (e.g., microsystem) and then work outwardly towards the most global and distal system (e.g., macrosystem) which are all encompassed within time (e.g., chronosystem).

The microsystem captures a person's local environment, indicating a specific set of behaviours, values, and interactions between social actors and settings closely related to the individual (Disanti & Erickson, 2021). For coaches and within the context of sports this system encompasses settings like work (e.g., club) and home, and the interactions with players, colleagues and fans. The mesosystem encapsulates the interrelations among an individual's different local microsystems (Rosa & Tudge, 2013). Specifically, "the



mesosystem is a system of microsystems” (Bronfenbrenner, 1976, p. 163). For example, how does a coach’s experience with their family’s microsystem interact with their experience within their club’s microsystem. The exosystem depicts the multitude of settings and processes that comprise the larger world in which an individual interacts but does not directly participate and which has an indirect impact on said individual (DiSanti & Erickson, 2021). For example, the sporting governing bodies which decide policy, rules and regulations that impact a coach’s development and practice. The macrosystem signifies the level largest in scale and resides over the previously described system (DiSanti & Erickson, 2021). The macrosystem is comprised of socio-cultural norms, beliefs, values and societal attitudes that filter down and guide an individual’s interpretations and manifestations of the interacting proximal systems (Rosa & Tudge, 2013). For instance, the traditional and engrained culture of a sport (e.g., football) will influence and shape how a coach perceives governing bodies (e.g., exosystem), work-life interactions (e.g., mesosystem), and player relations (e.g., microsystem). In sum of all the ecological systems, a football coach’s well-being could equally be shaped by sustained interactions at the club or home, via cultural norms and sporting governing bodies.

The time factor of the PPCT model relates to the chronosystem which captures how changes that occur over the individual’s lifetime caused by events or experiences can shape development (Bronfenbrenner, 1989). This system places emphasis on “space through time” (Bronfenbrenner, 1999, p. 20) as life and related experiences are not static but change over time which can destabilise relationships and activities (Bronfenbrenner, 2000). The time element captures time spent on immediate activities (e.g., attending a workshop), temporal-based frequencies of participation (e.g., consistency in engagement with activities or interactions), and time-based developmental influences that are not

directly related to an individual's interactions or activities but occur at a certain point in the individual's life (Disanti & Erickson, 2021). The time-based developmental influences are also termed *cohort effects*, which means that *when* in history an individual interacts with their surrounding systems matters (Disanti & Erickson, 2021). For instance, two coaches working in the same sport (e.g., football), but in different era's (e.g., 1980's compared to 2020's) will have different developmental and experiential encounters. Take the differing cultures during those times regarding mental health and well-being and how those would have shaped attitudes and beliefs regarding seeking support or demonstrating vulnerability. Additionally, the chronosystem outlines that the timing and sequence of events, interactions, and engagements within the various systems surrounding an individual are crucial for comprehending social phenomena (Bronfenbrenner, 1988, 1994). For example, for interactions to be effective they must occur regularly over extended periods, which suggests that if a person (e.g., coach) were to engage in one well-being intervention a year, it is less likely to be effective than engaging in a well-being intervention each month over multiple years (Bone, 2015).

Given the breakdown of the PPCT model (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998, 2006) it would appear a suitable framework to aid with the exploration of how football coaches experience and makes sense of well-being. For example, the primary purpose of the ecological systems theory is not to provide definitive answers, but to offer a framework that facilitates the exploration of processes and conditions that outline the boundaries and potential of human experience and comprehension (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). The PPCT model will help address what Norris et al. (2017) advocated when they asked for future research to explore what well-being means to coaches as the model takes into consideration how a coach's sensemaking will have developed due to personal

characteristics and interactions within and between their environment over time. In addition, previous approaches that have examined well-being are heavily informed from a positivist and quantitative tradition as they deductively impose theory to conceptualise and measure well-being (Norris et al., 2017; Potts et al., 2021a). Whereas the PPCT model guides exploration and does not deductively verify theoretical answers, which is why it aligns well with an inductive approach to inquiry (Rosa & Tudge, 2013) facilitating the exploration of how coaches understand well-being. Moreover, traditional theoretical models and approaches of investigating well-being, such as SDT and the JD-R model are often decontextualised and/or a-cultural (Cresswell et al., 2019) with little to no acknowledgement of the importance of reciprocal interactions between a person and their environment (Schaufeli & Taris, 2014). However, the PPCT model accounts for socio-contextual interactions and how they develop individual and collective sensemaking and experiences (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Specifically, the PPCT model accounts for how a person's or group's well-being could be shaped and understood due to reciprocal interactions within and between their surrounding multi-layered systems over time (Bronfenbrenner, 2000; DiSanti & Erickson, 2021; Rosa & Tudge, 2013). This is something which sports coaching well-being literature has overlooked (Tait et al., 2020) but has seen finite traction in athlete well-being domains (Purcell et al., 2022).

Thus, the present programme of research aims to utilise a bioecological approach (e.g., the PPCT model) to explore well-being in sports coaching contexts and build upon previous work which has only utilised the ecological systems variation (Purcell et al., 2022). This is mainly because the PPCT model is more complex as it acknowledges the idiosyncrasies of an individual (e.g., sex or experience), as well as how time (e.g., key life events or transitions) and reciprocal interactions (e.g., proximal processes) within

one's contexts (e.g., multi-layered systems) develops comprehension and sensemaking. An approach which places emphasis on exploring a person within context and their idiosyncrasies is interpretative phenomenological analysis.

### **2.5.2 The Three Pillars of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis**

To develop well-being understanding, research has argued that phenomenological studies would provide richer descriptions of well-being and insights into related experiences (Galvin & Todres, 2011; Holst, 2022; Kiefer, 2008; Sarvimäki, 2006; Todres & Galvin, 2010). For example, the methodological approach known as interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA; Smith et al., 2009) would suit because of its interpretative nature and ability to make sense of the relationship between 'person' and 'world' which contextualises participant claims within cultural and physical environments (Larkin & Thompson, 2012). Moreover, as a qualitative approach, IPA has a psychological interest in how people make sense of their experiences (Larkin & Thompson, 2012) and is concerned with the detailed examination of personal lived experience (Eatough & Smith, 2017). Such an approach is suitable for the proposed thesis because of its explicit commitment to understanding phenomena from a first-person perspective, and the value it places on subjective knowledge for psychological understanding (Eatough & Smith, 2017) something which has been missing within the coach well-being research field (Norris et al., 2017; Potts et al., 2021a). Historically, IPA has drawn upon the interpretivist paradigm, whereby rich and in-depth accounts are harnessed for an experience or event by utilising the three underpinning pillars of IPA, which are phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography (Smith, 2016).

### ***2.4.2.1 Phenomenology***

Phenomenology can be described as “a philosophical approach to the study of experience” (Smith et al., 2022, p.7). Phenomenological research tends to focus on what the experience of being human is like, how things matter to us and how said things constitute our lived world (Smith et al., 2022). The German philosopher, Edmund Husserl is considered the principal founder of phenomenology, who argued that we should ‘go back to the things themselves’, suggesting that we should endeavour to focus on each and every particular thing (e.g., person, phenomena, and experience) in its own right (Smith et al., 2022). Ultimately, describing how the world is formed and experienced through consciousness (Husserl, 1997). According to Husserl (1997) a founding principle of phenomenological inquiry is that experiences should be examined as they occur and in their own terms, for example he argued that researchers should bracket their ideas and perspectives of their lifeworld (e.g., the taken-for-granted, everyday life one leads) to concentrate on the world being presented to them (Smith et al., 2022).

Decades later, students of Husserl, such as Martin Heidegger and Maurice Merleau-Ponty built upon the phenomenological approach. Specifically, the work of Heidegger (1962/1927) and Merleau-Ponty (1962) emphasised a more contextualised phenomenology, one in which draws upon the situated and interpretative quality of our knowledge. This contextualised phenomenological approach suggests humans can never truly reduce or bracket to the abstract because the observations they make come from somewhere (Larkin & Thompson, 2012). For example, Heidegger communicated the contextualised nature of human via Dasein (‘there-being’), which is the preferred term for the uniquely situated quality of ‘human being’ (Smith et al., 2022). Heidegger is more concerned with the ontological question of existence itself stating that persons (Dasein;

‘there being’) are inextricably involved in the world, and in relationships with others (Larkin & Thompson, 2012). For example, professional football coaches, like any human beings are intertwined and embedded within their lifeworld (Seamon, 2018) and the cultural and physical environment that surrounds them will shape how they make sense of their world (Larkin et al., 2006). Heidegger (1962/1927), amongst other phenomenologists, place emphasis on one’s lifeworld (e.g., subjective world of lived experiences) whereby components such as temporality and spatiality are pertinent to the interpretation of human experience. Thus, the meaning of objects and events in a person’s experience are always derived from their context, within their lifeworld, and they are never independent of it (Ashworth, 2016).

As for Merleau-Ponty (1962), he describes that ‘persons’ are always embodied to the world and how that leads to our own individual situated perspective on said world (Smith et al. 2022). Merleau-Ponty (1962) discusses the situated viewpoint:

I am not the outcome or the meeting-point of numerous causal agencies which determine my bodily or psychological make-up. I cannot conceive myself as nothing but a bit of the world, a mere object of biological, psychological or sociological investigation. I cannot shut myself up within the realm of science. All my knowledge of the world, even my scientific knowledge, is gained from my own particular point of view, or from some experience of the world without which the symbols of science would be meaningless. (p.ix)

As human beings we can endeavour to bracket our own perspectives, but we are situated within the world (lifeworld), and all knowledge is gained from a particular point of view of engaging with said world. Qualitative investigations can be enriched by

analysis in terms of lifeworld aspects, such as self, sociality, embodiment, temporality (with its events), spatiality (with its objects), discourse, and mood (Ashworth, 2013). Phenomenology has been deemed an appropriate approach to research sport-related experiences because of its emphasis on subjective lived experience, consideration of one's lifeworld, and focus on the essence as opposed to incidence of phenomenon (Kerry & Armour, 2000). Therefore, for the proposed thesis particular care should be given to the contextualised nature of football coaches' well-being experiences as engagements within their lifeworld, such as working within football will have likely widened or narrowed their understanding of well-being. For example, using a phenomenological approach could unearth new knowledge regarding how past experiences and events (e.g., temporality) shape a person's (e.g., coach's) well-being comprehension, or how dominant discourses and cultural norms (e.g., sociality) influence well-being experiences (Galvin & Todres, 2011). Thus, a phenomenological approach could better contextualise the lived experiences of football coaches' well-being and situate well-being within the spatiality of football and its discourses.

#### ***2.4.2.2 Hermeneutics***

Hermeneutics is an iterative endeavour and effectively means 'to interpret' (Eatough & Smith, 2017), with its overall aim "to make meaning intelligible" (Grondin, 1994, p.20). Hermeneutics is important within IPA because humans are sensemaking beings, who attempt to make sense of the things that are happening to them (Smith, 2016). Therefore, within IPA the role of the researcher is then to make sense of the participant making sense of 'X'; which is described as a double hermeneutic (Smith & Osborn, 2015). This involves the researcher deeply engaging with the data of participants' personal experiences and navigating between multiple layers of interpretation (Smith, 2004). For

example, the proposed thesis aims to not only acknowledge but surpass the surface level accounts of the coaches, to enlighten the latent, hidden meanings in their accounts via reflexive interpretation (Smith et al., 2022). This can be achieved via the double hermeneutic which Ricoeur (1970) suggests is the hermeneutics of empathy and suspicion (questioning). The former attempts to reconstruct the original experience in its own terms, whereas the latter draws upon theoretical perspectives from outside to shed light on the phenomenon (Smith, 2016). In sum, the IPA researcher to some extent, is trying to adopt an ‘insider perspective’ (Larkin et al., 2006) to stand in the participant’s shoes and have their outlook. Whilst, also trying to stand alongside the participant, to view them from a different angle, ask questions and ponder over things they say (Smith, 2016).

Within the proposed thesis the author is involved in facilitating and making sense of how the phenomenon of well-being appears to participants (Smith et al., 2022). Consequently, the analysis may become more reliant on the interpretative work of the author, rather than representing what the participant would say themselves (Smith et al., 2022). This is pertinent for researching coaches’ well-being within men’s professional football contexts given: (i) the masculine football culture often instils organisational silence (Parker & Manley, 2016); (ii) professional football environments can be seen as an ‘arena of struggle’, riven with conflict and consequently a lack of honesty (Thompson et al., 2015); (iii) males in football tend to suppress their emotions and emotive-expressive behaviour (Adams & Carr, 2019); (iv) males are also far less likely to demonstrate help-seeking behaviours in general regarding their mental health and subsequent well-being (Gorczyński et al., 2020); and (v) vulnerability and seeking help are often seen as a weaknesses in high performance sport settings (Olusoga et al., 2019). Thus, *reading between the lines*, questioning the use of language, and tentatively drawing on theoretical



principles will need to take place to extrapolate and enrich the coaches' narratives. Consequently, the double hermeneutic approach could provide greater understanding and knowledge on coaches' well-being experiences and progress beyond a more 'surface level' analysis, which has been typical in previous research.

IPA draws heavily from Hans-Georg Gadamer who was prolific in the field of hermeneutics (Smith et al., 2022). Gadamer's (2013) work emphasised the importance of history and tradition on the interpretative process because humans negotiate between fore-understanding and what is newly presented to them. For instance, traditional ways of working (fore-understanding) can influence day to day practices, but a continuing professional development (CPD) session (newly presented information) could change practices. Likewise, traditions can influence how one would view and comprehend the CPD session, hence why in hermeneutics it is important to allow the new stimuli to 'speak in its own voice' as preconceptions could hinder comprehension and interpretation of experiences (Smith et al., 2022). The former example captures what Gadamer termed a *fusion of horizons* whereby newly presented information, or discussions can widen and broaden our understanding (Gimbel, 2016). Gadamer (2013) states to understand our world one must transition from their own horizon (i.e., the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point) to the horizon of others (e.g., persons and texts). Gadamer (2013, p.306) provides insight into how our present cannot be shaped without the past:

“The horizon of the present is continually in the process of being formed because we are continually having to test all our prejudices. An important part of this testing occurs in encountering the past and in understanding the tradition from

which we come. Hence the horizon of the present cannot be formed without the past. There is no more an isolated horizon of the present in itself than there are historical horizons which have to be acquired. Rather, understanding is always the fusion of these horizons supposedly existing by themselves.”

Gadamer opposes the view that horizons are mutually exclusive or that our worldviews are hermetically sealed and emphasises that people’s horizons are open to other horizons and that they can and will overlap so mutual understanding can be reached (Moran, 2000). Thus, understanding emerges as a fusion of horizons, whether that be from one’s convergence of past and present experiences or discussing one’s own beliefs in conjunction with someone else’s. The fusion of horizons that takes place between one person and another can shape new insights and points of view. Adopting Gadamer’s (2013) hermeneutic concept of ‘horizons’ could facilitate the generation of new well-being knowledge, as it may illuminate how coaches interpret and comprehend well-being due to the fusion between past and present interactions within the football context.

#### ***2.4.2.3 Idiography***

As can be seen within the previous discussions, IPA is concerned with particular cases (i.e., the experiences of specific individuals and phenomena, in detail). Hence this is why IPA adopts an idiographic approach, which is concerned with how to understand the particular and unique whilst maintaining the integrity of the person (Eatough & Smith, 2017). Due to distinct interest in individual cases, this typically means that IPA studies adopt small sample sizes (e.g., often ranging from single case studies to sample sizes of 10), because the analysis process is iterative and idiographic. It typically involves

carefully moving from case to case to cautiously make claims for the whole group (Smith, 2016).

A hallmark of good IPA and its idiographic nature is that within the analysis stages, group experiential themes are created through a nuanced analysis of convergences and divergences in participant accounts. Moreover, showing how participants may share concerns but also highlighting the individualistic ways those concerns reveal themselves for participants (Smith, 2016; Smith & Nizza, 2021). Thus, harnessing individual accounts of how well-being is experienced and made sense of is paramount because well-being and coaching is considered idiosyncratic (Cushion & Jones 2006; Kiefer, 2008; Wilcock et al., 1998). For example, capturing and interpreting individual accounts could enlighten how contextualised factors (e.g., level of sport and coaching experience) shape well-being experiences and sensemaking.

Exploring how coach well-being is experienced in different contexts and to different groups is paramount because of the significance social and environmental interaction plays in comprehension (de Chavez, 2005), such as organisational socio-cultural norms, beliefs and values. IPA is therefore befitting as it considers the contextualised culture and environment of the participants in the analysis phases when exploring their idiographic accounts (Larkin et al., 2006). Thus, IPA is resolutely idiographic, always attempting to capture *particular* experiences for *particular* people, and ensuring that any generalizations are grounded in this (Eatough & Smith, 2017).

#### ***2.5.2.4 Application of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis***

IPA is suited for the proposed thesis because of its experiential approach to inquiry (Smith, 2016), and because of its assumption that to understand the world, one requires

an understanding of experience (Larkin & Thompson, 2012). This is important for the context of exploring football coaches' well-being because 'being' is important to how we comprehend experiences and events. For example, as human 'beings' our well-'being' will always be inextricably involved in the world and in relationships with others (Larkin & Thompson, 2012). Therefore, interactions within football organisations, as well as residing (being) within such contexts will influence sensemaking and experiences of well-being.

IPA can acquire experiential understanding by eliciting rich, personal experiential accounts of professional football coaches, who are *always-already* immersed in a cultural, relational, linguistic, and physical world (Larkin & Thompson, 2012). Thus, the proposed thesis aims to explore what well-being means to coaches (Norris et al., 2017) because sports well-being research has lacked contextual explorations (Trainor & Bundon, 2023) with specific populations (e.g., football coaches). For example, before meaningful theory can be applied or developed regarding coaches' well-being it is imperative coaches' insights on well-being are unearthed (Norris et al., 2017). Gaining such insights is specifically important due to the idiographic nature of sports coaching and well-being in general, which suggests contextual nuances should be acknowledged. Consequently, the thesis aims to contextualise well-being by illuminating detailed individual nuances and personal experiences via an IPA design (Larkin & Thompson, 2012). To clarify why an IPA design has been selected:

- i. It places emphasis on the conscious lived experience of participants (Smith et al., 2022).

- ii. The interpretative component of IPA contextualises participant claims within cultural and physical environments and attempts to make sense of the relationship between ‘person’ and ‘world’ (Larkin & Thompson, 2012).
- iii. It empowers and gives a voice to the participants (Larkin et al., 2006).
- iv. Unlike nomothetic research, individual accounts and their nuances are shared creating rich and detailed data (Smith et al., 2022).
- v. IPA draws upon hermeneutics, specifically a double hermeneutic process. Thereby allowing for deeper interpretation and sensemaking of experiences (Smith & Nizza, 2021).

Furthermore, IPA not only includes an element of *giving voice*, but also *making sense* (Larkin et al., 2006). It is this making sense element that is of particular use for this thesis, because it allows for interpretation, which is grounded in provided accounts but may also use psychological concepts to extend beyond them (Larkin et al., 2006). For example, Heidegger noted that phenomenology consists of two parts, phenomenon, and logos (Smith et al., 2022). Heidegger interpreted phenomenon as to *show* or *appear* and concluded that the term appearance has a dual quality, such as things can have certain visible meanings and hidden meanings for us (Smith et al., 2022). This is central to phenomenology and the proposed thesis as they are both concerned with understanding the thing (well-being) as it shows itself, and how it is brought to light. Consequently, Heidegger believed that phenomenology is in part concerned with analysing something which may be latent, or disguised, as it emerges into the light (Smith et al., 2022). For example, the phenomenological concept of lifeworld can spotlight a coach’s taken for granted and typically unnoticed world, in which they are entwined and interconnected to (Seamon, 2018). As human beings we are often unaware of our own lifeworld unless it

shifts in some noticeable way (Seamon, 2018). Therefore, in relation to the thesis it is important to illuminate and share what is often taken for granted and not noticed about coach well-being. Additionally, Moran (2000) states that “how things appear or are covered up must be explicitly studied, [and] the things themselves always present themselves in a manner which is at the same time self-concealing” (p. 229). Once more coinciding with the proposed thesis as it aims to unveil and illuminate what well-being means for coaches (Norris et al., 2017) by iteratively analysing the surface and latent level accounts (Smith et al., 2022) of professional football coaches.

An IPA research design can also address many sports coaching well-being future research recommendations. One future research area advocated by Didymus et al. (2018) is the exploration of organisational climates and cultures due to their influence on coaches’ well-being and performance. By doing so, it will help develop understanding as to whether certain environments (e.g., football organisations) are conducive or harmful for coaches’ well-being. Thus, given IPA’s contextualised nature (Larkin et al., 2006) it is well suited to explore how socio-cultural influences shape well-being sensemaking and experiences. The findings of such an IPA study may enlighten in-depth, idiographic accounts of how coaches’ well-being is influenced by microsystem (e.g., organisational workings) and macrosystem (e.g., cultural norms) interactions (Bronfenbrenner, 2000) mainly due to how IPA contextualises participant claims within cultural and physical environments (Larkin et al., 2006).

Potts et al. (2021a) advocate that the emotions coaches experience and how they influence well-being requires further exploration, specifically in a qualitative capacity. For instance, Potts et al. (2021a) reported that emotions, particularly those positively

valenced can aid in the nourishment and creation of psychological well-being, whereas negatively valenced emotions can have a detrimental impact on performance and psychological well-being. An IPA approach acknowledges the importance of harnessing rich descriptions, trying to capture emotions surrounding an experience and how an individual understands and makes sense of said experiences when exploring phenomena (e.g., well-being) (Smith & Nizza, 2021). This is because the idiographic point of view from a participant will give insight into how they construct and make sense of well-being as they navigate their personal lifeworld (Smith et al., 2022). Thus, an IPA approach could illuminate how coaches' lived experiences within football contexts shape emotional states and subsequent well-being. For example, the contextualised 'need to win' culture in football and/or matchday results will most likely shape coaches' emotions and in turn their well-being experiences.

The adoption and implementation of qualitative methods is recommended by many who explored coach well-being associated topics (e.g., Bentzen et al., 2020a; Cho et al., 2021; Didymus et al., 2021; Durand-bush et al., 2012; Lundqvist et al., 2011; Olusoga et al., 2019). For example, it is suggested that rich, in-depth information is needed to complement the experimental and cross-sectional work (Didymus et al., 2021). Similarly, Cho et al. (2021) state that a qualitative research design would provide opportunities to ask further questions which can provide accounts of individual experiences that are unique to each participant. Additionally, Durand-bush et al. (2012) encourages future work to implement an idiographic approach because it can help identify effective and ineffective coach well-being practices at an individual level in detail. Moreover, Lundqvist et al. (2011) claims future qualitative work is warranted to explore sport related well-being in greater depth and detail. Hence, why the proposed thesis aims

to centrally adopt a qualitative phenomenological approach throughout due to its idiographic nature (Smith et al., 2022).

Longitudinal designs are another future methodological consideration for coach well-being associated work as they will help with the development and creation of future projects and theoretical insights into coach well-being (Norris et al., 2017). For example, there is a need to explore and implement coach well-being strategies over a period of a season. Baldock et al. (2021) promotes the application of longitudinal projects within football coaching, claiming they would allow for coach stress and well-being experiences to be explored across different points in a football season. Consequently, this would develop understanding on how coaches experience and make sense of well-being over time, such as whether certain timepoints cause more benefits or harm than others, and how best to manage well-being during them. Furthermore, Smith et al. (2022) encourages novel and innovative applications of IPA, such as implementing it in a longitudinal manner given temporality and change are important facets of experience. Smith et al. (2022) goes on to claim that collecting data at different time points enable the exploration of change over time, which can be extremely powerful and informative.

In sum of the qualitative research recommendations, it could be argued that a methodology such as IPA would suite the exploration of coaches' well-being, as IPA is idiographic in nature and aims to share the lived experiences of participants with no prior theoretical assumption (Smith et al., 2022). This approach would complement Norris et al. (2017) recommendation that future work should try to understand what well-being means to coaches before embarking upon systematic, theoretically driven research. In addition, Clarke (2009) argues from an occupational therapy standpoint, that IPA is a



useful methodology for understanding how occupation relates to health and well-being, and Kiefer (2008) explicitly recommends a phenomenological study of well-being to share rich accounts of individual's experiences of the concept, which may lead to better informed practice. Therefore, the methodology of IPA allows for an in depth exploration of how individuals experience and ascribe meaning to a specific phenomenon (Smith & Osborn, 2015), which in this instance is how coaches' experience and make sense of well-being within professional football organisations.

### **2.5.3 Photo-Elicitation: The Use of Images to Enrich Sensemaking**

Photo-elicitation is a qualitative research technique where participants comment on photographs (i.e., images), which prompt and guide in-depth interviews (Bugos et al., 2014; Collier, 1957). An auto-driven (i.e., reflexive) photo-elicitation approach is where the production or selection of the images is actioned by the interviewees (Romera Iruela, 2023). Such an approach can motivate participants to delve into the meaning and content of their personally supplied images. Insofar, Romera Iruela (2023) states that auto-driven photo-elicitation:

“not only enables the researcher and the respondents to negotiate the interpretations of the images, but also gives the latter a greater voice and authority to interpret their lives and social contexts, and an ‘action perspective’ that helps to make their observations on life and social systems meaningful to outsiders” (p. 67)

Photo-elicitation is an essential foundational component of photovoice (the terms are often used interchangeably) which is a form of community based participatory research that involves participants throughout the research process as commentators,

documentarians, and agents of social change (Bugos et al., 2014). Photovoice is an important participatory research approach that can develop insights into the lived experiences of people and communities which in turn can promote dialogue, challenge views, and contribute towards social change (Milne & Muir, 2020). Additionally, both photovoice and photo-elicitation allow for photographs to be taken by ‘insiders’ so that they can illustrate and make meaning of their experiences through the photographs that matter to them most (Kyololo et al., 2023; Mayfield-Johnson & Butler, 2017). Due to photo-elicitation and photo-voice often being used interchangeably, the proposed thesis will from now on select the term photo-elicitation to communicate and refer to photographic approaches.

The rationale behind using visual stimuli within interviews is because they can prompt emotional connections to memories and offer more meaningful accounts (Kunimoto, 2004), something which coach well-being literature has advocated for (Potts et al., 2021a). For example, by utilising an auto-driven photo-elicitation approach within interviews, a “phenomenological sense” (Harper, 1986, p. 23) of what photos mean to participants, and the nuances attached to them can be gained (Berg & Lune, 2017). This complements the phenomenological nature of IPA (Smith et al., 2022) and calls for exploring well-being from a phenomenological perspective (Galvin & Todres, 2011; Kiefer, 2008; Sarvimäki, 2006). Moreover, photographs can prompt participants to discuss details of what otherwise might have gone unspoken as mundane or irrelevant (Harper, 1986). This is pertinent for the current thesis as aspects of an individual’s lifeworld (e.g., how they experience well-being) can often be ‘taken-for-granted’ and go unnoticed (Seamon, 2018). In addition, men in football tend to dismiss and suppress their emotions and emotive expressive behaviour (Adams & Carr, 2019). Consequently, the

use of images and more specifically an auto-driven photo-elicitation approach would be suitable to harness rich and in-depth accounts of coaches operating in men's football. This is because it empowers, prompts, and facilitates discussion; ultimately giving the participant a stage to share their voice (see Evans-Agnew & Rosemberg, 2016).

Smith et al. (2022) argues that multi-modal IPA approaches (e.g., combining semi-structured interviews with photo-elicitation) are beneficial when studying a concept or topic that the participants may not frequently discuss, or have not given much thought to (i.e., it may have an everyday, taken for granted quality). For example, within professional football individuals are said to be inhabited by the game they inhabit (McGillivray et al., 2005) and conform to organisational norms without giving much thought (Parker & Manley, 2016). Moreover, Seamon (2018) argues that those who experience immersion-in-place (e.g., are inured to their 'place'), such as within a club or coaching environment may not realise how slight changes in behaviours, or environmental modifications could enhance their well-being and lifeworld due to a lived obliviousness. Consequently, photo-elicitation is a technique that can complement phenomenological research (e.g., IPA) as they both aim to illuminate tacit and latent lived experiences and meaning making within contexts (Morrey et al., 2020; Smith et al., 2022). Thus, the combination of auto-driven photo-elicitation and IPA is not only compatible but encouraged because it provides "thick depiction" (Kirova & Emme, 2006, p. 2) and enlightens phenomena (Boden & Eatough, 2014; Burton et al., 2017), hence is an effective multi-modal approach for exploring such well-being lived experience data.

#### **2.5.4 Docuseries: The Use of Online Video Media to Explore Seldom Heard Groups**

A novel approach to exploring a coach's lifeworld is through the immersion in and

interpretation of texts such as diaries, biographies, autobiographies (Sparkes & Stewart, 2016), and documentaries (McDonald, 2007). Documentaries and docuseries provide researchers with the opportunity to understand how individuals (e.g., coaches) within cultures (e.g., men's professional football) make sense of their world at specific times (McKee, 2003). Despite their importance in contextualizing sports within society, documentaries have received limited attention from sport psychology researchers (Poulton & Roderick, 2008), largely due to questions about their representation of reality. However, McDonald (2007) argues that documentaries' engagement with real-life issues and their examination of power and social change situate them within the "discourse of sobriety" (p. 210). Consequently, sport documentaries can shed light on a wide range of sociocultural and political issues (Poulton & Roderick, 2008) which are important for understanding well-being (Christopher, 1999; Joshanloo et al., 2021). For example, BBC Three's 'Football's Suicide Secret' and Sky Sports' 'Tackling the Stigma' highlight the everyday well-being challenges faced by football personnel, aiming to cultivate social change. Moreover, like how autobiographies can tell stories (Sparkes & Stewart, 2016), docuseries like Amazon's All or Nothing (AoN) capture first-hand experiences and narratives within a coach's context over time (e.g., a season or career), complementing the calls for exploring temporal aspects of well-being (Rush & Grouzet, 2012).

While documentaries are ideal for exploring social phenomena, it is important to acknowledge that sociocultural issues can be framed and socially constructed in particular ways (Poulton & Roderick, 2008). Adapting the view of Sparkes and Stewart (2016), docuseries offer a window through which phenomena can be observed. Thus, documentary data can illuminate the complex lives, stories, and experiences of sportspeople (Poulton & Roderick, 2008), making them well-suited to exploring

professional football coaches' well-being. Consequently, the use of coaching docuseries could illuminate and explore professional football coaches' well-being lived experiences throughout a season. For example, documentary film is often described as the "creative treatment of actuality" (Nichols, 2017, p. 5), encompassing three main assumptions: (1) documentaries depict reality (e.g., events that occurred), (2) they focus on real people, and (3) they narrate stories about real-world events. Consequently, docuseries can be defined as any television series about reality, featuring real people and unscripted content produced in natural settings (e.g., workplaces or homes).

In the sports genre, common documentary formats are biographical and ethnographical. The former provides an account of a person's life or a significant portion of it, while the latter portrays a culture or subculture in an illuminating way (Nichols, 2017). Additionally, documentaries can be classified into observational modes, which involve following and observing social actors in their daily lives, and participatory modes, which include interactions between the filmmaker and subjects to elicit revealing insights and develop a story or perspective (Nichols, 2017). Documentaries and docuseries are readily accessible on platforms like Netflix and Amazon, offering valuable and nuanced insights from diverse and seldom-heard populations (Smith et al., 2023). Thus, docuseries are well-suited to capturing the contextualized lived experiences of coaches and can act as a window through which well-being experiences can be viewed and interpreted.

## **2.6 Thesis Rationale: A Summary**

Considering the review of literature, there is rationale to explore football coaches' well-being experiences and sensemaking in a variety of ways. A range of theoretical, methodological and research informed considerations are now summarised. Throughout

general well-being literature (Hefferon et al., 2017; Kahneman, 2011; Lomas, 2015), as well as sport research (Lundqvist, 2011; Norris et al., 2017; Potts et al., 2021a) there have been calls for more qualitative and contextualised explorations of well-being within specific populations. This is because it can be detrimental to neglect a person's context when making sense of well-being (Hamling et al., 2020). For instance, 'being' is an important component of well-being and human being (Galvin & Todres 2011; Seamon, 2018; Todres & Galvin 2010), because if we were to take our well-being without *being* in relation to some context, time, and/or spatial and interpersonal domain then it would be reduceable to fleeting moments of wellness (Holst, 2022). Similarly, as human beings, our natural disposition is to always be somewhere, located, amidst and involved with some meaningful context (Larkin et al., 2006). Therefore, well-being should be explored in relation to a person's context.

Considering well-being is tied to contextual influences it is also tied to the concept of time (Hersch, 2023). Well-being is not a static state and is be shaped by socio-contextual interactions which result in within-person fluctuations over time (Rush & Grouzet, 2012). Similarly, the lived experiences of human beings have a temporal flow (Ashworth, 2016), hence past experiences and future ruminations will inform present sensemaking (Rush & Grouzet, 2012). Therefore, there is a requisite to explore football coaches' well-being experiences over a prolonged period (Baldock et al., 2021).

Bioecological theory, specifically the PPCT model acts as a complementary theoretical lens to explore well-being. This is because bioecological theory does not intend to provide answers but offers a framework to advance the discovery of processes and conditions (Bronfenbrenner, 2000) which may shape how football coaches'

experience and makes sense of well-being within their contexts. Given work-life conditions, coach-athlete relations, governing body education (The FA), the masculine culture, and past playing experiences, to name but a few, can shape experiences of well-being. Therefore, bioecological theory affords the opportunity to explore the reciprocal interactions within and between a coach's multi-layered ecological systems over time (Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Rosa & Tudge, 2013).

Sports coaching (Cushion & Jones, 2006; Jones, 2012) and well-being have idiosyncratic qualities (Kiefer, 2008; Wilcock et al., 1998). IPA's idiographic underpinning endeavours to enlighten individual differences and narratives to ensure voices are heard (Larkin & Thompson, 2012; Smith et al., 2022). Research in high involvement work settings indicate that the specific life context which currently surrounds an individual is paramount for understanding their perceived well-being (Page & Vella-Brodrick, 2009). Thus, valuable insights can be revealed by investigating a coach's lifeworld (e.g., context and everyday experiences) (Cronin & Armour, 2017).

There is a stigmatisation around mental health and well-being within the general population making it hard for individuals to seek support (Gorczyński et al., 2020, 2021). Elite sporting contexts, such as male football and the ingrained win at all costs culture that surrounds it, makes it even harder for personnel to demonstrate vulnerability (Hägglund et al., 2023; Higham et al., 2021). Given football's culture is replete with aggression, violence, and masculinity (Kelly & Waddington, 2006; Parker, 2001), where emotions, well-being issues and help-seeking behaviours are habitually suppressed (Manley et al., 2016), well-being is often deprioritised. Such cultures not only challenge men coaches but exacerbates women's coaching participation experiences and subsequent

well-being states (Norman & Rankin-Wright, 2018). Therefore, illuminating how men and women football coaches make sense of, and experience well-being has the potential to improve its management individually and systemically in men's football contexts.

To overcome suppression of voice and to capture the voices of seldom heard groups (Smith et al., 2023) the implementation of creative multi-modal qualitative approaches could surpass traditional thematic approaches and enrich the nuances of football coaches' well-being. IPA is conducive to multi-modal applications (Smith et al., 2022), such as longitudinal designs combined with creative visual approaches (e.g., photo-elicitation) as they can surpass description and facilitate symbolic and metaphorical interpretations of one's world and sensemaking (Morrey et al., 2022). A photo-elicitation approach can empower participants and stimulate discussions around sensitive topic areas (Evans-Agnew & Rosemberg, 2016), which is necessary for the thesis' target population where suppression of voice and conformity is habitual (Manley et al., 2016). The likes of video docuseries data which aims to tell stories can also be used as a window to view phenomena (e.g., well-being) and access seldom heard groups (e.g., elite level professional football coaches) who do not often share publicly how they feel (Sparkes & Stewart, 2016).

Given the above summary and the rationale of how to explore coaches' well-being within chapter 2.5, the proposed thesis aims to draw upon an array of methodological approaches to contextually explore football coaches' well-being. For instance, IPA's phenomenological, hermeneutical, and idiographic philosophical underpinnings will be foundational to the programme of research as they can facilitate the interpretation and sensemaking of well-being within context (Larkin et al., 2006; Smith et al., 2022).



Additionally, an auto-driven photo-elicitation approach can empower participants to share their voices and enrich sensemaking (Morrey et al., 2020; Romera Iruela, 2023). Furthermore, using video documentary data (e.g., docuseries) can provide access to seldom-heard groups (Smith et al., 2023) in the form of elite first team managers and can shed light on a wide range of sociocultural issues (Poulton & Roderick, 2008) that may influence well-being experiences. Then, Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, specifically bioecological theory which later informed the PPCT model (Bronfenbrenner, 1976, 1995, 2000, 2005; Rosa & Tudge, 2013) is advocated as a theoretical framework to enrich interpretations and sensemaking. In sum, chapter 2.5 has rationalised a variety of qualitative approaches for exploring well-being, which in turn should enlighten how the construct is contextually experienced and made sense of within men's football. The aims and objectives of the programme of research are now presented.

### **2.6.1 Aims of Thesis**

**Principal Research Aim:** To explore how coaches experience and make sense of well-being within men's football club contexts.

**Aim 1:** Illuminate football coaches' lived experiences and sensemaking of well-being using an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) approach.

**Aim 2:** Explore and represent the well-being experiences of seldom heard groups' operating in men's football.

**Aim 3:** Explore the temporal nature of football coaches' well-being using a longitudinal IPA approach throughout an entire football season.

**Aim 4:** Utilise creative qualitative approaches to empower football coaches and enrich their sensemaking of well-being.

# Chapter 3: Study One

## You Wouldn't Let Your Phone Run Out of Battery: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of Male Professional Football Coaches' Well-Being

**Peer-reviewed publications and conference proceedings associated with this chapter:**

Higham, A. J., Newman, J. A., Rumbold, J. L., & Stone, J. A. (2023). You wouldn't let your phone run out of battery: an interpretative phenomenological analysis of male professional football coaches' well-being. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*, 16(2), 213–227. <https://doi.org/kvd9>

Higham, A. J. (2022, September). *Put your head in a tumble dryer and f\*\*king turn it on*: A phenomenological exploration of male professional football coaches' well-being. Northern Research and Applied Practice Showcase, Leeds Beckett University, Leeds, UK. <https://doi.org/nbzs>

### **3.1 Chapter Abstract**

The present chapter illuminates that little is known about how coaches make sense of and experience well-being within their given context as athletes have traditionally been at the forefront of well-being research, which is concerning given coaches are as susceptible to well-being challenges (see Chapter 2). Considering well-being and coaching comprise of many idiosyncratic and sociocultural interactions, the present chapter employed a combined bioecological and interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) approach to explore how six male professional football coaches make sense of and experience well-being within the context of men's football. Due to IPA's contextualist position, commitment to the individual, and ability to empower and give voice, two group experiential themes were created: 'The endeavour to comprehend coaches' well-being', and 'Volatility of the football coaching profession: fragmented well-being'. Findings showed that football coaches made sense of their well-being by drawing on past playing experiences and sociocultural interactions, with some coaches comprehending well-being as a physical and mental battery. Additionally, several coaches experienced a fragmentation of self and subsequent well-being due to conflicts within and between their ecological niche and identity. A combined bioecological and IPA approach facilitated and enriched how well-being was contextually made sense of and experienced.

### 3.2 Introduction

As addressed within chapter 2, the concept of well-being has been debated across many contexts, including sport (Lundqvist, 2011), health (Kiefer, 2008), and the workplace (Bone, 2015). Despite varying theoretical explanations of well-being some agreement exists that it is a complex, subjective, and multifaceted phenomenon, incorporating hedonic (i.e., subjective) and eudaimonic (i.e., psychosocial) dimensions (Lundqvist, 2011). Organisations such as professional sport clubs have considerable interest in promoting staff well-being with reported benefits to health and performance outcomes (Didymus et al., 2018). Yet athletes are often prioritised over organisational staff (i.e., coaches), which is of concern given coaches impact their work environment as much as the environment can influence the individual (Didymus et al., 2018). Therefore, understanding well-being is not only critical for the coach, but also for the wider impact the coach's well-being might have on the athletes (Potts et al., 2021a). Nevertheless, coaches' well-being has typically been neglected (Kenttä et al., 2020b), which is alarming due to past calls for research to explore what well-being means to coaches (i.e., how they make sense of the construct) and to establish appropriate theoretical frameworks (Norris et al., 2017).

Well-being is often addressed when quantitatively examining stressors, coping, and burnout, thus focusing on ill-being whilst overlooking well-being (Kenttä et al., 2020b; see Chapter 2) and the collective person-context interaction of well-being 'in-the-world' (Sarvimäki, 2006). Although qualitative thematic research exploring stress transactions and social support has progressed understanding of the individual-environment relationship (Baldock et al., 2021), it conversely compartmentalises and isolates aspects other than well-being, ignoring the wider personal-contextual interactions within one's lifeworld. Hence, to holistically understand coaches' well-being, a

methodological approach, such as IPA is befitting to explore and make sense of such personal-contextual interactions. Moreover, to explore these interactions and the multi-layered idiosyncrasies of coaches' well-being, Bronfenbrenner's (2005) bioecological model provides an ideal lens through which psychosocial and sociocultural influences, and the often-complex lived experience of coaches can be qualitatively examined. Specifically, Bronfenbrenner's Process-Person-Context-Time (PPCT) model which suggests human development is shaped by repeated psychosocial proximal processes, personal characteristics, interrelating nested systems, and temporality (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Thus, factors which influence well-being ideology (Bone, 2015) include but are not limited to the interrelated microsystem (e.g., workplace), mesosystem (e.g., player-colleague relations), exosystem (e.g., trade unions), macrosystem (e.g., organisational culture), and chronosystem (e.g., sociohistorical events).

The primary intent of the bioecological model is not to claim answers but to offer a framework to advance the discovery of processes and conditions that delineate the scope and limits of human development (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). Hence, ecological methodologies should be in "the discovery" mode rather than the mode of verification, suggesting inductive enquiries are better suited to this model than deductive reasoning (Rosa & Tudge, 2013, p. 254). Yet, the more traditional qualitative models of thematic organization have been criticized as they "presuppose that these experiences impacting well-being can be neatly separated in the first place" (Ventresca, 2020, p. 180). Given the apparent importance of the various interactional components which contribute to the lived experience of coaches' well-being, researchers must continue to diversify their approach and avoid relying on examinations of these factors in isolation (see Chapter 2). A way to address this concern is by implementing a combined bioecological and IPA approach, as an ecological niche is constituted in a phenomenological field that orients an individual's

actions and interactions (Rosa & Tudge, 2013). Therefore, considering coaching (Cushion et al., 2006) and well-being (Kiefer, 2008) comprise of idiosyncratic sociocultural interactions, IPA is well suited to provide a detailed, nuanced analysis of coaches' well-being experiences and interpretations within context. For instance, due to IPA's phenomenological, hermeneutical, and idiographic underpinning it enables the participant and researcher to make sense of the interdependent relationship between the 'person' and their 'world' (Smith et al., 2022), which is central when addressing the taken-for-granted (e.g., well-being; Seamon, 2018). Hence the researcher is concerned with multi-layered contextual analysis, meaning focus is on examining not only different microsystems (e.g., work, home, community) but also interpreting the influences of the individual's experiences between systems (Bone, 2015).

A further justification for a combined bioecological and IPA approach surrounds professional football organisations being viewed as total institutions (Goffman, 1959) which are closed social systems shaped by sociocultural norms that can cultivate narrow identities and hegemonic beliefs amongst players and coaches (Champ et al., 2020; see Chapter 2). This is of concern given many coaches and players who transition into coaching, will have been ingrained and influenced by football's culture for significant proportions of their lives. Consequently, person-environment interactions over time can shape horizons (e.g., what one can see or understand) on a given concept or ideology (Gadamer, 2013). Insofar a coach's horizon of well-being may be narrowed or widened by sociohistorical (chronosystem) experiences (e.g., past playing career and cultural norms). Therefore, given the life context which surrounds an individual is critical for understanding how they make sense of well-being (Lundqvist, 2011), a phenomenological approach can enrich understanding of well-being (Kiefer, 2008; Sarvimäki, 2006). For instance, rather than capturing objective measurements based on

phenomenon prevalence, phenomenological approaches (e.g., IPA) have proven to be valuable when capturing the essence of football coaches' social worlds, such as sensemaking and experiences of stressors and burnout (Dixon & Turner, 2018; Lundkvist et al., 2012).

In sum, this chapter employs an IPA approach and bioecological framework to further understanding of professional football coaches' well-being. Consequently, the aim of the chapter is to explore how professional football coaches experience and make sense of well-being within the context of football club environments. The combined IPA and bioecological approach intend to enrich the current understanding of coaches' well-being, develop theoretical insight, and contextualise well-being experiences.

### **3.3 Method**

#### **3.3.1 Design**

This chapter adopted an interpretivist philosophical paradigm, informed by a social constructionist epistemology (i.e., knowledge of coaches' well-being is constructed via sociocultural interactions), and a relativist ontology (i.e., multiple interpretations of coaches' well-being exist) to comprehend the world from the participants' point of view (Smith & McGannon, 2018). Therefore, aligning with the adopted IPA and bioecological underpinnings, a coach's sensemaking (i.e., perceived truth) of well-being may be relative to the various interactions and contexts (i.e., workplace, homelife and culture) they experience. For instance, IPA embraces Gadamer's (2013) concept of horizons (e.g., one's assumptions, beliefs, and cultural background) which shapes an individual's understanding of the world. This understanding complements the bioecological approach (e.g., PPCT model; Bronfenbrenner, 2005) because horizons are not fixed and are constantly shaped due to proximal processes (i.e., reciprocal interactions) within and between one's ecological niche. Thus, a combined bioecological and IPA approach was



deemed appropriate as they aim to explore how individuals contextually make sense of their personal and social world (Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Smith et al., 2022). Moreover, due to the phenomenological essence of well-being, IPA's phenomenological, hermeneutical, and idiographic underpinning (Smith et al., 2022) acknowledges well-being lived experiences as subjective, fluid and constructed by coaches, as they interpret and develop their social understanding. Insofar, the coaches' sensemaking was unravelled by the author engaging with the double hermeneutic of IPA, whereby they tried to make sense of how football coaches understood their well-being and personal worlds. Consequently, a detailed idiographic examination of each coach's well-being prior to a tentative cross-case analysis was conducted (Nizza, et al., 2021).

### **3.3.2 Participants**

Six male professional football coaches ( $M^{age} = 38.2 \pm 5.9$  years;  $M^{coaching-experience} = 12 \pm 4.8$  years) were purposively sampled and recruited to obtain a homogenous sample (see [Table 3.1](#)). For context, all coaches were ex-players (three professional and three semi-professional) who had transitioned into coaching and paid full-time apart from Ben who was unemployed at the time of the study. This homogenous sample of professional coaches facilitated a detailed exploration of convergences and divergences within and between coach accounts. Professional coaches were characterised as those who have been employed full-time and worked at a professional football club in the English Premier League (EPL) or English Football League (EFL) at first team or academy level (Higham et al., 2021). Therefore, the inclusion criteria for the chapter were: (i) the participant identifies as male and can speak fluent English, (ii) they had a minimum of one year's coaching experience working within an EPL (i.e., tier one) or EFL (i.e., tiers two, three, and four) club in the UK.

**Table 3.1***Participant characteristics*

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Coaching experience</b>	<b>Coaching role</b>	<b>Qualifications</b>	<b>Club level</b>
Ben	32	14 years	Previously an academy coach and international coach	<b>Coaching:</b> UEFA A License <b>Academic:</b> Postgraduate	Previously worked across several tiers
Connor	39	16 years	Academy coach	<b>Coaching:</b> UEFA A Licence. FA Advanced Youth Award <b>Academic:</b> Undergraduate	Professional tier one
John	47	14 years	Academy coach	<b>Coaching:</b> UEFA A License. Undertaking Pro License <b>Academic:</b> No degree	Professional tier two
Max	40	7 years	Assistant manager	<b>Coaching:</b> UEFA A License <b>Academic:</b> No degree	Professional tier four
Michael	40	16 years	Academy coach	<b>Coaching:</b> UEFA A License. FA Advanced Youth Award <b>Academic:</b> Postgraduate	Professional tier three
Will	31	5 years	Goalkeeper coach	<b>Coaching:</b> UEFA A License <b>Academic:</b> Postgraduate	Professional tier one

Note. *UEFA = the Union of European Football Associations | FA = Football Association*

### 3.3.3 Interview Guide

Ethics approval was obtained via Sheffield Hallam University's ethics committee (Converis ID: ER35981952; see [Appendix 1](#)). Coaches were then invited to take part via email and supplied with a participant information sheet (see [Appendix 2](#)), an informed consent form (see [Appendix 3](#)), and the opportunity to ask questions prior to participation. A semi-structured interview guide (see [Appendix 4](#)) was developed and began by easing participants into recalling familiar descriptive accounts (Smith et al., 2022). The opening prompt was 'talk to me about your coaching experiences within football'. Afterwards, more investigative questions were introduced, such as 'in your own opinion, what is coach well-being?', 'how does it make you feel coaching in football?', and 'how do you personally experience well-being within your role?'. When interviewing, the author engaged in active, supportive listening, using prompts and probes to encourage rich discussion and elaboration (Smith et al., 2022). The interviews were conducted over phone and online via Zoom, which were audio recorded ( $M^{duration} = 91 \text{ min} \pm 24.4 \text{ min}$ ).

### 3.3.4 Data Analysis

Data were analysed in line with the principles of IPA research (Smith et al., 2022), resulting in seven stages: (i) adhering to the idiographic commitment of IPA, the interview audio files were transcribed verbatim and re-read individually by the author, allowing them to become immersed in the data and lifeworld of each participant; (ii) the author began line-by-line analysis of the first transcript, noting exploratory comments (e.g., either descriptive, linguistic, or conceptual) in the righthand margin of the text. For example, when the coaches used metaphors and analogies; (iii) experiential statements were established in the left margin of text. These statements were grounded in the data but also captured the conceptual, psychological essence of the exploratory notes in a reduced volume of detail; (iv) the experiential statements were then clustered into a

logical structure representing similar and differing concepts, which was an iterative and time-consuming process due to regression and progression between stages; (v) once the clustering of experiential statements was agreed upon, a table of personal experiential themes were created, where each cluster was named to identify the relevant information from all the experiential statements residing under it; (vi) the above process was then repeated for all participants to establish their own personal experiential themes, which in turn allowed for the identification of similarities and differences between all participants. The final stage resulted in the creation of group experiential themes, which represent the convergences and divergences across the whole sample, allowing for a detailed investigation to take place.

### **3.3.5 Research Quality**

The chapter adopted a relativist position which allowed flexibility, ensured sound qualitative practice, and maintained data trustworthiness (Smith & McGannon, 2018). Considering the contextual nature of this work, significant efforts were made to understand the ‘sensitivity of context’ (Yardley, 2017). For instance, close attention was given to the sociocultural context within professional football organisations and how it may influence perceptions on well-being. It was also acknowledged that those who reside within football are often accustomed to quick journalistic interviews than the proposed in-depth, researcher-led interviews (Roderick, 2006a). Therefore, to harness depth, trust was of paramount importance in the interview context (Roderick, 2006a), which is why it was explicitly stated that confidentiality and anonymity (e.g., use of pseudonyms and secure storage of data) would be granted.

To provide transparency (Yardley, 2017) and align with a reflexive approach, the author had previously delivered psychoeducational workshops to U14 and U16 academy players within a professional club environment and is currently undertaking a PhD which

explores professional football coaches' well-being. Therefore, from personal experience, the author has been exposed to a club's culture and practices, along with well-being literature. The author attempted to bracket preconceptions and drew on the supervisory team to act as critical friends and theoretical soundboards during the analysis process, to encourage reflexivity on interpretations and opinions (Smith & McGannon, 2018). For example, he scheduled challenging but supportive supervisory meetings which invited critical discussions on theme formulation and how participants' accounts could be enriched by theoretical interpretation. This was not to establish consensus but to develop the author's interpretations (Smith & McGannon, 2018). Finally, when conducting the analysis, the author was cognizant of the four markers for high quality IPA (Nizza et al., 2021) and thus attempted to construct 'a compelling, unfolding narrative'; conduct a 'close analytic reading of participants' words'; develop a 'vigorous experiential account'; and display 'convergence and divergence' between and within coaches' accounts.

### **3.4 Findings and Discussion**

Two group experiential themes were identified during the analysis; 'The endeavour to comprehend coaches' well-being', and 'Volatility of the football coaching profession: fragmented well-being', with each comprising of two subordinate themes. The findings are described, interpreted, and discussed in relation to pertinent literature, with a multivocality of coach accounts provided. Bronfenbrenner's (2005) bioecological approach and PPCT model are employed as frameworks to explore well-being experiences and sensemaking.

#### **3.4.1 The Endeavour to Comprehend Coach Well-Being**

The word endeavour is used to represent the participants' challenges to understand and make sense of their well-being within context. Coaches' interactions within and between multiple levels of their ecological niche, such as interpersonal interactions and

football club culture appeared to shape horizons (Gadamer, 2013) of well-being.

#### ***3.4.1.1 Making Sense of Well-Being***

This theme captures how coaches navigate their thoughts and contextual experiences to comprehend well-being. Several coaches acknowledged well-being to be individualised and context specific, as discussed by Ben:

I think, coach [pauses], if I've understood the question correctly. I imagine coach well-being links to tuning in on how is that individual? What's going on in their world? What stresses are they under and how can we support them? And it's not necessarily just stresses that might be related to their role because there's influences outside of their role that we need to be aware of... issues at home.

Ben pausing and querying his understanding of the question suggests uncertainty, which many other coaches expressed when discussing well-being. However, Ben's reference to stress, support systems, and wider contextual demands (i.e., issues at home) illuminates the bioecological nature and person-context interaction of well-being. The issue for Ben was being out of work whilst his wife was pregnant, hence interactions within and between his microsystems (e.g., work and home) shaped his understanding and experience of well-being (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). This highlights how a coach's well-being is not only intertwined within the sporting context, but within their wider world, and more so how simply experiencing 'being-in-the-world', in ordinary everydayness (Sarvimäki, 2006) can shape well-being sensemaking. Additionally, despite struggling to comprehend well-being, several coaches made sense of it by using a *battery* analogy, whereby *energy* influences physical, behavioural, social, and psychological dimensions of well-being:

Your energy thing obviously helps you to work more effective. So, I think this

energy and battery analogy is quite cool... The spark will jump over to other people around you. So, as much as I think other people... can drain your energy or pull you down. You can also pull other people up by being a positive character and by having good energy in an environment, then again I think this always correlates with well-being. If I've positive energy... feel good... motivated... I think my well-being is on a very different level... Whereas if I feel fatigued... not motivated, or sad... I'm not going to be in a good mental state. (Will)

Will's well-being energy analogy acknowledges the importance of the person (e.g., characteristics) and their proximal processes (e.g., interactions within and between microsystems) in context (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Insofar, the individual (i.e., coach) and those in their environment (e.g., colleagues) can influence well-being bi-directionally. Therefore, individual well-being appears to be made sense of by acknowledging both intra and interpersonal interactions. Converging with Will, Ben utilised a mobile phone's battery analogy to make sense of well-being:

What energy levels are [you] running on? So, if you look at like your mobile phone, how much battery has it got? People do of course let their phone go dead or [on] fumes, but you immediately want to charge it up, don't you? How often do we do that with ourselves? Where people just need a charge up, and are we the ones to charge them up?

Physical and mental energy appear to be a core component of well-being for both Will and Ben as they recognise that *batteries* supply energy and can occasionally die or be low, alluding towards experiences of burnout and fatigue (Kenttä et al., 2020b). Moreover, interpreting Ben's question of "are we the ones to charge them up?" implies managing well-being should not solely rest on the individual and that wider support

should be offered. One way to increase wider support is for organisations to improve their understanding of what well-being is and to educate themselves and their employees on the concept (Purcell et al., 2022). However, this is made hard due to a lack of understanding of the concept (Norris et al., 2017). Nonetheless, comprehension and education of coaches' well-being could be aided by comparing it to something tangible and known, such as a phone battery. This simplistic analogy could raise awareness and educate organisations about how thwarted well-being can be detrimental to coaching performance (Potts et al., 2021a).

The person-context component of well-being was reiterated by Connor, an academy coach at a Premier League club and Max, an assistant first team manager at a league two club. The contexts of academy and first team coaches are typically portrayed to significantly differ, yet both make sense of well-being by its connection with club matchday results. For example, Connor stated “No one wants to say it, but it’s there as the elephant in the room. So literally something that’s pretty much out your control [matchday results] is dictating whether you have a good week or not.” The “elephant in the room” metaphor suggests organisations and their personnel are aware of the effect results have on coaches' well-being, usually because coaches associate winning with perceived job security (Higham et al., 2021). Yet this is an issue for coaches' well-being as results are typically out of their control and are dictated by player performances. This highlights how distal interactions between the microsystem (e.g., team) and exosystem (e.g., opposition) shape well-being sensemaking and experiences. Similarly, Max displayed how matchday results not only affect individual well-being but subsequent behaviours and interactions within wider systems (e.g., home-life):

[You're] miserable, you're not working out as much... you're fretting a bit more about things and you're a little bit more miserable at home, you then get in



arguments at home with the wife, or you're not present at home [when losing]... But when you win, you're buzzing, "I am out tonight... we're off out for some food tonight", you're naturally a bit more upbeat. But when you get beat, it's like [the] fucking end of the world.

Interpreting Max's struggles, his disclosure of "fretting a bit more" conveys insecurity, "not present at home" captures immersion in role, and "like [the] fucking end of the world" expresses emotional instability. However, he displays hedonia and positive behaviours such as socialising with others when winning. Therefore, in addition to living interactions (e.g., social exchanges), coaches' well-being and subsequent behaviours can be shaped by non-living interactions (e.g., matchday results) within their ecological niche (Bronfenbrenner, 2005).

Contrastingly, Will, another first team coach, argued that coaches should not allow their "feelings [to] depend on mere results" as they "can drag you down quite quickly". Will may have this alternative outlook due to his postgraduate educational background widening his horizons of understanding (Gadamer, 2013), as he is accustomed to learning about and accepting others' views. For instance, his sensemaking of well-being was widened by the views of his experienced colleagues:

Everybody was like "yeah don't worry... it [the season] is a marathon, not a race"... Everybody was so relaxed... I was obviously the young coach. I was very driven by these results, so this was the first time where I really started thinking "alright, I need to get a different mindset towards the results." ... It reminded me there's more to what I do as a coach and how I need to feel about it, than just one result or two bad results in a row. So, this was one thing that I learned and that helps me feel much better.

The PPCT model expresses how a person's characteristics (e.g., age, past experiences) can influence how individuals will interpret and act (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Therefore, because Will was young, open-minded, studying a postgraduate degree, and interacting with experienced coaches, the conversational exchanges (i.e., fusion of horizons; Gadamer, 2013) widened his perspective about results within his role. It is suggested that coaches who can separate themselves from matchday results can benefit (Lundkvist et al., 2012), which was the case for Will as it made him 'feel much better', effectively facilitating well-being. Consequently, the bioecological and PPCT models (Bronfenbrenner, 2005) are suitable frameworks to aid sensemaking of coaches' well-being as participant accounts aligned with acknowledging the importance of individual characteristics (i.e., person), as well as the proximal processes that interact within and between their ecological niche (i.e., context).

#### ***3.4.1.2 Are They Stuck in Old Ways?***

This theme exhibits how the macrosystem (e.g., club culture) and chronosystem (e.g., sociohistorical experiences) can influence how coaches make sense of well-being (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). Many coaches claimed that football is outdated, with Michael saying, "it's traditionally quite an old school, dinosaur, male driven industry... you've got to toughen up and gotta get on with it." The use of the term "dinosaur" emphasises how he views football's culture as primitive and outdated, where worryingly, prehistoric cultural norms can challenge the evolution and progression of coaching beliefs (Potts et al., 2021a). Connor also claimed that toughening up is expected:

Probably only recently... people started to talk about it [well-being]. It's not, you know, whatever I've got, about 16 years I've been coaching, and you kind of were just expected to toughen up, not show sort of any vulnerability or weakness.

Connor's use of "expected" signifies the perceived pressure from his club's traditional masculine culture to not display vulnerability. For instance, this may be why many coaches "toughen up" and suppress their feelings, as the football culture (e.g., macrosystem; Bronfenbrenner, 2000) they interact with promotes masculine norms like the suppression of feelings and health-related concerns (Manley et al., 2016). This demonstrates how macrosystem (e.g., cultural) interactions can influence a coach (e.g., identity), their microsystem (e.g., organisation; Bronfenbrenner, 2005), and well-being sensemaking. Moreover, several coaches drew on past playing experiences (e.g., chronosystem; Bronfenbrenner, 2000) to inform their current horizon of understanding (Gadamer, 2013):

I've never really delved into it [well-being]. I've never really needed to go and educate myself on it. I've never really had those, deep-lying problems that one would have, or those issues. I was a strong character... I've never really had the need to go knock on the door and say "listen, can I have a chat, put your arm around me". My attitude has always been well, "I'll show you"... that was always my mentality and I carried that on into my coaching and managing so... well-being is never something I've really 110% delved into. I've never really had the need to, but I need to broaden my horizons and learn about it. (John)

The oldest coach of the sample John understands and makes sense of well-being from his past playing and coaching experiences, as well as his interactions with traditional football culture. As a result, John appears to perform his gender (Butler, 1988) by drawing on his masculine identity to make sense of why he disregards well-being, claiming that he was a "strong character" who did not need support when he was a player and thus carried this view into his coaching practice. John claiming, he had no "deep-lying problems", is possibly due to his prolonged exposure to traditional masculine cultural

norms. Seemingly exposure to the culture of professional football has narrowed his horizons (Gadamer, 2013) on well-being, ingraining a dated psychological outlook. Insofar, John addressed how transitioning from player to coach instilled a perceived “stigma” around seeking support:

In football you’ve got to be a tough guy, mentally strong and all that. There is a stigma attached to it, that I think players genuinely feel uncomfortable to open up, as in it makes them look weak or you’re not mentally strong ... The vast majority of managers and coaches were players, so they came up through that and they’ve still got the same kind of mentality as in they don’t really want to open up or they see it as a bit of a negative to open up.

Here John utilises second- and third-person speech, possibly because he feels uncomfortable discussing his own well-being experiences through fear of being judged. Thus, utilising alternative points of view could be his way of opening up about his well-being without compromising his masculinity (Butler, 1988). Moreover, John goes on to say “never back in my day did we even contemplate... You know if somebody mentioned a psychologist, straightaway you’d be thinking I’m not mad [crazy], I don’t need to go see [a psychologist].” John further informs his current horizon of understanding from past experiences, pathologising individuals as mad for seeking psychological support, and associating well-being to mental disorders. This can be described as cultural reproduction (Cushion & Jones, 2014), where John’s life as player was instilled with hegemonic beliefs that are hard to change due to legitimised social practices in his environment. Therefore, like how critical moments can impact football players (Nesti et al., 2012), critical interactions and transitions (proximal processes) over time (chronosystem) within a coach’s ecological niche (Bronfenbrenner, 2005) can contribute significantly to horizons of understanding (Gadamer, 2013), such as the development of well-being sensemaking.

Alternatively, Ben who is younger and has a postgraduate degree, attributed such conjecture and perplexity around well-being to a lack of education, “not once have I ever been on a course where it’s [well-being] been covered.” This highlights the insufficient and often sporadic nature of education in football (Higham et al., 2021) and reiterates that organisations should promote and deliver tailored psychoeducation on mental well-being within context (Purcell et al., 2022). Psychoeducation could promote a fusion of horizons (Gadamer, 2013) which may help change the narrative (i.e., stigma) attached to seeking support. However, as Bronfenbrenner (2005) suggests, for critical interactions (e.g., psychoeducation) to be effective it must happen consistently over prolonged periods (e.g., rather than a singular well-being education day). With the sample of coaches lacking regular exposure to well-being education and by informing current understanding with previous playing experiences, it could be assumed that there is a problematic generational lag regarding professional football coaches’ well-being. Thus, coaches potentially struggle to comprehend the importance of their own well-being, as significant past experiences and proximal processes within their coaching context narrow present horizons of understanding (Gadamer, 2013). However, Ben believes there will eventually be a generational shift on well-being perceptions due to seeing coaches and players actively engaging with contemporary practices:

It is changing, there is a different influence coming through now within academy coaches in England within the EPPP [Elite Player Performance Plan] who are more educated... they are a different generation, they’re probably around my age or younger. They’ve got teaching degrees... master’s degrees, so they’re a lot more educated in life... they’re different type of people.

Therefore, well-being comprehension and support may improve due to the “different generation” engaging with the EPPP, possibly because the younger coaches are

a ‘different type’ who are educated and committed to psychologically support players (Champ et al., 2020). Thus, given that many of the participants were ex-players, current players who progress into coaching will become a new generation of key socialising agents, especially given the influential role the macrosystem (e.g., culture; Bronfenbrenner, 2005) and cultural reproduction (Cushion & Jones, 2014) can play in the football context. For instance, most of the sample had little exposure to psychological support when they were previously players, which legitimised their masculine norms and well-being stigmatisation. However, current players now have access to psychological support on a regular basis (Champ et al., 2020), which is essential for effective change over time (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). Therefore, the “different generation” of players progressing into coaching and existing coaches, should have consistently engaged with psychological support over time. Thus, consistent proximal interactions with psychological support and personnel (i.e., sport psychologists) should widen well-being understanding.

### **3.4.2 Volatility of the Football Coaching Profession: Fragmented Well-Being**

The terms volatility and fragmented were chosen as they represent the author’s interpretations that coaches’ well-being is continually shattered and reconstructed by the exchanges within their environment. Within this group experiential theme, it highlights how comprehension and sensemaking of coaches’ well-being is shaped by perceived available support, identity confictions, addictive tendencies, and experiences of isolation.

#### ***3.4.2.1 Consumed by the Role***

This theme portrays how coaches’ well-being can become fragmented due to excessive immersion-in-place, resulting in a lived obliviousness as to how individual and relational well-being is influenced (Seamon, 2018). Several coaches harnessed a sense of purpose

and identity from their coaching role which caused well-being to thrive. Whereas for others their role cultivated obsessive tendencies that thwarted well-being:

It's [switching off] very, very difficult... I've loved football, since I was young. I've lived from football. I eat, sleep, and drink football. That is me. That has been my life and a major part of me, because I love the game so much, and I have that passion for the game. So, I suppose it's very hard to just switch off and just to forget about it... I can't and that's just me, that's just my DNA. (John)

John's account displays how he battles to switch off as football is a part of him, within his "DNA", implying football constitutes his identity (Lundkvist et al., 2012). Strong footballing identities tend to be cultivated during playing careers (Nesti et al., 2012), which may explain John's unity with his coaching role as he is an ex-player who has been ingrained within football for a significant period of his life (chronosystem; Bronfenbrenner, 2005). For example, his referral to "I eat, sleep, and drink football" not only signifies the role football plays in his development as a person, but also in sustaining well-being. Insofar, Max's well-being and identity was fragmented when he experienced his first dismissal:

It's all I know. I've been in it since 16, so I don't have anything else to go to. Like I said if I had anything else, I genuinely think I would go to it. I would miss football of course... [the] constant communication and interaction, all day every day. Now [when fired] I have got no purpose to get up. I would be lying in bed... I've fucking got no reason to get up.

The phrases "It's all I know" and "I don't have anything else to go to" evoke entrapment due to an immersion-in-place (Seamon, 2018). Max's longstanding residence within football and the associated proximal processes (e.g., relationships and routines) in

that context shaped a large fragment of his identity. For example, Max's removal from his immersive environment fragmented his identity and subsequent well-being due to a perceived lack of purpose (eudaimonia). Given football is part of Max's identity, becoming removed from it left him feeling an unauthentic self (Sarvimäki, 2006), thwarting his well-being because of his everyday familiarity collapsing. However, Max further implied that even when employed his well-being was still constrained:

[Football is] so short-term and there's so much pressure to be successful now. You need to win now, you need to keep us up [avoid league relegation] now. There's so much pressure on it that your focus is just always on that... opposed to family life... You don't enjoy your life as much, because your life is consumed by your need to win the next game... You've got the little man [child to look after], but... you are trying to think about the next game, or what am I going to do? How can I change things? How can I make things better? So, you are present but not present... you are there in body but not in mind.

Max's obsessive tendencies and persistent ruminations appeared fuelled due to the short-termism of football, which was exacerbated as he had recently become a father and felt the need to provide for his family. Consequently, this resulted in Max immersing himself in work, which at the time cultivated a lived obliviousness to his surroundings (Seamon, 2018). As a result, he engaged in less meaningful familial and home-life exchanges (microsystem; Bronfenbrenner, 2005), which caused a fragmentation within his ecological niche and well-being because he had become mentally disassociated from family (Lundkvist et al., 2012). Therefore, organisations could support coaches by allowing them regular time to disassociate from and reflect on their role during a season which may promote greater self-awareness, interpersonal experiences, and well-being management. Furthermore, Max also provided parallels to that of a drug addict:



It's the winning games... That's what people thrive off, and it's the same thing that sends them to an early grave. But that's just what they kind of live with... it's an extreme thing to say but it's a drug... they get addicted to that adrenaline, that buzz... it's a ridiculous profession... but that's what they miss when they're not in [the profession] ... I can guarantee if you were to ask them, they would be like "oh why am I back in this?", they forget the buzz and adrenaline, because it becomes relief.

It may be assumed common knowledge that positive results are associated with well-being (Baldock et al., 2021), but Max's account illuminates how they are not a stable long-term source for well-being. For instance, Max later claims the "buzz" of winning wears off and hardship soon ensues. Therefore, like an addict, he craves the high of a substance (winning), but the comedown is abrupt. Connor acknowledged this instability of results, proclaiming "you can't control the result, so take care of the processes and probably the result will be better than it is." Thus, coaches should be aware that positive results can provide quick well-being fixes but should place greater importance on well-being sources within their immediate control. Moreover, coaches not only experience tangible addictions, such as alcohol consumption (Roberts et al., 2019), but become addicted to the sport they passionately love and the identity it brings. Consequently, if coaches are voicing addictive analogical accounts, then they must be supported aptly as becoming overly immersed in their role can be detrimental towards well-being. In sum, a coach's well-being can become fragmented when their identity becomes conflicted (e.g., feeling unauthentic), as well as when they centre their identity around work because it can intensify addiction-like tendencies (e.g., work obsession and persistent rumination).

### ***3.4.2.2 Sink or Swim***

This theme attempts to illuminate how perceived isolation, as well as a lack of support and trust can influence experiences of well-being and its management. Ben encapsulated how most coaches experienced well-being challenges within their volatile environments, stating “from a well-being perspective, you’re constantly like, put your head in a tumble dryer and fucking turn it on. That’s your head every day.” The reference to one’s “head in a tumble dryer” symbolises how well-being is tormented due to the relentless cycle of football matches and seasons. For instance, various coaches like Michael called football a “sink or swim” environment, whereby one must keep their head above water to survive. Yet his account is rather nuanced, as initially he states:

From my point of view, it’s [the environment] a real good mix of professional coaches, with a lot of experience and that’s why maybe the lens on well-being is less so, because those areas that potentially could develop into an issue for you don’t because you’ve always got people who you’ve got good relationships with.

Here Michael frames the environment and those within it positively, as individuals who can support and buffer well-being challenges, which is important for mentally healthy environments (Purcell et al., 2022). However, later within the interview, perhaps when Michael becomes more relaxed and acquainted, he appears to open-up. Michael implies, due to a lack of structured support and not wanting to lose his job, he would suppress true feelings and cope alone:

It’s an industry where naturally you understand that you’re fortunate to have the opportunity to do what you do... you’re waking up every day doing something that you’ve always done, that you’ve always played, and that you fell in love with as a kid, and you know that there’s so many people who would want to be in your

position. So... when you go back to your well-being topic, you're almost under pressure just to get through and cope with that yourself if you do ever have an issue, because you don't want to lose that opportunity. So, there's no kind of formal structure there to help you if you need help, and you're under this internal pressure to think, well I love my job, and I want to work in football... but if I've got these issues, I've just got to deal with it myself, because there is no structure there to support me.

Michael's transformative account represents how reliance on micro-level (Bronfenbrenner, 2005), unstructured interpersonal support systems are not enough to solely facilitate well-being. He repeatedly states there's no structured support, suggesting a want or possible need for formalised structured support. His concerns around job insecurity implies structured support would be best provided on a wider exo-level (e.g., union or governing body) as it would separate him from his immediate workplace, maintain anonymity, and improve perceived job-security and trust. Nevertheless, the perceived lack of structured support within his ecological niche fuelled suppression and isolation, which coaches often do to simply survive in their given context (Champ et al., 2020). The fear, doubt and lack of trust at a microsystem level impacted Ben, as he was dismissed by his manager when seeking support:

He said, "well look, if you're not happy just fuck off"... I was genuinely saying fucking hell I need help... I got dismissed. Who can you talk to? ... I've never worked in an environment where somebody has literally said "what's going on with you?" Because football typically doesn't afford itself to that... In terms of actual well-being within a club environment. I've never had anyone... even being remotely aware to the detail of how I'm doing.

Ben's experience demonstrates the disconnect between organisational and coach well-being support, as his statement "football typically doesn't afford itself to that" is a possible reference to how football's masculine cultural norms thwart sufficient support and displays of help-seeking behaviours. For instance, the chapter's sample of football coaches were typically exposed to a culture which socially legitimised (Cushion & Jones, 2014) toughness and suppression over care and support. This was identified because most of the coaches believed they had to perform to their gender (Butler 1988) to feel secure in their role and meet institutional norms (Manley et al., 2016). Consequently, due to a perceived lack of care, Ben appeared lost:

There'll be times, where you feel like, real bad, like crap, because you just don't know who to talk to, and it can be very lonely, it can be quite a dark place. Where, you know, you feel like you're on your own and you just don't know what to do.

The use of "dark place" could symbolise his isolation, but also the torment of his thoughts as he is left to conceal them within himself with no point of release (Roberts et al., 2019). Ben implies the loneliness and isolation which hindered his well-being did not only stem from absence of support, but because he believed he could not reveal his true self (e.g., vulnerabilities) due to fearing dismissal. This further perpetuated the notion that being an unauthentic self can hinder well-being (Sarvimäki, 2006). There are suggestions that coaches should develop communication and relationship-building skills for well-being (Potts et al., 2021a). However, it is argued that coaches should not be held solely accountable, and organisations have a duty to promote and support well-being internally. Yet Connor revealed how his current organisational support systems are not fit for purpose:

This is going to come as a shock to some of the people in higher positions and that

shouldn't be the case, that their fingers are not on the pulse with this stuff [coaches' well-being]. It probably shows you there's a breakdown in communication somewhere or [lacks] a process for people to open up.

Connor stressed that “typically, in most environments you'd probably go to HR [human resources] and tell them how you're feeling”, but due to having no relationship or “level of trust” with HR he felt he had “no-one really to talk to”. Consequently, for Connor's well-being to thrive, organisational relationships and trust are of utmost importance. Furthermore, Connor's metaphoric “finger on the pulse” not only represents a lack of organisational awareness of coaches' well-being, but also how some coaches are ahead of their organisations in their thinking. At an exosystem level (Bronfenbrenner, 2005), Max was aware that trade unions such as the Professional Footballers' Association and League Managers Association (LMA) can offer support outside of his organisation. Max had previously spoken with a representative from the LMA but claimed “the biggest problem... is when you don't know anyone there. So, there's no relationship... you're just phoning a random number and you're getting a random person answering it.” He further argues:

I think when you've got these [well-being] problems you really need to have a relationship with somebody and actually be comfortable saying these things. You know what I mean? Have trust in that person that they have got a genuine interest in your well-being.

Therefore, Max's well-being appears to thrive when operating within trustworthy, psychologically safe environments, which promote genuine care for well-being and comprise of well-established and authentic relationships (Purcell et al., 2022). Moreover, support networks should be cultivated across micro- (work-life) and exo-levels

(governing bodies) because Max believes there could be fatal consequences if proactive well-being support is not in place for coaches:

Unfortunately, something serious is going to happen, somebody like a [British celebrity who committed suicide] for instance... something is going to happen with a manager eventually through a mental state where they commit suicide or something really fucking tragic, and, it's going to have to take that unfortunately before anything happens.

Max's account shifts Connor's previous statement "finger on the pulse" from a figurative meaning to a literal risk, which is concerning given that football coaches have taken their lives over similar experiences in the past (Roberts et al., 2019). Max's plea for proactive support focused on organisations tackling fan and media abuse, something which he states transitions from "a work-related matter... [to] a life related matter", thus highlighting how work interactions can bleed into personal lives thwarting intra and interpersonal well-being. Consequently, the sample of coaches' thought-provoking accounts signify that well-being sensemaking and experiences are inextricably shaped by interactions within and between various bioecological contexts, such as: the microsystem (organisational support), mesosystem (fan-family relations), exosystem (trade unions), macrosystem (cultural norms), and chronosystem (sociohistorical events).

### **3.5 Strengths and Limitations**

This chapter explored how professional football coaches experience and make sense of well-being by utilizing a combined bioecological framework and IPA approach, which enabled three distinctive strengths. Firstly, it helped to conceptualise the idiosyncratic and multi-layered dynamic interactions within and between an individual's environment and well-being, something quantifiable and thematic well-being approaches often neglect.

Secondly, an IPA approach surpassed surface-level accounts of coaches, enlightening latent, hidden meanings via reflexive interpretation (Smith et al., 2022). This also allowed for deeper interpretation and sensemaking of experiences within context, such as how past playing experiences formulated current well-being comprehension. Thirdly, IPA's storytelling element (Nizza et al., 2021) empowered coaches to voice their nuanced well-being experiences and how they make sense of the concept, something which is rarely considered. Despite this, it is acknowledged that temporality and change are important aspects of experience (Smith et al., 2022) and well-being which were not necessarily captured within the singular interviews. Additionally, although a homogenous IPA sample was recruited, a limitation is that only the voices of white male coaches were shared.

### **3.6 Reflections for Future Research and Practice**

Six reflections are offered: (i) future research should implement a longitudinal IPA approach to capture how interactions within and between one's ecological niche fragment the self and fluctuate subsequent well-being temporally; (ii) the differences between coaches who were and were not previously players should be explored, as it may elucidate whether past playing experience significantly contributes towards well-being comprehension. Similarly, the lived experiences of females coaching in male football contexts should be illuminated to share any contextualised differences as to how they comprehend and make sense of well-being; (iii) innovative and multi-modal IPA approaches are advocated as participants' accounts and sensemaking could be enriched by utilising creative data collection methods like photo-elicitation and online video media; (iv) considering multiple coaches attempted to make sense of their well-being by viewing it as a mobile phone battery, on an applied level the use of such familiar and accessible terminology could be helpful when educating coaches and organisations on what can drain and charge well-being; (v) Organisations are encouraged to support

coaches with their well-being, as reliance on well-being management should not solely rest on the coach. Insofar, organisations could endorse mentally healthy frameworks, deliver psychoeducation on well-being (Purcell et al., 2022), and proactively encourage help-seeking behaviours, such as one-on-one support from a sport psychologist. However, such support and education (proximal processes) within a coach's microsystem, must be provided on a regular basis over extended periods of time to be effective (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Finally, the bioecological and PPCT models are advocated as appropriate frameworks for future studies to explore how a person experiences and makes sense of well-being because they holistically account for reciprocal interactions within and between an individual's biophysical, psychological, sociocultural, and contextual conditions. In conclusion, a combined bioecological framework and IPA design enlightened how well-being as a construct is made sense of and experienced within footballing contexts.



# Chapter 4: Study Two

Using Video Docuseries to Explore Male Professional Football  
Head Coaches' Well-Being Experiences Throughout a Season

**Peer-reviewed publication associated with this chapter:**

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## 4.1 Chapter Abstract

Within Chapter 3 football coaches disclosed how their work environment is unpredictable and demanding, comprising a multitude of stressors which can impede well-being. Additionally, coaches highlighted how the masculine culture within football often promotes suppression of voice, causing internalisation of thoughts and isolation. The present chapter used coaching docuseries ‘as a window’ to explore and illuminate male professional football head coaches’ well-being experiences throughout a season. It builds on Chapter 3 as it captures a seldom heard groups’ (e.g., first team head coaches in the Premier League and LaLiga) well-being accounts and experiences over time, highlighting temporal changes and contextualised demands. More specifically, the present chapter utilised football docuseries and a bioecological framework to explore how four male professional head coaches experienced well-being whilst working in one of the top European football leagues (Premier League, La Liga). Four docuseries were sampled and resulted in the analysis of 31 episodes ( $M^{duration} = 46.6$  minutes,  $SD = 4.5$  minutes). Within this chapter an adapted interpretative phenomenological analysis approach was implemented to illuminate convergences and divergences in contextual accounts. These accounts resulted in five group experiential themes: ‘I belong to the game’; ‘he belongs to the game’; ‘you need the right people around you’; ‘it’s difficult to describe the manager without describing the person’; and ‘people are trying to stab you’. The findings indicate that football coaches may experience identity conflicts and become deeply absorbed in their work. This impacts not only their well-being but also their family’s, who they often turn to for social support. Consequently, by unveiling nuanced challenges to coaches’ well-being, organisations may be better informed to offer more aligned and bespoke well-being support systems.

## 4.2 Introduction

Within recent years, professional football players have started to defy the game's hypermasculine culture of silence by voicing their well-being struggles to the media (Nassoori, 2022). In comparison, professional football coaches have not been as forthcoming in the media, though some have implicitly disclosed information about their general well-being struggles. For instance, coaches have described how management is like a drug addiction (Thomas, 2022) and they often feel overwhelmed and consumed due to professional football's demands (Baldock et al., 2021; see Chapter 3.4). A probable reason for this is due to the multitude of performance, organisational, and personal stressors they experience when working in the professional context (Baldock et al., 2021). For instance, football personnel have voiced concerns about the professional context, such as its micro-political infighting, a need-to-win mentality, and job insecurity (Bentzen et al., 2020; Higham et al., 2021; Potrac et al., 2012), all of which can thwart well-being due to increased pressure. Thus, football organisations have a duty of care to support their personnel's well-being which can be seen by the psychological and counselling services offered to their players, both within Spain (La Asociación de Futbolistas Españoles, 2020) and England (Players' Football Association, 2023). Yet, coaches' well-being has often been neglected in comparison to their players, with an English Premier League coach claiming, 'if you're not a player, you don't get the mental health support that you need' (Whyatt, 2021). Therefore, it is paramount researchers strive to further understand well-being in contrasting professional sport (i.e., working) contexts, as they shape well-being experiences in differing ways (Didymus et al., 2018; Roberts et al., 2019).

The male professional football context has traditionally been encompassed within an authoritarian and subservient culture, which has been instilled over numerous decades (Parker 1996; 2006; see Chapter 3.4.1.2). Such culture is a significant factor as to why

many within the sport conform to institutionally legitimised social norms, such as suppression of feelings and health-related concerns (Manley et al., 2016). One probable explanation for conformity is impression management (see Goffman, 1963), whereby coaches will strategically shape their behaviours and identities to navigate their social context. Another explanation is situated learning (Parker, 2006), as many players who have been engrained within football's masculine culture often progress into coaching with hegemonic beliefs and narrowed identities (Champ et al., 2020; see Chapters 3.4.1.2 and 3.4.2.1). A potential result of these narrowed identities is coaches dramatising desirable institutionalised identities (e.g., masculinity), which often conflict with their own to gain social standing (Roberts et al., 2019). Consequently, coaches become an inauthentic self which thwarts well-being due to concealing who they truly are (Sarvimäki, 2006; see Chapter 3.4.2.1). Therefore, it is pertinent that the intense professional football context and its influence on coaches' well-being is explored in further detail, not only for the enhancement of coaches' well-being, but for performance- and athlete-related gains (Yukhymenko-Lescroart & Sharma, 2022). For instance, a coach's poor management of well-being challenges (e.g., stressors) can thwart their own performance, which subsequently can hinder coach-athlete relationships, athletes' mental states, and competitive performances (Fletcher & Scott, 2010). This is a possible result of emotional contagion whereby the coach's stress is transferred to their athletes (Thelwell et al., 2017), hence if football coaches' can better manage their well-being it may optimise the experience of emotional contagion and lead to better player well-being and performances (Rumbold et al., 2022).

The construct of well-being is considered multi-faceted, encompassing hedonic (i.e., subjective well-being), eudaimonic (i.e., psychological well-being), and temporal aspects, like within-person fluctuations (Rush & Grouzet, 2012). Furthermore, well-being

is suggested to be ingrained in the life context of an individual, including their spatial-temporal experiences (Lundqvist, 2011). Subsequently, environmental, personal, and relational factors that influence a coach's well-being should be explored in greater depth (Rumbold & Didymus, 2021). Therefore, to understand the multi-factorial nuances of coaches' individualised well-being experiences in greater detail, Bronfenbrenner's (1995; 2000) Ecological Systems Theory, specifically bioecological theory is an appropriate theoretical framework to explore psychosocial and sociocultural influences on well-being. Moreover, Bronfenbrenner's (2000) Process–Person–Context–Time (PPCT) model complements the multi-factorial elements of well-being, placing specific emphasis on interactions within and between an individual and their ecological niche over time (Bronfenbrenner, 2000). The PPCT model acknowledges how the individual (e.g., age and gender) and temporal reciprocal interactions (i.e., proximal processes) within their ecological niche (e.g., nested systems of all living and non-living objects) shape development (Bronfenbrenner, 2000). For context, a football coach's ecological niche would comprise of interactions within and between the microsystem (e.g., workplace, home), mesosystem (e.g., player-colleague and family-club relations), exosystem (e.g., mass media, governing bodies), macrosystem (e.g., club culture, locality), and chronosystem (e.g., sociohistorical events, life transitions). Therefore, a coach's well-being sensemaking and experiences could equally be shaped by interactions at the club, at home, via mass media, and past playing or coaching careers.

In combination with bioecological theory, the phenomenological, hermeneutical, and idiographic foundations of interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) are befitting to explore and interpret individual lived experiences and accounts (Smith et al., 2022). For instance, an IPA approach complements the PPCT model as it maintains a contextualist position and a commitment to the individual, which promotes the

illumination of personal sensemaking and nuanced experiential accounts (Smith et al., 2022). Thus, IPA's ideographical nature is well suited given well-being and coaching are viewed as idiosyncratic (Didymus et al., 2018; Kiefer, 2008). IPA also embraces the interpretative roles both coach and researcher play in making sense of experiences via a double hermeneutic, whereby the researcher tries to make sense of the coach's interpretations to enrich understanding (Smith et al., 2022). Additionally, IPA acknowledges that a coach's sensemaking can be shaped by horizons (e.g., what one can see or understand), which can be influenced by a fusion of horizons (e.g., person-context interactions; Gadamer, 2013). For example, how a coach comes to perceive and comprehend well-being can be narrowed or widened by proximal processes in their ecological niche (Bronfenbrenner, 2000), such as via persistent exposure to cultural norms (macrosystem) or workplace relations (microsystem and mesosystem). Consequently, for the purpose of this chapter a combined IPA and bioecological theoretical approach was adopted as they recognise that biopsychosocial and contextual factors collectively shape well-being experiences and comprehension (Kiefer, 2008; Sarvimäki, 2006).

A novel way to explore a coach's ecological niche is through the immersion and interpretation of texts, such as diaries, biographies, autobiographies (Sparkes & Stewart, 2016), and documentaries (McDonald, 2007). Documentaries and docuseries offer an opportunity to do this because they enable researchers to obtain an understanding of the ways in which individuals (coaches) within cultures (professional football), at certain time-points, make sense of the world around them (Mckee, 2003). However, even though documentaries play a crucial role in contextualising sports within society, they have received scant attention from psychology researchers in sport studies (Poulton & Roderick, 2008). This was mostly because their representation of reality was brought into

question, but McDonald (2007) argues their “engagement with real life, with issues of power and social change, situates the documentary within the discourse of sobriety” (p. 210). As such, sport documentaries can enlighten wide ranging sociocultural and political issues (Poulton & Roderick, 2008). For instance, BBC Three’s ‘Football’s Suicide Secret’ and Sky Sports ‘Tackling the Stigma’ illuminate the everyday well-being challenges football personnel face to cultivate social change. Moreover, docuseries such as Amazon’s<sup>®</sup> All or Nothing (AoN), like autobiographies, tell stories (Sparkes & Stewart, 2016) and capture first-hand experiences within a coach’s given context over time (e.g., a season or career). However, while documentaries provide ideal contexts for exploring social phenomena, it is important to acknowledge that sociocultural issues can be framed and socially construed in certain ways (Poulton & Roderick, 2008). Thus, adapting the view of Sparkes and Stewart (2016), docuseries offer a window through which phenomena can be seen. Therefore, documentary data can illuminate sportspeople's complex lives, stories, and experiences (Poulton & Roderick, 2008), meaning they are well-situated to facilitate the exploration of male professional football head coaches’ well-being. Consequently, this chapter aims to use coaching docuseries to illuminate and explore male professional football head coaches’ well-being experiences throughout a season.

## **4.3 Method**

### **4.3.1 Research Design and Philosophical Underpinning**

This chapter is informed by an interpretivist paradigm, which adopted a social constructionist epistemology (i.e., a coach’s well-being knowledge is constructed via sociocultural interactions), and a relativist ontology (i.e., multiple interpretations of coaches’ well-being exist). A combined bioecological and IPA approach also guided the current chapter due to the phenomenological, hermeneutical, ideographical, and

ecological underpinning, which facilitated the exploration of how individuals make sense of their personal and social world (Bronfenbrenner, 2000; Smith et al., 2022). For instance, complementing the chapter's epistemological and ontological underpinning, IPA draws upon Gadamer's (2013) horizons, which are an individual's assumptions, beliefs, and cultural background that shapes understanding and interpretation of the world. As the bioecological approach (e.g., PPCT model; Bronfenbrenner, 2000) would suggest, horizons are not fixed and are constantly shaped due to proximal processes within and between one's ecological niche. Thus, horizons can be widened or narrowed by interacting with people, objects, languages, and cultures over time.

Due to the novel nature of this chapter, the IPA approach and its analysis process were adapted so that it aligned with video documentary data. For example, because of sampling video docuseries, IPA's contextualist position (Smith et al., 2022) allowed for not only the interpretation of participant speech but their given behaviour and context at certain timepoints. Therefore, like a longitudinal interpretative phenomenological analysis (LIPA) approach (Farr & Nizza, 2019), each docuseries episode which captured a different timepoint was analysed to explore the contextual and temporal aspects of well-being experiences (Rush & Grouzet, 2012). In addition, equal to traditional IPA workings, comprehension and sensemaking was explored by exercising the double hermeneutic, whereby the lead author tried to interpret how the football coaches attempted to make sense of their lived experiences (Smith et al., 2022). Therefore, an ideographic and detailed examination of each head coach and their corresponding docuseries was conducted prior to tentative cross-case analysis.

#### **4.3.2 Docuseries Context and Procedure**

Documentary film can be viewed as the "creative treatment of actuality" (Nichols, 2017, p5), which comprises of three assumptions; (1) Documentaries are about reality (e.g.,



something that happened); (2) Documentaries are about real people; (3) Documentaries tell stories about what happens in the real world. Therefore, docuseries can be viewed as any tv series about reality, containing real people, and unscripted content which is produced in its natural context (e.g., place of work or home). Typical documentary models within the sport genre are biographical and ethnographical, with the former providing “an account of someone’s life or a significant part of it”, and the latter representing a “culture or subculture in an illuminating manner” (Nichols, 2017, p.156). Moreover, documentaries can reside within observational (i.e., follow and observe social actors as they go about their lives) and participatory (i.e., feature engagement between the filmmaker and subjects to draw them out in revealing ways and to develop a story or perspective) modes (Nichols, 2017). Additionally, documentaries and docuseries are easily accessible via platforms like Netflix<sup>®</sup> and Amazon<sup>®</sup> which can provide useful and nuanced insights from various populations. A population which can be considered seldom-heard (Smith et al., 2023) are professional top tier (e.g., English Premier League and La Liga), first team football head coaches, hence docuseries are well placed to capture their contextualised lived experiences.

After ethical approval was granted by Sheffield Hallam University research ethic committee (Converis ID: ER44874238; see [Appendix 5](#)), four Amazon<sup>®</sup> Prime docuseries, three AoN series and season one of Simeone Living Match by Match (LMM) were selected (see [Table 4.1](#)). Inclusion criteria was informed by Nichols (2017) as docuseries had to: (1) have a professional football head coach as a focal point; (2) document a football head coaches’ contextual lived experiences (i.e., reality) over time; (3) exhibit biographical and ethnographical components, plus observational and participatory documentary modes. The sport documentary genre is “key to placing sport in their social context and in the process reveal that sport is more than simply about the

performance on the field of play” (McDonald, 2007, p.222). For instance, the AoN series captured head coaches’ lived experiences over the course of an entire football season and the LMM series focused on lived experiences over the course of a career and season. Whereas the LMM and Arsenal’s AoN series had a nuanced focus on the head coaches’ home context and social relationships. A homogeneous sample of docuseries was included to align with the principles of a LIPA approach (Farr & Nizza, 2019) as the docuseries comprised of 24.4hrs worth of data across several timepoints (i.e., episodes). Therefore, multiple datasets (episodes and docuseries) were brought together, analysed, and discussed to unveil convergences and divergences in experiences (Smith et al., 2022).

**Table 4.1**

*Characteristics of docuseries*

<b>Docuseries title</b>	<b>Duration</b>	<b>Head coach</b>
AoN Manchester City FC	8 episodes. <i>M</i> episode length = 48.9 minutes	Pep Guardiola
AoN Tottenham Hotspur FC	9 episodes. <i>M</i> episode length = 48.9 minutes	José Mourinho
AoN Arsenal FC	8 episodes. <i>M</i> episode length = 48.9 minutes	Mikel Arteta
Simeone Living Match by Match (Club Atlético de Madrid)	6 episodes. <i>M</i> episode length = 39.8 minutes	Diego Simeone

**4.3.3 Data Analysis**

The data were analysed using adapted IPA (Smith et al., 2022) and LIPA (Farr & Nizza, 2019) guidelines, comprising of nine stages (see [Table 4.2](#)). The stages were acknowledged as fluid, which allowed the author to navigate back-and-forth between stages.

**Table 4.2***Adapted interpretative phenomenological analysis stages*

Analysis Stage	Description of Process Undertaken
Stage 1: Immersion	The author watched the entirety of one docuseries to firstly immerse themselves in the context of the head coach, and secondly to decide the scope of analysis which was useful in determining the appropriate data (i.e., segments of video) to transcribe. Therefore, only parts of the docuseries which included the head coach or referred to them were included in the transcription and analysis process. Contextual sensitivity was given to the use of music, visual angles, and clip transitions used, but this was omitted from the analysis process as IPA grounds itself in human experience. Thus, raw speech and visible behaviour was prioritised as opposed to producer audiovisual edits.
Stage 2: Transcription	Adhering to the idiographic commitment of IPA, the relevant video segments were transcribed verbatim and then re-read individually by the author, which allowed for further immersion into the data of the participant.
Stage 3: Organisation	The author created a five-column analysis document, which comprised from left to right of, experiential statements, context, transcribed segment, exploratory notes, and time stamp.
Stage 4: Reading, watching, and note taking	Afterwards the author began line-by-line analysis of the transcribed segments from the docuseries noting exploratory comments (e.g., descriptive, linguistic, or conceptual). The corresponding video segments were rewatched to aid notetaking on behavioural and contextual aspects.
Stage 5: Formulating experiential statements	Experiential statements were then formulated by capturing the conceptual and psychological essence of the exploratory and contextual comments, whilst also remaining grounded in the data.
Stage 6: Clustering experiential statements	The experiential statements were then clustered into a coherent structure representing homogeneous and conflicting concepts, which was a repetitious and laborious process.
Stage 7: Establishing personal experiential themes	Once the clustering of experiential statements was agreed upon between the author and supervisory team, a table of personal experiential themes (PETs; Smith et al., 2022) was created, where each cluster was named to identify the relevant information from all the experiential statements residing under it.
Stage 8: Replication	The above process was then repeated for all docuseries and respective head coaches to establish their own PETs, which aided the identification of parallels and distinctions between all participants.

Stage 9: Establishing group experiential themes	Group experiential themes (GETs; Smith et al., 2022) were then created to represent the convergences and divergences across the whole sample, which facilitated the investigation and illumination of sample nuances.
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#### 4.3.4 Qualitative Rigor

Due to the nuanced nature of the work, a relativist approach was adopted as it allowed for flexibility and contextual consideration in quality criteria (Smith & McGannon, 2018). One concern with archived data, which could be viewed as docuseries stored on a streaming service, is that it may be seen as cleansed of conceptual and interactional contexts in which they were created and through which they should be understood (Mauthner & Doucet, 2008). Consequently, comprehension of why the data was created and the contexts in which it is set was crucial to an authentic understanding and analysis of data (Irwin, 2013). Therefore, significant efforts were made to understand the sensitivity of context for each docuseries (Yardley, 2017), which is why the IPA approach was adapted to incorporate specific exploratory notes on contextual and behavioural observations. Moreover, although the docuseries are ultimately set within the professional football context to capture head coaches' lived experiences over the course of a season and career, it is acknowledged that they were fundamentally created by an external producer and edited for informational and entertainment purposes. Caution was thus given to the fact that the docuseries were not created to explicitly focus on coaches' well-being, even though related onscreen discussions and behaviours (e.g., obsessive ruminations, lack of sleep) which thwart performance and well-being were addressed. An example of how the author interpreted onscreen interactions can be seen within the LMM series analysis, where Diego addressed how his daughter corrected him, saying family is his life, not football. During this exchange, Diego begins to visibly look upset and tears soon ensue, illuminating how his engrossment with football affected not only his own but his family's well-being. Without the visual footage the emotional context would have

been lost, hence acknowledging on screen actions enriches the analysis and interpretation process.

Aligning with a reflexive approach and to provide transparency (Yardley, 2017), the author has previously worked with academy players in a professional football club and is actively exploring professional coaches' well-being within football. Consequently, from personal experience the author has been exposed to a professional football club's environment and general well-being literature. Attempting to mitigate any preconceptions, the author engaged in critical discussions with PhD supervisors to promote reflexivity and to challenge theoretical interpretations (Smith & McGannon, 2018). For instance, the research team met regularly to critically discuss analytical interpretations, as well as theme formulation. The collaborative meetings were to explicitly progress the author's interpretations and not for consensus (Smith & McGannon, 2018). For instance, the author was reflective that docuseries, as with any qualitative data, cannot represent an absolute objective truth (Sparkes & Stewart, 2016), but still does provide a valuable insight into real-life scenarios and social phenomena (McDonald, 2007). Therefore, contextual sensitivity was given to the editor's use of music, visual angles, and clip transitions used, as well as how docuseries such as Amazon's AoN can sociologically frame an 'all or nothing' portrayal of coaching well-being experiences. However, for the purpose of this chapter this was not a core focus of the analysis process as IPA grounds itself in human experience (Smith et al., 2022); hence raw speech and visible behaviour was prioritised over audiovisual edits.

#### **4.4 Findings and Discussion**

The purpose of the chapter was to explore how male professional head football coaches' experienced well-being in their contexts. Analysis illuminated the experiences of four professional football head coaches, resulting in five group experiential themes, which are

interpreted and discussed in relation to relevant literature, incorporating a multivocality of coaches and relational accounts.

#### **4.4.1 “I Belong to the Game”**

This theme represents how coaches displayed signs of being consumed by their coaching role which shaped well-being. For example, during episode one José discloses how being relieved of duty left him with a lack of purpose:

Too many holidays. Too many football matches watching from spaces where I don't belong. I don't belong to the box... stands [or] the sofa of my house. I belong to the game. I was empty. I needed my place.

Linguistically, his use of the phrase “spaces where I don't belong” implies being out of place, almost lost, perhaps because his ecological niche has become fragmented due to conflicts within his microsystem (e.g., removal from workplace) and chronosystem (e.g., transition out of football; Bronfenbrenner, 2000). José appears to make sense of his purpose or “belonging” by associating it with being in role, possibly because his perceived identity is being a head coach at a club (Lundkvist et al., 2012; see Chapter 3.4.2.1). Therefore, to fulfil his “emptiness” and sense of well-being, he needed “belonging” by returning to his role. Having a sense of purpose in life has been associated with positive well-being experiences, whereas a perceived lack of purpose can thwart a coach's well-being as it fuels obsessive passion and subsequent maladaptive behaviours (Yukhymenko-Lescroart & Sharma, 2022). Consequently, José's well-being appeared thwarted due to conflicts (e.g., dismissal) within his ecological niche, which caused a loss of purpose and identity (see Chapter 3.4.2.1). Similarly, within episode one Diego shares an account of football being his identity, but confessed that an exchange with his daughter widened his understanding:

It's [football coaching] my life. The other day, my daughter corrected me. Because I said this was my life... [visual emotion] And she said, "No, we are your life." She's four years old, but she's right.

During his exchange, Diego behaviourally expressed upset, beginning to weep because of the realisation that he is a father and husband first and foremost. His realisation was apparent due to a contrast in views from his daughter, which could suggest a fusion of horizons (Gadamer, 2013) had taken place within his microsystem, developing his perspective (Bronfenbrenner, 2000). As a result, this momentarily subdued his immersion-in-place (e.g., work; Seamon, 2018), enabling him to re-evaluate his identity and purpose in life. A pertinent reason as to why the coaches appeared consumed by their role was due to an insistent passion, turned obsession to be the best and to win, which created high amounts of pressure:

It's not just about playing or coaching football. It's about winning. If we don't win, it's an empty career... I won trophies in every club, so I bring the expectation to a certain level, that with other people there is no expectation. It's my fault. And if nobody puts that pressure on myself, I'm the first one to do it. I want to live with that pressure. (José)

For instance, José utilised first person speech "I bring the expectation", suggesting his personal character and internalised high standards fuel contextual pressure, which can thwart a football coach's well-being due to increased perceived stress (Baldock et al., 2021). Drawing on the PPCT model to aid sensemaking (Bronfenbrenner, 2000), it was apparent that coaching characteristics (e.g., passionate identity) fuelled internalised expectations leading to instances of persistent rumination, obsessive-like tendencies, and work-life conflicts. This can thwart well-being as an obsessive passion generates pressure

to fulfil specific requirements (e.g., be successful) and can often cause individuals to feel out of control, creating conflict within their wider life (Yukhymenko-Lescroart & Sharma, 2022; see Chapter 3.4.2.1). For instance, Diego addressed how it is hard to switch off from football, which subsequently affected his personal life and sleep deprivation:

It's very difficult to forget about soccer. There isn't a moment where you can unwind, because there are always thoughts going through your head, situations that you keep thinking about... The beautiful thing... is that this is the reality of the job [and] sport, this search for the unknown. And what keeps you alive and won't let you sleep, because you can't sleep at night. All the players go through your mind, there's one with an injury... Should we play with three at the back or four? You just don't sleep.

Here, Diego's well-being is thwarted (e.g., sleep deprivation) due to constant rumination, which he details as the "search for the unknown", which possibly represents the unpredictability of his job and environment. However, although it is detrimental to his well-being, he admits that football's unpredictability is also "what keeps you alive", almost providing him with a buzz and excitement that he is addicted to, which is not uncommon for coaches (Thomas, 2022; Yukhymenko-Lescroart and Sharma, 2022). A possible way to mitigate the addiction and consumption in the role is for coaches to cultivate relationships and interactions outside of football, such as with family and friends, because Mikel discloses the isolating nature of the profession:

The biggest [piece of] advice Pep gave me... [was] "This is the loneliest profession." When you close that door, it's you and your worries, issues... decisions that are always there.

As the season progressed Mikel implied ruminations (i.e., worries and thoughts),



intensify when closing the door (i.e., being alone). Loneliness can relate to our relationship with ourselves and how our individuation is asserted in the world (Motta & Larkin, 2022). Therefore, when an individual's desire to be understood in their entirety is thwarted, and their ability to reveal their complete uniqueness to others is impeded, they feel lonely. Consequently, Mikel's loneliness may not simply stem from the absence of others in his ecological niche, which can thwart well-being due to a lack of social support (Baldock et al., 2021) but because he cannot reveal himself and his thoughts in their entirety to others, such as colleagues (e.g., microsystem), fans and media (e.g., exosystem) through fear of cultural (e.g., macrosystem; Bronfenbrenner, 2000) masculine non-conformity (Manley et al., 2016; see Chapter 3.4.1.2). This illuminates how proximal processes between systems can shape a coach's authenticity and well-being experiences.

#### **4.4.2 He Belongs to the Game**

Some docuseries provided novel insights into the head coaches' personal lives by entering their homes and obtaining accounts from family and friends, which provided nuanced perspectives as to how they manage their role and well-being. For instance, Mikel's wife Lorena and two sons spoke to the camera in episode six about Mikel's work-life balance:

Lorena: If he's on his own at home, he will be 24/7 in the office. [Clips of Mikel working in his office]. It is hard for him, even when we are on holidays in the summer... he sees kids playing, he would get up and start... coaching them.

[Transitions to his children] Producer: What do you think of your dad's job?

Son 1: It's good, although sometimes I don't like it because he's like, up there [points to the office] for like two hours straight and he's not with us but when he's with us, I really enjoy it.

Son 2: [jovially holds hand to ear mimicking Mikel on the phone] Five more

minutes.

The insights from Mikel's family provide their nuanced interpretation of him and how he manages his role and personal life. Mikel's family inadvertently engaged in a form of hermeneutics as they attempt to interpret what he says and does. For instance, Lorena interprets Mikel's behaviour at home by comparing it to when on holiday to signify his incessant obsession in differing contexts. Whereas the accounts of Mikel's children provide insight into how his physical and psychological absence at home, not only thwarts his well-being but his family's. For example, the burden of work and family obligations can cause coaches to experience physical and mental fatigue, to the extent they deprioritise wider aspects of their life such as family (Lundkvist et al., 2012; see Chapter 3.4.2.1). However, Mikel seems unaware that his well-being and presence at home are being thwarted due to work, reinforced by a clip of him trying to play football in the garden with his children whilst on the phone. Mikel's behaviour could thus be interpreted as a lived obliviousness caused by a strong immersion in work which consequently down-prioritises family impeding their well-being (Lundkvist et al., 2012; Seamon, 2018). Comparably, the LMM docuseries entered Diego's homelife, where his family provided nuanced insights into his well-being and consumption of the role:

Giovanni (Son): He thinks too much about stuff, about how he could have done this, or that. My old man is 100% soccer... (Episode. 1). He doesn't have anything else. I've told him many times that he needs to focus on something else. At present, his two daughters are the way he has of switching off. (Episode. 3). I said he had to learn... soccer is soccer, but there's also another side that's life. For someone whose life involves soccer 24/7, it's hard to get him out of that soccer atmosphere, [as] he breathes soccer all the time. (Episode. 5).

The account provided by Giovanni highlights the toll football can take on Diego's well-being as he becomes consumed. Giovanni's assertion of "he breathes soccer" signifies how engrained Diego is within the football context, implying football appears to be the air (i.e., purpose) that gives him life. Considering football is the air Diego breathes, removing him from football without alternative purpose could thwart his overall well-being (see Chapter 3.4.2.1). Giovanni tried to widen Diego's horizon of understanding (Gadamer, 2013) by encouraging him to focus his breath (i.e., purpose) on something other than football, such as family. Consequently, well-being could be an antecedent of mitigating immersion in a role via a fusion of horizons (Gadamer, 2013) with others (e.g., family). Giovanni's account emphasises the importance of family surrounding the coach and how they may help with dissociation from football and management of well-being.

#### **4.4.3 "You Need the Right People Around You"**

It was apparent from the docuseries that personal relationships played an important role in managing a coach's well-being. For instance, after a poor run of results Mikel was more cognizant about the importance of being surrounded by the right people when pressure is on:

We are bottom of the league. Zero goals... we are getting hammered by everybody... In difficult moments, you question yourself, you have fears, difficult things happen in your mind... You need the right people around you to support you and sometimes to help you lift when you're under difficulty.

Interpreting Mikel's account, comprising of isolated self-doubts, and the claim "difficult things happen in your mind", suggests that his mental well-being can become thwarted due to constant rumination (Rush & Grouzet, 2012). His want for having people

around him could represent the loneliness of the profession and how having others present may mitigate the detrimental impact isolation can have on well-being. Contrastingly, Diego claims:

Regardless of the people around me, I make the decisions. When there's happiness, criticism, sadness and when there's elation, you are by yourself.

Diego's statement of "regardless of the people around me" came in the final episode, concluding that even with others continuously present in his environment, he still felt a sense of isolation. However, Diego's account could be illuminated by Mikel's choice of language such as "right people", implying that simply having people present is not enough to alleviate isolation and obsession, but perhaps people need to understand him to rightfully support him. This is exemplified by Mikel's wife Lorena:

I take the good and the bad, the critics and the opinions, everything really as part of his job. But normally I don't allow all that to get in the house. I normally try to be outside of that bubble. Sometimes I need to drag him out from there and make him see, 'Hey, it's just that bubble.' I mean, life is going on outside the bubble. With me, he's quite vulnerable, completely open, and we talk a lot.

Lorena's use of metaphorically dragging Mikel out of the football bubble when at home connotes how he can become deeply consumed due to work-life conflicts (Didymus et al., 2018) in his ecological niche, but also how Mikel is reactively receiving (as opposed to proactively seeking) social support to manage his work-life balance and subsequent well-being. Furthermore, Lorena disclosed that Mikel is "completely open" with her, indicating family fit into the category of "right people" for emotional expression, perhaps due to unwavering trust. Similarly for Diego, the supportive relationship with his wife Carla played an important role as he states, "Carla was very important for me because she

knows me, she knows what I need". Here Diego concurs that having an established relationship is of utmost importance to understand and effectively meet his individual needs for regulating well-being. Coinciding with Lorena's account, Carla discloses that talking and listening to Diego is a form of social support they enact:

Sometimes he gets home at 4am and wakes me up to talk. If it went well, I fall asleep because I know he'll be able to sleep. But if it didn't go well, I wake up. But yeah we have conversations at the strange hours.

Both Mikel and Diego appear to utilise their romantic relationships with their wives as forms of well-being support, possibly due to strong trust, ease of access, and dissociation from their club. Therefore, because of having strong spousal relationships they feel safe and are more inclined to be honest with how they feel, as demonstrated by Diego seeking support from his wife at 4am. Within football, men typically struggle to be open and display vulnerabilities due to its uncaring nature and socially legitimised masculine norms (Manley et al., 2016). This then may be why Mikel and Diego confide and seek solace in the women of their lives, as they provide the care they do not receive at work. Consequently, the absence of perceived psychological safety and care at work may be why male coaches perform to gender norms when in the football context (Newman et al., 2021a; Parker, 2001). For instance, professional football clubs can be viewed as institutions which exude hegemonic masculinity, which is characterised by power, authority, competitive aggression, emotional restraint, and heterosexuality (Parker, 2001; 2006). Such institutions expect a 'professional attitude' which is often viewed as how well one conforms to the traditional working practices of the club, hence coaches conform to and display hegemonic masculinity (Parker, 2001). Therefore, it is no surprise football coaches attempt to seek support and display glimpses of vulnerability outside of their respective football clubs as they do not have to conform to the systemic

hypermasculine culture. For instance, Diego discusses the difficulties of building relationships and being honest in the professional football context:

I'm a bit unusual... I find it hard to start relationships. I wish I had been different in that respect. I wish I had been more open, but I haven't been able to. It's probably something that can still be improved. In my opinion, family keeps you grounded. And it makes you understand that beyond the passion we feel for the sport, I have a very nice life and a beautiful family.

Diego states "I haven't been able to" in response to being open and building relationships. This could be interpreted as the football context (i.e., job role and environment) he is in does not allow for it, perhaps because of all the backstabbing and infighting that occurs for self-preservation (Higham et al., 2021). He also claims at the start "I'm a bit unusual", possibly due to struggling to build relationships in football, despite having strong ones elsewhere. A former player of Diego's, Sebastian interprets why Diego may see himself as unusual:

I was lucky enough to get to know him as a person and as a coach. Diego, a nice cheerful guy, a jokester. He's honest. He's emotional. [Alternatively], I met Cholo, who is demanding, tough, cruel, heartless, a winner.

Sebastian implies that Diego has a dual identity in Diego and Cholo, which enabled him to act differently when in and out of football. For instance, Diego is sociable, emotional, and honest, but when he enters the football context, he becomes Cholo, who appears to conform to professional football's masculine norms (Manley et al., 2016). According to Goffman (1963) individuals engage in impression management, where they shape their identities to align themselves with certain dominant or subordinate cultural discourses in their context. Therefore, Sebastian's insight provides added depth and

clarity to Diego's earlier statement of "I haven't been able to" build relationships as he seems to be aligning with football's dominant ideologies (macrosystem; Bronfenbrenner, 1995). Consequently, some coaches may adopt different identities when in and outside of football, but this could cause fragmentation of self and thwart well-being due to being an inauthentic self (Sarvimäki, 2006; see Chapters 3.4.2.1 and 3.4.2.2). For instance, when work-life balance becomes conflicted, a clash of polarised identities may occur within their microsystem (e.g., work and home; Bronfenbrenner, 1995), which could be why well-being becomes compromised.

#### **4.4.4 "It's Difficult to Describe the Manager Without Describing the Person"**

Within all the docuseries coaches revealed aspects of their identities that conflate and differ in relation to their well-being. Mikel, after being asked how he thinks others would describe him, reveals that there is more to him than being a head coach:

I think it's difficult to describe the manager without describing the person, so I think... I'm honest, direct, and probably very demanding as well... Sometimes, they [media and fans] see a manager in a way that is not realistic. I suffer. I have feelings, I have kids. I make mistakes. I cry. I laugh. Inside that person, there is somebody else that is dealing with something as well, you know, that is not immune to what is happening.

Mikel provides a nuanced account opposing the masculine football norms as he believes his identity as a coach cannot be described as separate to him as a person (e.g., a husband and father). He reveals as a head coach that his authentic self (Sarvimäki, 2006) is someone who can suffer and is not immune to the hardships of football. Mikel saying, "inside that person there is somebody else", could imply how his true identity can be suppressed and overlooked by those (e.g., media and fans) on the periphery of his

ecological niche (e.g., exosystem; Bronfenbrenner, 1995). Drawing on the PPCT model (Bronfenbrenner, 2000), a probable reason why this may be is because the media and fans (i.e., exosystem) have stronger proximal interactions with football's culturally masculine attitudes and ideologies (i.e., macrosystem) than with Mikel (e.g., the individual). Consequently, the media and fans' unrealistic perceptions and expectations of head coaches are possibly why Mikel's identity and subsequent well-being feel fragmented. Contrastingly, Mikel felt as though he could display his true identity and be open with his players:

I made a decision when I decided to be a manager that I was going to open up with the players and to do that then you have to accept that... you're going to get hurt.

Mikel's endeavour to display characteristics which align more so with his perceived identity (authentic self) is possibly due to the proximal closeness and frequent interactions he has with his players (microsystem) within his ecological niche, as opposed to fewer interactions with wider exo- and macrosystems (Bronfenbrenner, 1995). Thus, Mikel appears to engage in impression management (Goffman, 1963), whereby proximal closeness to others determines his authenticity and subsequent well-being. Moreover, although Mikel acknowledges that honesty can leave him vulnerable, he is honest with his players to try and establish trusting relationships, a condition which helps foster well-being in professional football (Baldock et al., 2021; see Chapter 3.4.2.2). Similarly, José openly discloses with his team the personal trauma of his dog dying:

I think the majority of you know and some of you maybe think... I am an idiot. But the reality is that I'm dead because my dog died. My dog died, and I'm fucked. Deeply fucked. And I want you to know that because I don't want you to think I



am upset with you, or less confident or less happy.

Throughout the docuseries, José promoted the segregation of sporting and non-sporting lives, but due to personal trauma thwarting his well-being, José's ecological niche became conflicted. For instance, an individual incident (i.e., dog passing) external to his coaching role, thwarted his well-being and subsequent performance, demonstrating how interactions within and between his wider ecological niche (mesosystem; Bronfenbrenner, 2000), can shape well-being experiences. Thus, José's experience implies a coach's well-being cannot be discussed separately from the wider interactions within and between their ecological niche over time.

#### **4.4.5 “People are Trying to Stab You”**

For most of the head coaches, interactions with the media and fans (exosystem; Bronfenbrenner, 2000) played a pertinent role in cultivating pressure and criticism, which appeared to influence well-being. For example, footage was shown of Arsenal fans verbally abusing Mikel whilst he was leaving a match. However, criticism did not only transpire from fans as several head coaches displayed clear frustration and anger when the sports media targeted them and their team:

[José working while listening to the TV] Pundit: I'm telling you Mourinho is passed his best. Look what happened in United—

José: [turns off TV] Fuck off.

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[Pep attends a press conference] Reporter: What do you make of John Stones' performance today? He's been criticised a lot this season. But he seemed to play—

Pep: [visibly frustrated] John Stones has more personality than all of us here together in this room. More balls... than everyone here.

José's and Pep's responses indicate how their emotional management can be tested by interactions with the media. Research on coaches' stress supports that the media are commonly cited as a performance stressor which thwarts well-being because they incite pressure (Didymus et al., 2018). But what was most apparent for some head coaches was their perceived obligation to defend their team in the public eye, leaving them to take all the criticism:

Of course I'm going to defend you till the end of our lives in the press conference.  
(Pep)

Don't worry, I will face the people. But today it's hard to defend you. Hard. I will take all the shit again. No worries. (Mikel)

The use of "the end of our lives" by Pep could be interpreted as his unwavering support for his team, but it could also be understood as how interacting with the media (exosystem) can terminate footballing lives due to its cutthroat nature, thus thwarting job security (microsystem) and well-being (Bentzen et al., 2020). Ultimately, highlighting how distal exosystem interactions influence microsystem relations and shape well-being experiences (Bronfenbrenner, 2000). Furthermore, Mikel frustratingly highlighted it is his sole obligation to face the "shit" from the media as he is the head coach, which placed his well-being at risk. For example, Mikel makes sense of the persistent criticism by comparing it to a deliberate act of physical harm:

We have to go through different moments, some very difficult, some when people are trying to stab you. Criticism is coming... We're under a lot of pressure and criticism.

The use of "people are trying to stab you" implies that the deliberate, targeted pursuit of the media and fans can cause actual harm, which would subsequently impede

well-being (see Chapter 3.4.2.2). Moreover, Mikel's wife Lorena discloses the severity of the criticism and abuse Mikel faces:

Producer: One minute people are praising him, and the next minute they want him to be sacked.

Lorena: Or to die!... They hate you. People really feel extremely passionate about what's happening in football. People put their joy, anger, sadness, or their deepest emotions [in it]. You need to not ride on that train and focus on what you're doing and what you can control and what is in your hands. Otherwise... [Lorena swirls her finger] you go crazy.

Lorena's evident awareness that people have called for her husband's death signifies the abhorrent abuse that head coaches are exposed to and how it will not only influence their well-being but that of their family. The professional football environment has been characterised by abuse and intimidation within clubs (Newman et al., 2021a), yet Lorena's account reflects how external abuse and intimidation towards a coach within their exosystem can bleed into personal life (microsystem; Bronfenbrenner, 2000; see Chapter 3.4.2.2). Lorena's reference to going crazy appears to be in relation to how the criticism from media and fans could consume a coach, perhaps through fuelling persistent ruminations, something which happened to Mikel as he questions what his children may think when they see media content: "The kids read news and... Will he go somewhere else? What is happening? You're gonna get fired, Daddy, if we lose another match?" Further inspection of Mikel's account would suggest an ecological nature to his well-being (Kiefer, 2008). For example, interactions within and between his ecological niche which are mostly out of his immediate control, such as micro-level team performances and exo-level media expectations are influencing one's well-being (Bronfenbrenner,

1995). Insofar, in a squad debriefing session midway through the season, José urged his team to provide him with protection via positive results:

I think it's a very important week, probably the most important week of the season until now. So I need your protection. And your protection is give me results.

José's account is indicative of how volatile a head coach position can be as he displays job insecurity through stating he "needs" his team to provide him "protection" by winning. Feeling pressured to win has been associated with less optimal well-being in coaches (see Chapter 3.4.2.1), which is concerning since optimal well-being can enhance their long-term wellness, and performance- and athlete-related outcomes, such as relationships and mental states (Yukhymenko-Lescroart & Sharma, 2022). Moreover, feelings of job insecurity and external pressure in football are known to expedite experiences of burnout which can subsequently thwart one's well-being and performance (Bentzen et al., 2020). Therefore, coaches should be cautious of obtaining protection and subsequent well-being solely from unstable elements which lack individual control (e.g., player performances), as well-being would best be facilitated by stable factors within a coach's immediate control (e.g., family support and behavioural habits).

#### **4.5 Applied Implications**

To aid the comprehension and management of coaches' well-being within professional football a series of applied implication are proposed. Coaches would benefit from regular education and reflective practice on their management of well-being which could increase their self-awareness on issues that compromise it and subsequent performances. However, given well-being support has previously been questioned by UK professional football coaches (Whyatt, 2021), an exploration of well-being support services for coaches within the UK and other countries is warranted because differing international

football associations will offer varying support and guidance. More so, considering the idiosyncrasies of well-being and coaching, bespoke well-being education and support would be greatly welcomed in addition to generic guidance. Thus, coaches' well-being strategies should be explored and delivered on more of an individualised level throughout the season. This could be explored in novel longitudinal ways, such as using diaries or photos to capture and enrich coaches' experiences and sensemaking of well-being support.

It was apparent from the sample of coaches that they reactively relied on ad-hoc, informal forms of social support in their environment, such as strong marital relationships, which was possibly due to its ease of access and established trust. Consequently, it is encouraged coaches establish strong relational bonds away from the football context as those external to the sport context can widen horizons of understanding (Gadamer, 2013). However, acknowledging that coaches may rely on receiving informal social support highlights how professional football organisations need to take a proactive role in cultivating psychologically safe and supportive environments for coaches. Clubs often have a player care member of staff in position who strives to support player well-being, therefore it can be argued this role could be extended to support coaches' well-being. As a result, coaches would have access to a dedicated member of staff or team, who supports club employee well-being. Lastly, coaches implied that their well-being thrived when their identity was not conflicted, and their perceived purpose was not solely on their job. It is acknowledged that changing football's ideologies and cultural norms is not feasible for one coach, but if more coaches shared their voices and well-being experiential accounts, then it may initiate change for the better and lessen the perceived stigma around the concept. Thus, it is important for football organisations to develop an awareness that head coaches can become consumed by their job roles, and that this can

have deleterious effects on their well-being and performance. Organisations should therefore promote opportunities for coaches to develop a more well-rounded sense of self so that their identities do not solely revolve around being a football coach. This could be facilitated by club owners/executives encouraging coaches to engage in external hobbies, in turn enabling them the time to disassociate from their coaching role.

#### **4.6 Reflections and Future Research Directions**

The chapter makes an original and novel contribution to the topic area, by illuminating and exploring male professional football head coaches' well-being experiences throughout a season using coaching docuseries. This chapter highlights how a seldom-heard group (Smith et al., 2023) can be accessed without researcher involvement via documentary data, which allowed for flexibility whilst maintaining contextual sensitivity (Farr & Nizza, 2019). Despite those strengths, it is acknowledged that the lack of participant-researcher interaction limits the ability to probe for additional depth and detail in provided accounts (Farr & Nizza, 2019). Future research could therefore benefit from combining documentary data with traditional participant-researcher interviews, as incorporating both types of data would enrich the sensemaking process and illuminate nuanced convergences or divergences in coaches' accounts. Moreover, although this is one of the first pieces of work which uses docuseries data as a platform to explore coaches' well-being experiences, a limitation is that the docuseries were edited and constructed by someone other than the research team and were not produced to specifically capture well-being experiences. Consequently, to progress this chapter's adapted IPA findings, future work could conduct a deeper film analysis on how such edited and stylised stories portray coaching experiences. Lastly, it would be beneficial for future research to explore how obsessive tendencies and the culture of professional football influences coaches' well-being experiences and sensemaking. This could be

achieved by ethnographical research which would add further additional layers to how coaches experience well-being in their context.

#### **4.7 Conclusion**

The purpose of this chapter was to use docuseries to illuminate and explore male professional football head coaches' well-being experiences. Findings have demonstrated that coaches' well-being can become thwarted due to obsessive-like tendencies, which lead to persistent ruminations, such as worries and self-doubt. Obsession also led many coaches to become consumed by their role which created a lived obliviousness as to how they were behaving and acting outside of the football context. Coaches' immersion-in-role fragmented both their well-being and that of their families, as work and related ruminations spilt over into their homelife, thus conflicting their ecological niche. A nuanced finding was that coaches' well-being can be thwarted due to conflicts within their ecological niche, such as when their perceived identity could not be asserted due to conforming to football's institutionalised norms. Overall, the findings of this chapter provide insight into the well-being experiences of a seldom-heard group and acts as a platform for future work to do the same so that more voices can be represented and shared. Future work should continue to illuminate coaches' well-being experiences and idiosyncrasies so that organisations can become better equipped to provide bespoke support. Therefore, a longitudinal exploration of football coaches' well-being across a season is warranted. This would help capture seasonal events and stages which either facilitate or thwart well-being experiences. Moreover, given the idiosyncrasies of coaching and well-being, exploring both men and women coaches' well-being experiences whilst working in men's professional football is necessary. In doing so, a more comprehensive of outlook of well-being can be shared.

# Chapter 5: Study Three

## Using Photo-Elicitation to see the Bigger Picture: A Longitudinal Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of Male Football Coaches' Well-Being Experiences

### Conference proceedings associated with this chapter:

Higham, A. J., Newman, J. A., Rumbold, J. L., & Stone, J. A. (2023, December). *Using photo-elicitation to see the bigger picture: An exploration of how football coaches experience and make-sense of well-being over the course of a competitive season*. 14th International Council for Coaching Excellence (ICCE) Global Coach Conference, Marina Bay, Singapore. <https://doi.org/gtc8tj>

Higham, A. J., Newman, J. A., Rumbold, J. L., & Stone, J. A. (2024, July). *Can a picture speak a thousand words? A longitudinal photo-elicitation exploration of football coaches' well-being experiences and sensemaking*. 17<sup>th</sup> European Congress of Sport and Exercise Psychology (FEPSAC), Innsbruck, Austria. <https://doi.org/nbzq>



## 5.1 Chapter Abstract

Chapter 5 is a combined longitudinal interpretative phenomenological analysis (LIPA) and photo-elicitation approach conducted with seven male football coaches across an entire football season. The study aimed to explore how football coaches temporally experience and make sense of well-being using auto-driven photo-elicitation. The study builds upon both those in Chapters 3 and 4 as it was acknowledged that well-being is not a static state but fluctuates in relation to proximal processes over time. Therefore, it was evident that a longitudinal exploration of well-being was necessary to capture the temporal fluctuations and changing experiences over time. Moreover, it was identified in Chapter 3 that some coaches struggled to explain their well-being and what it is, hence why an auto-driven photo-elicitation approach was employed to empower the participants and to enrich sensemaking endeavours. Findings resulted in the creation of three group experiential themes (GETs): ‘Striving to be present and true to self’; ‘Well-being sensemaking and experiences shaped by time’; and ‘Navigating the (in)stability of football, coaching and life’. All the GETs comprise of relevant subthemes which go into rich experiential detail on specific factors that influenced well-being states. The chapter communicates that ‘third spaces’, authenticity, sociohistorical events, and familial interactions shape well-being experiences over time.

## 5.2 Introduction

As Chapters 2 and 3 demonstrated, well-being has been hard to define and conceptualise within both general and sports coaching contexts (see Chapters 2.1, 2.3, and 3.4.1 for further details). Then the findings of Chapters 3 and 4 illuminated the contextual and bioecological nature of well-being within professional football club organisations (e.g., first team and academy football contexts). These findings have also captured how biopsychosocial factors greatly shape well-being experiences over time, rationalising the longitudinal exploration of well-being in context (see Chapters 3.6 and 4.5). For instance, from a phenomenological human well-being perspective there is no ‘being’ without ‘place’, because it serves as the condition of all existing things spatially, environmentally, and temporally (Seamon, 2018). Thus, the interconnectedness of the individual in relation to biopsychosocial (e.g., health, behavioural habits, and relationships) and socio-contextual factors (e.g., environments and cultures) is critical as to whether human well-being thrives or not over time (Lomas & VanderWeele, 2022; Mead et al., 2021). This was exhibited within chapters 3.4 and 4.4 as they addressed how coaches conveyed well-being as physical and psychological energy which can be drained or charged by reciprocal socio-contextual interactions within their lifeworld.

The lifeworld of an individual (e.g., coach) comprises of everyday life and situations one would perceive and subjectively experience (Mayoh & Jones, 2015), such as physically and socially structured dwelling ‘places’ (e.g., environments and contexts) (Galvin & Todres, 2011). For instance, Oldenburg (1999) considered our home to be the ‘first’ place of dwelling in our lives, and our workplace the ‘second’. However, such places typically instil social hierarchies and narrow identities which can impede well-being. For example, football organisations (i.e., workplaces) are known to have power imbalances and instil hegemonic masculine beliefs and norms (Champ et al., 2020). Thus,

Oldenburg (1999) promoted ‘third places’, which he described as public places where an individual can disassociate from home and work-life to cultivate well-being. Core characteristics of ‘third places’ are that there are few formal or social obligations and hierarchies, they are communal and conversational, and create a sense of homeliness and relaxation (Oldenburg, 1999). However, in the context of sport, it is well documented that individuals routinely prioritise work over other ‘places’ due to its highly competitive, demanding, and addictive nature (Lundkvist et al., 2012; Yukhymenko-Lescroart & Sharma, 2022), which often results in a lack of self-care and impeded well-being (Eccles et al., 2023). As seen within chapters 3 and 4, overly immersing oneself in work can not only impede intrapersonal well-being but also has interpersonal consequences, such as shaping familial well-being experiences.

Coaches are performers who experience many demands and challenges (e.g., Norris et al., 2017; Potts et al., 2021a). For instance, professional football coaches experience a multitude of performance (e.g., managing workload), organisational (e.g., job security), and personal (e.g., work-life balance) stressors which impact their well-being and ability to perform effectively (Baldock et al., 2021; 2022). Chapters 3 and 4 highlighted how need to win cultures, job insecurities and conflicts, as well as the pressure to be successful can lead to obsessive tendencies in football that can impede effective functioning and well-being. Both chapters unearthed how such lived experiences also permeate or ‘bleed’ into family life, demonstrating the transactional and contagious nature of well-being. Thus, given coaches are key socialising agents who can significantly influence work environments (Didymus et al., 2018; Higham et al., 2021), it is important to not only comprehend their well-being experiences, but the wider impact they may have on other individuals (Potts et al., 2021a). Acknowledging and exploring the collective person-context interaction of well-being ‘in-the-world’ (Sarvimäki, 2006) and how

temporality (e.g., past, present, and future) shapes well-being is of great value because well-being is not a static state but is complex, dynamic, and ever changing (Lundqvist, 2011; Rush & Grouzet, 2012).

Currently there is limited research, which experientially explores coaches' well-being within football contexts over substantial periods of time. Baldock et al. (2022) examined stress and its association with mental ill/well-being across a season using a mixed methods approach but concluded that future research should adopt designs which can obtain a more complete understanding of coaches' well-being. Chapter 4 aimed to partially address this concern using video docuseries data which followed 'topflight' head coaches throughout a season, observing significantly greater timepoints within work and home-life contexts. However, given the nature of the data, there remained a requisite to longitudinally explore football coaches' lived well-being experiences in greater detail as it has been reported that certain timepoints within a football season (e.g., beginning of the season) can place additional strain on well-being (Baldock et al., 2022).

There have been calls for more temporal and contextualised qualitative explorations of well-being (Hefferon et al., 2017; Kahneman, 2011; Lomas, 2015) with claims that exploring well-being through a non-contextual lens may have adverse consequences (Hamling et al., 2020). As Chapters 3 and 4 demonstrated, Bronfenbrenner's (2000, 2005) bioecological Process–Person–Context–Time (PPCT) model can illuminate the dynamic and multi-layered elements of contextualised and temporal well-being as it captures the interactions within and between an individual and their lifeworld (see Chapters 3.2 and 4.2 for an overview of the PPCT model and the multi-layered systems which can shape well-being). A core system that shapes identity within men's football is its culture (macrosystem), which has traditionally been masculine, authoritarian, and subservient (Kelly & Waddington, 2008; Parker, 1996,

2006). For decades football's inured culture has led many to conform to institutionalised social conventions, such as the suppression of emotions and well-being issues (Manley et al., 2016; Parker, 1996, 2006). Therefore, to overcome suppression and concealment, a combined LIPA and photo-elicitation approach was implemented (Burton et al., 2017). Chapter 3 found over a single timepoint that suppression of true selves (e.g., identity and feelings) and conforming to club cultural norms can shape well-being experiences. Additionally, Chapter 4 using docuseries data captured similar findings over a longer period, with coaches' demonstrating how obsessive tendencies and the need to win can shape their own and family's well-being experiences. These findings suggest that exploring lived well-being experiences across a season is important because it will help illuminate how well-being fluctuates in relation to socio-contextual interactions during differing timepoints (Baldock et al., 2022).

A LIPA approach is appropriate to explore the temporal flow of phenomena due to its hermeneutic, phenomenological, and idiographic underpinning (Nizza & Farr, 2019). LIPA can illuminate how the temporal flow of past experiences, current moments, and anticipated futures shape present sensemaking (Hersch, 2023; Rush & Grouzet, 2012). To complement LIPA's contextualist position and commitment to the individual (Smith et al., 2022), a photo-elicitation approach was implemented to illuminate participants' tacit experiences, those taken for granted or background phenomena (Morrey et al., 2022; Pain, 2012). This was because chapter 3.4.1 illuminated how coaches rarely gave attention to their well-being and that past experiences may have shaped their sensemaking without them being aware, hence a photo-elicitation approach could unearth additional latent experiences related to well-being. For instance, using visual stimuli can prompt coaches to discuss details which otherwise may have gone unspoken, highlighting emotional connections to experiences, in turn harnessing more meaningful accounts

(Harper, 1986, 2002). The use of photographic methods to enrich insights into sport coaches' well-being related experiences was advocated within chapters 3 and 4, mainly because photo-elicitation can empower participants to lead and collaborate in the interview through supplying their own images to make their experiences and lifeworld more visible (Bates et al., 2017; Curry, 1986; Seamon, 2018). Moreover, LIPA acknowledges that one's horizons (e.g., what one can see or understand due to sociocultural background) can be broadened by a fusion of horizons (e.g., person-context interactions; Gadamer, 2013). Thus, the need to interpret and co-construct phenomena (e.g., well-being) provides space for multi-modal approaches (e.g., LIPA and photo-elicitation) as they can surpass description and facilitate symbolistic or metaphorical interpretations of one's world and sensemaking (Morrey et al., 2022; Smith et al., 2022). Consequently, the present study aimed to explore how football coaches temporally experience and make sense of well-being throughout a season using a combined LIPA and photo-elicitation approach.

## **5.3 Method**

### **5.3.1 Research Design and Philosophical Underpinning**

The current study maintained the same philosophical assumptions within chapter 3 (e.g., social constructionism and relativism), which complements the core foundations of a LIPA approach (Farr & Nizza, 2019). For instance, LIPA draws on phenomenology, hermeneutics and idiography which assumes that phenomena (e.g., well-being) are made sense of and experienced in varying ways depending on the person and contextual interactions (Smith et al., 2022). Thus, aligning with social constructionism and relativism all knowledge is local, provisional and situation dependent where multiple perspectives of phenomena exist (Burr, 2015). In combination with LIPA, semi-structured interviews were conducted alongside a photo-elicitation method to create a multi-modal approach

which can aid and enrich the sensemaking process with images (Smith et al., 2022). The LIPA approach can capture temporal well-being experiences as they evolve through the flow of subjectivity (Farr & Nizza, 2019). For instance, the author and each participant engaged in a double hermeneutic (Smith et al., 2022) to understand and make sense of the participant's lifeworld and subsequent well-being temporally. This can be seen in chapter 5.4.2.2 where Connor was experiencing a club takeover and claimed to be fine when closer interpretations over multiple timepoints unveiled that his well-being was compromised. Furthermore, the idiographic nature of LIPA enables detailed examination of individual cases over time (Smith & Nizza, 2022), which coincides with the idiosyncratic nature of coaching and well-being. As a result, LIPA complements the exploratory nature and phenomenological enquiry of the research.

### **5.3.2 Participants**

A homogenous sample of seven male football coaches ( $M^{age} = 39 \pm 6$  years;  $M^{coaching-experience} = 14.14 \pm 3.48$  years) were purposively recruited (see [Table 5.1](#)). The sample and its size were based on research guidelines established by the LIPA method (Farr & Nizza, 2019). These guidelines considered the number of participants and interview timepoints, given the substantial volume of data generated by LIPA (Farr & Nizza, 2019). All the participants were professional coaches working within professional clubs and academy environments (Higham et al., 2021). The inclusion criteria for the study were (i) the participant can speak fluent English, (ii) they worked in men's football and had a minimum of three years coaching experience within the English Premier League (EPL) (i.e., tier one) or English Football League (EFL) (i.e., tiers two, three, and four) in the UK. Out of the entire sample, one coach (i.e., John) was unemployed at the time of interview one but was employed from interview two onwards. In addition, all coaches were paid and employed full-time apart from Pete who was paid part-time.

Pseudonyms and age ranges are provided to adhere to anonymisation and confidentiality procedures.

**Table 5.1**

*Participants' demographic and employment characteristics*

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Coaching experience</b>	<b>Coaching role</b>	<b>Coaching: qualifications</b>
Connor	40-45	17 years	U16's Games Coach	UEFA A Licence. FA Advanced Youth Award
Craig	40-45	15 years	U21's Professional Development Group Manager	UEFA A License. FA Advanced Youth Award
John	45-50	14 years	First Team Manager	UEFA Pro License
Max	40-45	8 years	Assistant First Team Manager	UEFA A License. FA Advanced Youth Award
Michael	40-45	16 years	U18-U21's Professional Development Phase	UEFA A License. FA Advanced Youth Award
Pete	30-35	17 years	U16's Assistant Coach	UEFA A License. FA Advanced Youth Award
Tom	25-30	11 years	Assistant (transitioning to) Head of Coaching	UEFA A License. Working towards FA Advanced Youth Award

### **5.3.3 Interview Guide**

Ethical approval was granted via Sheffield Hallam University ethics committee (Converis ID: ER44690456; see [Appendix 6](#)). Coaches within the research team's network were then invited to take part in the study via email and social media (e.g.,



Twitter™ and LinkedIn™). Those which responded with interest were provided with a participant information sheet (see [Appendix 7](#)), an informed consent form (see [Appendix 8](#)), photo-elicitation guidance (see [Appendix 9](#)), and the opportunity to ask questions prior to participation. Coaches were interviewed at four specific time points throughout the 2022-23 season<sup>2</sup> (see [Table 5.2](#)). This was because the varying timepoints captured core events (e.g., Winter World Cup, new year, transfer window, play offs) and possible workload fluctuations (e.g., start of season increasing workloads, or festive period and Winter World Cup providing opportunity for rest) that may shape well-being experiences.

**Table 5.2**

*LIPA interview timepoints and contexts.*

<b>Timepoints</b>	<b>Context</b>
<b>1: August</b>	End of preseason and beginning of the football season
<b>2: December</b>	End of the calendar year, festive period, and Winter World Cup
<b>3: February</b>	Start of the new calendar year and end of transfer windows
<b>4: May</b>	Conclusion of the season and potential play off

Multiple interviews were conducted to yield plentiful, rich data (Smith et al., 2022) and to investigate change over time (Flowers, 2008), for example focusing on how participant’s well-being changed throughout the competitive season (see [Appendix 10](#) for interview guide). When interviewing, the thesis author engaged in active, supportive listening, which involved using prompts and probes to encourage rich discussion and

<sup>2</sup> The 2022-23 season in the Premier League began on the 5<sup>th</sup> August concluding on the 28<sup>th</sup> May and the Championship started on the 29<sup>th</sup> July concluding on the 8<sup>th</sup> May. Both seasons were anomalies compared to previous seasons because the 2021-22 season was condensed due to the Coronavirus and started a month late, which meant teams had less rest and preparation time for the upcoming 2022-23 season. Then due to the 2022 Winter World Cup the Premier League and EFL’s Championship paused for 6 weeks in November and resumed late December. This caused congested fixture schedules where some clubs played three league matches inside seven or eight days (Thomas-Humphreys, 2022).

elaboration (Smith et al., 2022). The interviews were conducted online via Zoom and audio recorded (see [Table 5.3](#)).

**Table 5.3**

*Interview length means and standard deviations*

Participant	Timepoint 1	Timepoint 2	Timepoint 3	Timepoint 4	Total $M^{duration}$ and $SD$
Connor	81 min	83 min	101 min	103 min	92 ± 11 min
Craig	83 min	85 min	86 min	95 min	87 ± 5 min
John	77 min	54 min	63 min	69 min	65 ± 9 min
Max	129 min	119 min	112 min	106 min	116 ± 10 min
Michael	45 min	73 min	95 min	103 min	79 ± 25 min
Pete	91 min	70 min	64 min	74 min	74 ± 11 min
Tom	70 min	86 min	91 min	100 min	86 ± 12 min

#### **5.3.4 Photo-elicitation Context**

The semi-structured interviews were paired with auto-driven (i.e., reflexive) photo-elicitation (Romera Iruela, 2023) to harness richer participant conversation and storytelling (Bugos et al., 2014). This enabled the author to gain a “phenomenological sense” (Harper, 1986, p. 23) of what the content of the images meant to the participants as it allowed them to share and define any issues or concerns. The combination of techniques is encouraged within IPA research (Smith et al., 2022) because it can stimulate in-depth discussion and provide considerable experiential insight (Morrison & Williams, 2020). For instance, photo-elicitation allowed the coaches to provide an insider perspective as they sourced images that illustrated and made meaning of their experiences (Mayfield-Johnson & Butler, 2017) within the professional football context. Furthermore, using visual stimuli within the interviews prompted emotional connections to memories and offered more meaningful accounts (Bates et al., 2017). This was important since

chapter 3 demonstrated the organisational culture of men's football often encourages individuals to suppress their emotions and thoughts (see Chapters 3.4.1.2 and 3.4.2.2).

The coaches were asked to source at least two images that captured their current well-being in each interview and no maximum image limit was imposed so that they could freely express themselves. Coaches were also given the option to source their images by either taking the images themselves (e.g., using a smartphone) or by sourcing copyright-free images online from sites such as Unsplash and Pixabay. Incorporating such an approach was to provide the coaches with flexibility and to cater to their busy working schedules. This approach resulted in 84 images being provided by the coaches (see [Table 5.4](#)). To mitigate ethical challenges, coaches were briefed to avoid taking photos of clearly identifiable or vulnerable persons (e.g., children) unless parental consent was obtained (Morrison & Williams, 2020). Coaches were also briefed that images which contained identifiable features would be edited (e.g., blurred) accordingly to maintain anonymity. Coaches were asked to send their images to the author via email prior to their scheduled interviews. This allowed the author to become familiar with the coaches' images and prepare them for sharing online during the interviews.

**Table 5.4***Number of images supplied by participants*

Participant	Timepoint 1	Timepoint 2	Timepoint 3	Timepoint 4	Total Images
Connor	2	2	4	8	16
Craig	3	2	3	3	11
John	4	2	4	5	15
Max	2	2	2	2	8
Michael	2	3	3	2	10
Pete	2	2	2	2	8
Tom	2	2	2	2	8

**5.3.5 Data Analysis**

Following IPA guidance provided by Smith et al. (2022) all the interviews were initially transcribed verbatim and re-read frequently to immerse oneself in the lifeworld of each participant. A reflective research diary was used to note timepoint observations and impressions from the interviews, as well as the authors thought processes during the multiple stages of the study. In doing so this enabled the author to remain focused on the data at hand and to maintain reflective accounts for transparency with the supervisory team. After transcription the author began line-by-line analysis of participant one's (i.e., Connor) first timepoint transcript, noting either descriptive, linguistic, or conceptual exploratory comments in the righthand margin of the text. Experiential statements were then established in the left margin of text and were grounded in the data, while also capturing the conceptual and psychological essence of the exploratory notes in a reduced volume of detail. The experiential statements were then clustered into a logical structure representing converging and diverging ideas. Once the author and supervisory team had agreed upon the clustering of experiential statements, personal experiential themes (PETs; Smith et al., 2022) were created, where each cluster was titled to capture the relevant

information from all the experiential statements residing under it. These steps were then repeated for all of Connor's four timepoints across the season before progressing onto the next participant. This was so that the author could remain fully immersed within each individual participant's lifeworld across the four timepoints. The above process was repeated for all participants to establish their own PETs, which in turn allowed for the identification of similarities and differences between participants. The concluding stage resulted in the formulation of group experiential themes (GETs; Smith et al., 2022), which allowed for a comprehensive investigation of convergences and divergences across the sample.

### **5.3.6 Research Quality and Rigor**

A relativist approach was adopted as it allowed for flexibility and contextual consideration in quality criteria (Smith & McGannon, 2018). Transparency in epistemological and ontological positioning is important as it shapes how one interprets and understands the data (Yardley, 2017). Considering personal and professional values (i.e., axiology) and given the interpretivist paradigm and LIPA approach (Smith et al., 2022), the author acknowledges that they are an inseparable part of the social world under investigation, thus findings and conclusions may be influenced (Saunders et al., 2019). To further reflect the situatedness of the research and for transparency, the author has spent several years researching the construct of well-being and the male football context. Specifically, analysing the data collected in chapters 3 and 4 may have subliminally shaped interpretations of well-being within football contexts. Moreover, the author has also previously been exposed to a professional club's culture and practices as they delivered psychoeducational workshops to academy players. Therefore, to alleviate such influencing factors, the author and supervisory team met regularly to critically discuss analytical interpretations and to promote reflexivity (Sprake & Palmer, 2022). In addition,

to increase awareness and reflexivity the author also maintained a reflective diary, notetaking initial observations and thought processes during timepoints to develop their interpretations (Newman et al., 2021a; Smith & McGannon, 2018).

## **5.4 Findings and Discussion**

Provided below are three group experiential themes (GETs) and their respective subordinate themes which enlighten how well-being experiences and sensemaking fluctuate over time due to the reciprocal interactions between the coach and the multi-layered contextual system(s) they dwell within. All GETs are structured as themes spanning time, because they capture the progress of experiences and sensemaking over timepoints (Farr & Nizza, 2019).

### **5.4.1 Striving to be Present and True to Self**

This GET captures how several coaches desired the ability to untether themselves from work, which in turn provided greater opportunity to rest and recover, something which they found beneficial for well-being. Moreover, coaches also illuminated how well-being was shaped by their ability to be an authentic self, which was often determined via interactions with others in their immediate environment (e.g., work personnel and family). This GET concludes with an exploration of lifestyle sacrifices coaches believed they had to make to effectively function and excel in their role.

#### ***5.4.1.1 Importance of ‘Third Spaces’: The Endeavour to Disassociate and Rest***

Within this subordinate theme, Oldenburg’s (1999) ‘third place’ work is used as a lens through which the findings can be illuminated. For instance, traditionally such places are viewed as spaces other than work and home where differentiations of social status fall away, and people can socialise. People often enter third places for self-care, to escape the pressures of life, and relax in a way that is usually not possible when working to fulfil the

social obligations of home and work (Fly & Boucquey, 2023). However, to improve their well-being a selection of coaches identified the need for a “third space”, opposed to place, and viewed it as somewhere other than work or home within the microsystem where they felt able to have ‘me (personal) time’. Coaches addressed how third spaces could either be social or individual, which differs from Oldenburg’s (1999) emphasis on socialisation, but similarly the spaces were sought after for the ability to rest and disassociate from work and home-life, to ultimately improve well-being and general functioning. Tom best captured (see [Figure 5.1](#)) and articulated the need for a third space in the latter stages of the season:

**Figure 5.1**

*Overwhelmingness of work and home-life*



Timepoint 3

It’s tricky because the way my mind works, I’m constantly thinking. So, I need to have things to distract myself with, but I feel like I almost need three spaces of work, family, and then me. Um, just the way that having a baby is you don’t really get a lot of time outside of your family one... it means then I can’t get that third space, which is my space to do whatever I want to just relax, go and play golf, go to the gym, whatever that looks like. (Timepoint 4)

Tom's use of "third space" illuminates his desire to detach not only from work for rest but also the hecticness of daily home life (e.g., challenging microsystems). This was symbolically captured by Figure 5.1 which connotes Tom pinched between work and home-life demands leaving him unable to acquire his desired third space. The overwhelmingness Tom experienced during this timepoint was most likely because he had recently transitioned into a new work role and not long since become a father, which both placed demands on his time and energy. This could be further exacerbated due to the timepoint itself as Tom had just endured a near complete and demanding footballing season. This captures the influential nature of core events and key life transitions over time (e.g., chronosystem; Bronfenbrenner, 2000) on well-being experiences, whereby some may lead to physical and psychological fatigue which subsequently impedes well-being. Rest has been identified as important for sports coaches, with specific emphasis on detachment, controllability, reduced effortful thinking, and variation in routines (Eccles et al., 2023). As seen in Tom's account he claimed to be "constantly thinking" which is known to strain coaches' well-being via an inability to switch off (see Chapters 3.4.2.1 and 4.4.1). He also recognized that having "things to distract" himself would be beneficial, but interestingly throughout the season Tom had noticed that he had not maintained a consistent routine. Tom tried to uphold activities he enjoyed and aided well-being, such as exercising, seeing friends, and having family gatherings, but due to work-life commitments he struggled to maintain them on a regular basis:

I'm exercising much more... last couple of weeks I've tried to be a little bit more disciplined to go, "no, I'm exercising that night, I'm doing that this morning." Obviously, it's very challenging as well when you can't just leave your son at home... I've not been able to have the access to it [gym], since [son's] been born or since the wedding, the [new] job... I'm [also] really valuing, uh, on a Sunday,



we always have Sunday roasts... And there's no time limit on it... It's just everyone around the table and I really value that... It's more family, but it's people that you can generally just talk with. You can laugh, you can take the mick out of each other, you can open up, whatever you need it to be. (Timepoint 2)

I just feel like the last six months I've had to drop exercise, journaling, basic stuff to do with me. Because other stuff's been more important at the moment for the longer-term plan, which I've not enjoyed. I've not really been able to see any other way to do it. I either neglect work or I neglect home life so that I can go to the gym. If you neglect work, people will criticize... And if you're not present at home, you're neglecting that... So I think it was just easier for me to not prioritize myself. (Timepoint 4)

An explanation for Tom's struggles to maintain routines could be due to how football seasons are structured and the fluctuation in work demands which are not conducive for life outside of the sport. Interestingly, Tom may have been able to prioritise himself and exercise more in timepoint 2 due to the festive break period in academy football and he possibly became more aware in timepoint 4 because the season was concluding, which afforded time to reflect. However, Tom's comment of "I either neglect work or I neglect home life" exemplifies the lack of time to sufficiently engage in both life domains. Once more, this demonstrates how contextualised transitional events and stages of a season shape well-being development (e.g., chronosystem; Bronfenbrenner, 2000), such as the academy break for Tom provided some respite, but this would not be possible for first team coaches who are not afforded the same opportunities.

As time passed throughout the season and due to regularly discussing his well-being via the study, Tom became more aware that variability in his routine had ceased,

and that the third spaces which helped him, and his well-being had become deprioritised. Deprioritisation occurred as he was focusing on the “longer-term plan” (i.e., future) of work and home-life, which appeared to cause personal instability and thwarted well-being in the short-term. Rush and Grouzet (2012) previously reported that focusing on the distant (i.e., long term) future is not as beneficial as focusing on the near future for well-being, which appeared to be the case for Tom. However, Tom was able to claim some sporadic respite which came in the form of a third space away from work and home-life when he went on holiday with his family:

Um, generally just having time with family. We had [son]’s birthday. My birthday. So we had a week in, um, Center Parcs with mum, dad, brother, his girlfriend, [wife], [son], uh, grandma. And although it was quite stressful because [son] was out of his routine, different place. There were so many lovely memories that, like we had quiz night. We had pasta night, pizza night on the Thursday and there were so many real nice moments, and I was able to completely switch off from work... But it was also just very stressful cause it was so full on with so many people. I was kind of like three days into it going, I’m almost forcing myself to maximise the time and I was like, I dunno, am I actually present in it? (Timepoint 4)

Having the ability to be with his loved ones away from the daily hassles of work and home-life facilitated his general well-being as he claimed to be able to “completely switch off”. However, Tom’s admission of “forcing myself to maximise the time” illustrates how he was compelling himself to enjoy it as opposed to naturally embracing the opportunity. It was also apparent during this period that stress was induced due to caring for his son and because of vast amounts of social interactions which left him feeling drained and mentally absent. Eccles et al. (2023) claims that well-being can be improved via rest which centres around engaging with activities and environments that impose low

cognitive demands. Therefore, based on the current findings it could be assumed that third spaces which focus on social gatherings or exchanges can facilitate well-being to a degree but may also have deleterious consequences (e.g., drained energy and induced stress) if they impose high cognitive demands or are being forced. An alternative, third space for some coaches was the car journey to and from work as it was a space where they had the time to be with their own thoughts, as captured by Pete within [Figure 5.2](#):

**Figure 5.2**

*Long commutes to and from work*



Timepoint 2

One thing that I forgot to mention... I spend a lot of time in my car as well. That's why I chose [Figure 5.2]. I commute for at least two and a half hours a day. So that was also a reason why I chose the cars... I quite like the opportunity to just be in your own head while you're driving. A lot of just thought, not necessarily reflection, just thoughts, thinking about stuff goes on... I think I'm relatively good at making time for myself to just be alone and think, but maybe that's because I have the car to do it in, um, yeah, struggling to maybe think of opportunities where I'm-- I suppose when you're at home or you're at work, there are things going on which take your attention away, tasks that you have to focus on or Twitter posts

that you get caught in. But um, yeah, the car is a good place for that. (Timepoint 2)

Pete acknowledges that constant interactions or demands within his prominent spaces (home and work) can distract and reduce opportunities to rest and process thoughts. His long and isolated driving periods enabled him to be in his “own head” and with “thoughts” which demonstrate the desire to have personal spaces for contemplation. However, it also reveals how due to busy working schedules, third spaces are hard to acquire, as driving to and from work could be considered more of a ‘two-and-a-half’ space given its connection between home and work commitments. Similarly, John utilised the car journey as an organisational strategy, but conversely did so with social interaction as opposed to being with his own thoughts in isolation. For instance, John talking through and actioning his thoughts in the car helped the management of his well-being as he was more inclined to switch off from work when home:

The clarity I get in the car when I’m driving, uh, yeah, two and a half, three hours. Okay, I go on the phone and I speak and I organize and I get everything done, and that means when I can go into the house then it’s all done. And I can concentrate solely on listening and hearing about what the kids were up to and speaking with my [wife] and having them conversations. So the drive is good. The drive gives you clarity. The drive helps you get all your emotions out over the phone and clear the mind before you go into the house. (Timepoint 3)

John places emphasis on using the time in the car so that when he arrives home “it’s all done” which is most likely in reference to being more mentally present for his family. Interpreting John’s claims that the car journey provides “clarity”, “helps you get all your emotions out”, and “clear[s] the mind”, implies that it has a therapeutic nature,

possibly due to it being a third space that one can control and focus on oneself. Thus, like Oldenburg's (1999) characterisation that third places prioritise conversation, some coaches did socially converse with others in their chosen third space, but also held dialogue (i.e., conversations) with themselves in isolation to process ruminations. Therefore, it appears as though both John and Pete, amongst other coaches, utilise their car journeys (a somewhat third space) in the form of a novel organisational strategy to process ruminations which in turn facilitate well-being across other spaces (e.g., home and work).

#### ***5.4.1.2 Who am I? The Challenges of (In)Authenticity***

This subordinate theme captures how multiple coaches navigated (in)authenticity throughout the season due to numerous systemic interactions and demands within their context. For instance, as captured by Tom's supplied image during timepoint 1 (see [Figure 5.3](#)), he was transitioning into a head of coaching role and felt like he had to be careful as to what "face" he chose to display.

#### **Figure 5.3**

*Having to bring the smile, changing faces, and navigating (in)authenticity*



Timepoint 1

Not only was this captured within his supplied image, but also when he said, "I dunno the research, but there's the theories of like your public face, your private face, and your face that you only show yourself". Tom's discussion around differing faces relates

to Goffman's (1971) impression management, whereby people endeavour to engineer a particular conceptualization of themselves before others. Tom demonstrates this as he was shaping his identity to navigate the early transitional phases of a new role and context so that he could display favourable self-impressions before others. This is evident within football contexts as it has been reported that individuals will mould their identities to align with cultural norms and practices, in addition to navigating the micro-political landscapes in organisations (Gibson & Groom, 2019; Thompson et al., 2015). Tom's dramatization of self (see Goffman, 1971) was also to establish who he could trust, as he states having "trusted people... [helps] in terms of well-being", because he is able to display his true authentic self. Tom's account conforms with findings from chapters 3 and 4, as they unveiled football coaches will often traverse between authentic and inauthentic selves depending on the context. Later within the season when Tom had acquired his new 'management' position, he admitted to finding it hard to navigate club staff relationships due to the increased power and authority, which came with his new role and perceived identity:

So a lot of it has been, uh, swimming against a tide, not seen enough change, but then being the face of change and actually having it as quite a negative thing. Um, and then my general identity shift from, I'm used to being a leader from within a program or a coaching peer [group] and I'd be like, "oh, what's your thoughts on this?" And I'd be able to influence from within camp. Now I'm deemed within a hierarchy, I'm above people trying to do things slightly differently. And not having that relationship of peer-to-peer people, it's senior to peer, and where the boundaries of that fit has been quite a challenge for me. (Timepoint 3)

During this timepoint there was a noticeable shift in Tom's general demeanour and emotions, as his usual happy and talkative self, appeared to be psychologically fatigued and deflated<sup>3</sup>. This may be in part because Tom used to be "able to influence from within camp" which suggests that he no longer feels part of the 'camp' he was once associated with, almost outcast into an opposing 'camp' due to the adjusted identity his new role brings. Research demonstrates career transitions within sport can cause self-identity issues and adjustments (Hickey & Roderick, 2017), hence becoming part of the club's hierarchy Tom became more aware of the influence he can have on others which led him to mask emotions and behaviours even more so:

I guess with the political intelligence, you kind of know, you are now in a position where people might reflect your behaviour or your mood. Um, so yeah, so I've, I've been very conscious to not show, um, like disappointment or not show if I'm struggling, which I know is part of the issue at times. (Timepoint 3)

Tom's reference to 'political intelligence' captures how he has had to become more aware of his contextual surroundings (i.e., contextual intelligence; Mellalieu, 2017), such as the microsystem interactions he has with staff and how the culture of the club (macrosystem; Bronfenbrenner, 2000) can instil conformity of hierarchical behavioural norms. This is not uncommon within professional football organisations as coaches often develop micro-political literacy and strategize to maintain employment during periods of organisational change and instability (Gibson & Groom, 2019). Due to Tom feeling the need to suppress his emotions, vulnerabilities, and ultimately true self, it took its toll on his well-being, to the extent that he hopes things are much better within timepoint 4's interview:

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<sup>3</sup> This was a personal observation and reflection that I felt was pertinent as it added context to Tom's narrative, highlighting how over time his well-being and subsequent feelings have become impeded.

My thoughts more are, I really hope that chat four is different, is more smiley people. Um, and a genuine smile as well, cuz I don't mind chat one and chat two. I think that's kind of what's been expected. Chat three is where I'm most going, "Nah something needs to, something needs to start giving here, cuz that's not sustainable or that's not an effective way." So it's more of a hope of mine that, chat four's gonna be more, either like an image of success or an image of happiness, joy, you've achieved... that's my hope. (Timepoint 3)

The identity shift combined with fluctuations of inauthenticity according to Tom were not sustainable, implying that prolonged tension on one's identity and authenticity can have deleterious consequences for well-being experiences. The PPCT model explains how proximal processes (e.g., prolonged interactions) greatly influence one's development and comprehension (Bronfenbrenner, 2000). This coincides with Rogers (1959) work of the ideal and real self, whereby incongruence between the two can hinder one's well-being, which may explain why prolonged tension on Tom's authenticity impeded his well-being experiences. This seems a common challenge for football coaches as they have previously disclosed that they can experience identity conflicts and often conceal their authentic selves (see Chapters 3.4.1.2, 3.4.2.1, 4.4.1, 4.4.2, 4.4.4). This was also pertinent for Connor who throughout the season experienced vast amounts of instability due to a club takeover:

Um, the bit that's probably rubbed off [due to takeover] is I've just had to change. Um, so I'm normally quite positive, chatty, um, enjoy being in people's company. That would be my sort of personality trait and where I'm probably at my best... I would normally be, my boss, would call it a cultural architect if you like. So someone who's kind of at the front of it, leading it... I've kind of removed myself from that role. Um, just yeah, if I'm honest, it's been about keeping your head



down, getting on with your job just cuz there's, yeah, all sorts of silly power plays and stuff going on... it is draining, you know, it's like me having a mask on. I said to someone the other day, um, which is probably quite a good way of putting it. It's like, for the last month, maybe longer than that to be honest, you become almost like a robot talking to HR ... So I've not been particularly authentic... you know, not being myself, not being maybe as true to myself, but that's probably just around self-preservation and making sure that you stay in a job. (Timepoint 2)

Connor's statement "it's like me having a mask on" converges with Tom's previous accounts, whereby coaches feel the need to suppress identities and possibly conform to navigate instability in their club (e.g., microsystem; Bronfenbrenner, 2000). Similarly, Walton et al. (2023) reports that individuals withhold their authentic selves or 'wear a mask' when they perceive there to be a lack of psychological safety. Therefore, prolonged periods of inauthenticity may lead to depersonalisation and subsequent cases of burnout and impeded well-being (Olusoga & Kenttä, 2017; Simova et al., 2024). Additionally, Connor's inauthenticity appeared to stem from the infighting (i.e., lack of psychological safety) caused by the club takeover and the need to self-preserve from harm, almost like a defence mechanism (Thompson et al., 2015). The harm was in the form of potentially losing his job as he claimed that "Loads of people's jobs were up for debate" during this period and that people were "backstabbing and infighting" to stay within their job role (Higham et al., 2021). Thus, such unstable proximal processes within the micro- and mesosystem (e.g., infighting and club takeover), over prolonged timepoints (e.g., chronosystem; Bronfenbrenner, 2005) impeded his general well-being experiences. This once more captures how the volatile and relentless working culture of football is not the most conducive for well-being (Higham et al., 2021; Roderick &

Schumacker, 2017). As time passed, Connor continued to struggle with the instability from the club takeover but did so in isolation by concealing his emotions from family. This was because he did not want his thwarted well-being to impede theirs, as he states during timepoint 3, “I could chat to my partner, but you don’t wanna necessarily bring down where she’s at with stuff. You don’t want to be moaning about it every time you get home”. Here Connor behaves inauthentically and suppresses his true feelings to protect his partner, suggesting that well-being experiences, whether thwarted or facilitated, can be transactional. For instance, well-being experiences can be heavily shaped by emotional states, thus Connor suppresses to mitigate any form of negative emotional contagion (Rumbold et al., 2022). Previous work has demonstrated how football personnel conceal emotions to conform to the masculine football culture (Newman et al., 2021b; see Chapters 3 and 4), whereas Connor demonstrates that it could be for self-preservation and to protect loved ones.

#### **5.4.2 Well-being Sensemaking and Experiences Shaped by Time**

This GET captures how past, present, and future cognitions, as well as events shape current well-being experiences and comprehension.

##### ***5.4.2.1 The Past Shaping Present Well-Being Comprehension and Experiences***

Research has suggested that a present focus is crucial for experiencing and understanding well-being (Rush & Grouzet, 2012). However, several coaches expressed that their well-being comprehension was shaped by how they made sense of core past experiences and events (e.g., chronosystem; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). For instance, Pete acknowledged that in the past he was a young and highly ambitious, full-time academy coach, who was driven to excel in the game. However, after achieving what he wanted to, he felt no longer bound by the game and almost freer because he was content:

The reason I continue to work in Academy football is because I choose to. I'm not in a position where I need to, or I'm sort of ego-driven to do it, which I certainly have been in the past. In the past it's paid my bills, and it's been a driver, because I was trying to achieve something within the game which I felt I did, hence why I decided to change careers. (Timepoint 1)

The contentedness was captured in [Figure 5.4](#) during timepoint 1, as he claims to be at peace with his career achievements and aspirations. Pete also abstractly interpreted the image, claiming that the bookshelves in the background represent the knowledge he has gained from past experiences, which greatly shape his current contentedness and subsequent well-being. Such additional core past events which shaped Pete's well-being comprehension and experiences were how he cared for others in his life:

**Figure 5.4**

*Past experiences fuel contentedness*



Timepoint 1

My dad died from a brain tumour, and I was caring for him in his sort of [last] five or six months, so there was a bit of a like a life reassessment. I looked at what I had sort of strived to achieve, and thought well, in the last ten years I think I've done that. So, let's go and do something that is a bit less, um 24/7 as a job... I said before, my sort of contentedness is because I choose to be at [Club], rather than

the ego or the ambition driving me, or the sort of finance sort of forcing me and not really having much of another option... I've [also] cared for [an ill friend]. Um, so he's about that big [gauges height]. So, lifting him, carrying him, showering him, toileting him. He has a very limited range of movement and motion, so even like picking things up on a table and giving them to him just to make his life easier. So, I think I've probably been fortunate in the sense that I've been exposed to having to care for someone and other people at various times in my life, so I think there's sort of an inherent kindness which I think I am able to apply to myself. (Timepoint 1)

Pete acknowledges several past instances where he has cared for those that he loves and how such experiences have shaped his outlook on self-care. He believed that he is "fortunate" to have experienced caring for others at "various times in [his] life" because it widened his horizons (Gadamer, 2013), to the extent he understands there is more to life than coaching and the importance of applying care to oneself. This is a differing outlook compared to many other coaches operating within professional football clubs as the competitive environment often encourages coaches to care about results as opposed to themselves (Cronin et al., 2020). For example, Max highlights:

I've got to win. I hate losing. That's one of my sayings really, I hate losing more than I love winning... When you win it's just pure relief... Whereas you lose, it's like- [we] lost Sunday, I'm in a mood Monday, I'm in a mood Tuesday, I'm still in a mood really, because we've got beat. It sticks with you for ages. Losing just sticks with you until the next game that you win... I'd like to be like celebrating for days on end [but] it's just I'm that relieved we've won, I'm more tired, you know?... You feel that pressure of having to be successful for everyone. I'm that

bloody tired when it finishes, you're just like, I just want to go home to bed.

(Timepoint 1)

It always comes back to you win games of football, everything's great. You lose games of football, it's turmoil basically, you know, it's [well-being] dictated by what happens out on the pitch. (Timepoint 3)

Max's diverging narratives illustrate how coaches can care for results sometimes to the detriment of their own well-being. For instance, his relentless desire to win appeared to result in a lack of self-care as he implied to feel physically and mentally fatigued. Whereas the past events Pete experienced and interacted with changed his outlook and values regarding what is important not only in coaching, but his life:

The life experiences you have, I think, mould, and shape you... I went through a maturation period where the things I valued changed, and I saw greater value in other areas of my life rather than- I realized that having a badge on your chest, actually, is quite meaningless. (Timepoint 1)

Pete's account captures how interactions within and between his lifeworld over time mould sensemaking because he suggests that past life experiences shape and inform present understanding (e.g., chronosystem, Bronfenbrenner, 2005). For instance, he begun to see "greater value in other areas of [his] life", which can be interpreted as focusing on areas outside of work and realising that football results should not dictate him. The subsequent change in Pete's values and perspective aided his well-being, as he transitioned from being addicted to football and the pursuit of success, to a more contentedness and balanced outlook:

I was absolutely addicted to the pursuit of what I was trying to achieve... Um, but obviously the time of my life and just how I was in my well-being at the time that

was creeping in. So, I needed to work harder on separating the two [work and personal life]. (Timepoint 2)

The exposure to significant ill health events of close relations led Pete to create a better work-life balance and pushed him to adopt a different outlook on well-being and self-care. Pete's general narrative complements and progresses previous research (Rush & Grouzet, 2012) by signifying how past experiences can be beneficial for well-being comprehension and management. However, other work (Yukhymenko-Lescroart & Sharma, 2022) and the thesis' findings (see Chapters 3.4.2.1, 4.4.1, 4.4.2, 4.4.3) have highlighted how obsessive ruminations over negatively perceived experiences can be detrimental to present well-being. Moreover, Rush and Grouzet (2012) spoke of temporal distance (i.e., the distance away from the present moment that an individual's thoughts span) and that the further away an event is from the present moment the less impact it will have on well-being. However, Pete's account details that events from many years ago (e.g., caring for ill father) can shape well-being comprehension and management positively, as the events gave him a different perspective which influenced his interpretation of various seasonal pinch points that may thwart well-being. Therefore, highlighting how focusing on or recalling from both positive and negative past instances can be beneficial for well-being. For example, [Figure 5.5](#) timepoint 3 in a symbolic manner, captures his different outlook compared to the norm within professional football as visually it represents how he is effectively functioning compared to colleagues:

## Figure 5.5

*Past experiences shape different well-being outlooks*



Timepoint 3

So the sort of background to this one is running a race but running it a bit differently. Um, and feeling like, as I'm running it, I'm ahead of the others, whoever the others are... so I'm the guy in the middle with the ball, whereas the others are pushing the boxes. (Timepoint 3)

A possible reason for Pete's outlook and image choice may have been because during this timepoint his academy age group were unbeaten compared to others in the club. As a result, he felt the freedom to stretch and challenge himself and his team by implementing different tactics. He goes on to claim that his well-being thrived from "the enjoyment of purposefully doing something different and seeing results". This is conveyed via his supplied image of a person rolling a ball in comparison to others pushing boxes, representing how he feels more content and is functioning better. However, given Pete also claimed "when you're winning, things feel good, regardless... That's football", it can be interpreted that the run of good performances, "regardless" of the context is contributing to his well-being, demonstrating the relationship between results and well-being in football (Baldock et al., 2021; Bentzen et al., 2020a). Similarly, Michael drew on past experiences claiming that from his experience of coaching in professional football organisations for numerous years, he understood that footballing seasons are like a

treadmill with the conveyor belt continuously going (see [Figure 5.6](#)). What he meant by this is that seasons will speed up, slow down, have inclines, be arduous, tiresome, and hurt if you fall off. Michael therefore knew what could compromise his season and subsequent well-being because of his past coaching experiences:

**Figure 5.6**

*Seasons are like treadmills*



Timepoint 1

I just know what it's going to be like. I know what we've entered into, because it's the same every year sort of thing. It's full on, I got off the laptop at ten past two in the morning last night. Don't get me wrong, that's not every night. But yeah, there's just that much going on. Um, you're sort of always moving on, chasing your tail, moving on to the next thing. So, yeah, listen. I feel fine, still happy and enjoying it. But yeah it is full on, and tiring, and draining. I know next season I'll be exactly the same... You could interview me next year, and if I'm doing the same job, and all those stable things have not changed, there's not been a revamp in the system, and how it works. I'd be having the same conversation with you I think... Yeah, definitely [experience helps]. (Timepoint 1)

Michael's claim of getting off the laptop at 2am signifies how his workload has ramped up during this timepoint, most likely because the season had recommenced. Thus, interpreting the image within the context of timepoint 1, it could be Michael's way of



portraying how he knew the treadmill's speed and incline had increased due to the start of the season. This coincides with Baldock et al.'s (2022) findings which reported that the beginning of a football season impacted coaches well-being the most. Michael goes on to admit that prior experiences help him to make sense of how a season may unfold and at what stages may shape his well-being:

Still on it [the treadmill]. Like I say, just in the last sort of 24 hours, turned the speed down, which is great. I suppose because we don't speak often, it might come across to you, I certainly, remembering back to that time speaking to you, I feel in a better place than I did then. Definitely. I don't know if that comes across to you and listen, holiday next week obviously plays a part in it. The World Cup, everything we've talked about... But yeah, I just feel better balanced, more in control, maybe going back to the treadmill, you know, I've turned the speed down and I'm just enjoying that time. But knowing in my mind, there'll be a time where I've gotta turn it up again and we'll go uphill. (Timepoint 2)

Michael understands that seasonal demands, as well as his well-being will fluctuate over time, but controllability is important, which is demonstrated when he states, "I've turned the speed down". Here, Michael alludes to taking things steadier as he enters the festive December period, reflected by the booking of his family holiday. However, this may have only been possible for Michael because the academy breaks over the festive period, whereas for first team managers like John and Max, the festive fixture schedule was unrelenting. Towards the conclusion of the study, during timepoint 4, Michael stated "how you deal with what's happening in the current is guided by sort of experiences from the past", which highlights how his sensemaking was shaped by past experiences (e.g., chronosystem; Bronfenbrenner, 2000). This could be explained via how coaches integrate multiple experiences as interconnected modes of learning, influenced by preexisting

‘biography’ (Abraham et al., 2006). Specifically, coaches can and will draw on a network of past experiences, knowledge, and beliefs (i.e., unique biography) that act as filters and lenses through which a coach views or interprets phenomena (e.g., well-being) in turn guiding learning and development (Cushion et al., 2003; Griffiths & Armour, 2013; Trudel et al., 2013). Therefore, the present findings demonstrate how recalling on the past can have positive benefits when managing or experiencing well-being. Consequently, it may be beneficial for experienced coaches to share their seasonal experiences with novice coaches so that they can be more proactive, as opposed to reactive when managing well-being.

#### ***5.4.2.2 The Present Context Shaping Well-Being Comprehension and Experiences***

The present context a coach finds themselves in can greatly influence their perceived well-being, such as residing at the top of the league unbeaten compared to experiencing a club takeover which fuels uncertainty. The instability which is caused by club takeovers and structural changes can ripple throughout a club fragmenting one’s lifeworld and well-being. For instance, multiple coaches experienced some form of club and staff restructuring which led to increased instability and thwarted well-being. Connor’s account is shared to capture the temporal influence a club takeover had on his well-being throughout the season. For example, via images (see [Figure 5.7](#)) and during interviews, Connor expressed how the structural transitions of a club takeover created insecurity and conflict, insofar people were losing jobs and toxicity spread throughout the club. The influence of others and the context Connor interacted with shaped his understanding of well-being and subsequent experiences:

**Figure 5.7**

*The influence of others and context have on well-being*



It's just realizing how much other people impact your well-being... I get a phone call "heads up, I'm hearing on the grapevine, that one of the coaches [you're] close to has gone and knocked on the door of the top guy and basically just tried to throw you under the bus..." I remembered that just killed my bank holiday weekend. I let it kill my family's bank holiday weekend and you don't get many of them in football. (Timepoint 1)

Most people will probably say he [Connor] must be in a great place... That's what they'd see. What they don't see is the impact that the environment and the people in it have on you. So, they probably don't notice that I sit on my own sometimes now, go off to a different room, that I'm quieter than I've ever been. Like they don't realize the other side of things... I'm enjoying a brilliant weekend with my family and you can't get it outta your head that some poor guy's going through shit, it's bound to impact you. (Timepoint 2)

Connor places great emphasis throughout the study about the influence others and the context has on shaping his well-being, as such interactions can bleed into family life. This demonstrates mesosystem interactions (Bronfenbrenner, 2000) whereby work-related problems (e.g., organisational changes and micro-politics; Gibson & Groom, 2019) are subsequently shaping home-life exchanges (see Chapters 3.4.2.1 and 4.4.2). To

try and mitigate the challenges he faced, Connor appeared to adopt a mindfulness-acceptance-commitment (MAC; Gardner & Moore, 2004, 2006) approach throughout the season:

If you use the Four A Model... Assess the situation, Accept, Adapt, Apply, I use that for everything... I took it from our psychologist... it's almost a circular model that keeps going round. Every situation you're in, you assess the situation, you do that all the time anyway that's just being a human being. The accept part is where I think people get stuck, actually accepting what's in front of them. So, accepting you're not perfect. Accepting that you can do something different, I think our natural instinct is self-survival if you like. (Timepoint 1)

The best thing they [the club] ever did for me was to help me develop a skillset like a Four A Model where I could stop and go, right, I'm stressed as anything now, what actually can I do? What's going on for me? Assess the situation you're in, accept that is the situation you're in. Then what resources are available? How do I then apply it? How can I use it to be a bit better? Going through that Four A Model, assess, accept, adapt, apply. I know it seems sad to have a model like that [sniggers] you follow, but it's just like, and I don't follow it like that. I just go, right, what can I do? What can I use? How am I gonna apply it? I think it's really helpful and that's the bit I'll always appreciate from them, that they did that rather than, I don't know, like now our psych team, we'll have a catch up for half an hour now and again, I think, it's just ticking a box really... Some of these things that they put on to help you, you know there's someone to chat to at the club. We've got people to chat to anonymous, score surveys, report stuff going on. Pffft all of it makes minimal difference compared to actually having a skillset to deal with it. (Timepoint 3)

The 'Four A Model' Connor mentions aligns with a MAC approach (Gardner & Moore, 2004, 2006) as it prompts him to be more self-aware of and present in current situations with an emphasis on acceptance. Connor's narrative illustrates how he perceives the development of individual skillsets to be more worthwhile than organisational support as what support is offered is seen as "ticking a box". This alludes to organisational support lacking intention and worth from Connor's perspective, meaning he would much rather rely on himself to manage his well-being and circumstances. Progressing to timepoint 4, Connor compared his seasonal well-being experiences to "Shawshank Redemption", specifically "coming through a sewer of shit". This was to capture his struggle with enduring the fractured context and to symbolise himself crawling through to the end of the season because he had little left to give. Once more this illustrates the unrelenting and volatile nature of working in professional football organisations (Gibson & Groom, 2019; Higham et al., 2021; Roderick, 2006b; Roderick & Schumacker, 2017). Connor concludes the hardship stating:

I'm done, it's taking energy now to deliver... there's probably an element that you're still in a bit of shock. Like I entered this season in a really good place with the whole same staff core that have done well... I'm at a point now where it's gonna look very different. So yeah, I feel drained. Just want to kind of take a stock of it all and work out what I'm doing. (Timepoint 4)

Consequently, because of enduring toxicity and a fragmented context throughout the entire season, Connor contemplated leaving his role. This came to fruition not long after concluding the study as Connor parted ways with the club he had spent over a decade with, which captures the influence proximal processes (Bronfenbrenner, 2000) have on well-being. For example, proximal processes are most influential when they are sustained over time, hence Connor was exposed to such poor and unstable working conditions for

so long it greatly influenced his decision to leave the club. Conversely, throughout the study there were several instances whereby Connor would claim to be happy and not affected by the structural changes:

Like, you're asking me a lot about my well-being and there's something about me that should be saying or feels I should be going, oh, I'm really down because of it being toxic and, you know, it's really impacted me, but it's not, honestly isn't, I don't feel that bad... I love my job and I know I think about it a lot, but I am able to switch off and have a beer. (Timepoint 2)

Interpreting Connor's account he may be engaging in a form of emotional suppression whereby he does not want to demonstrate the consequences of the club takeover on his well-being. Using Connor's narrative as an example, it demonstrates the temporality of well-being experiences and how transitional events such as a club takeover (e.g., chronosystem) can shape organisational culture, values, and beliefs (e.g., macrosystem), as well as work relationships (e.g., micro/mesosystem) over time (Bronfenbrenner, 2000). Connor undoubtedly tried to display resilience but went from positive to waivered well-being due to the prolonged exposure to poorly coordinated and managed organisational change which led him to leave the club. This could suggest that MAC based approaches (Gardner & Moore, 2004, 2006) are not enough in isolation to manage well-being effectively and that better organisational support, especially during periods of instability and change are needed to complement individual coping practices. Therefore, as the PPCT model (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006) suggests proximal processes which are prolonged and sustained have the greatest influence, hence it is no surprise that persistent exposure to instability thwarted well-being and led to dropout. Alternatively, Craig experienced relative stability throughout the season despite key members of staff leaving the club, because of strong work-based relationships which he

claimed exuded a sense of being “all in it together”. He portrays the strong club relationships by stating:

Um, so the CFO [Chief Financial Officer], he is incredibly close with the manager. Um, the owner, comes across well... He speaks really well, um, very honest and says, “listen, I dunno much about football at all... I’ll help you with anything”, and you feel it comes to a genuine place... Um, so yeah, there’s presence without being overbearing... Um, I think it’s, for me you know when they come in, you have just a relaxed chat and talk about anything. They’re the more valuable things for me than it always being work related and it’s always formal or, you know, oh, the owner wants to see you because something’s wrong. (Timepoint 1)

It was implied from Craig’s account that genuine relationships and clear hierarchical communication, as opposed to overbearing presence and constant formalities were beneficial for staff relations and club stability. Therefore, Craig appeared to value the genuine relationships between hierarchy and staff members, suggesting positive leadership can cultivate an environment where well-being could thrive. Craig’s advocacy for strong relationships was displayed throughout the season (see [Figure 5.8](#)) as he selected multiple images to capture how they were foundational for well-being stability:

**Figure 5.8**

*Good staff and strong relationships are important for well-being*



Timepoint 2



Timepoint 3

First of all, from a well-being perspective, these are the people that have the biggest impact... this is all the full-time staff at the training ground (Figure 5.8). So, from two kitman, two medical, an analyst, two sports scientists, me and another coach, secretary, and chef. So, my well-being is- was always gonna be impacted by the quality of the relationships that I have with these people. (Timepoint 2)

Work has portrayed the interpersonal nature of well-being, suggesting that it can transcend the individual to infiltrate relationships with significant others (Simpson et al., 2023; see Chapters 4.4.2 and 4.4.3). Thus, Craig's experiential account highlights the interpersonal nature of well-being and how relationships between coaches and other individuals within their lifeworld (e.g., micro and mesosystems; Bronfenbrenner, 2000) can reciprocally shape well-being experiences. Craig's narrative radiates that when club relationships are supportive and cohesive they can have positive influences on well-being, which in turn portrays how working in football can benefit well-being. This alludes to how positive organisational climates that build strong and trusting relationships can mediate or buffer against impeded well-being (Didymus et al., 2018), whereas unrelenting performance climates can induce stressors (Simpson et al., 2021). Interestingly, during timepoint 2 Craig had experienced losing some close staff relationships, with the first image being a farewell to the club's physiotherapist. Craig suggested that the provided image captures the closeness of the staff:

I think a bit like last time, um, you know, when you have that initial thought and then you look at it [image] a little bit more. I think the fact that if you, there's only one person not, or maybe two, possibly not making physical contact with each other. You know, if people don't get on, then you're not gonna have arms on



shoulders. It might sound a silly little thing, but I think it gives an indication that, you know, people feel comfortable with each other. (Timepoint 2)

Here Craig can be seen engaging in a form of hermeneutics whereby he uses the image as a prompt to promote deeper sensemaking (Romera Iruela, 2023). From analysing the image and identifying the physical closeness of staff he enriched his interpretations by conveying the importance of togetherness. In addition to the club's physiotherapist, other core coaching staff later left the club which he compared to as a "sense of loss":

I feel that I'm in a more positive place than [our last chat]... [that period] did feel a little bit more losing good people. It was hard. Um, and there was a sadness for me personally around that. Um, so I know that definitely did affect me... when I look at the sort of the group shots or work photos, I think that when we're at our best, we are all together. Um, you know, communicating well... clarity in what we want to do. (Timepoint 3)

Craig claimed to feel better within timepoint 3 compared to 2, as comparably he was previously going through a period of mourning. He admits to feeling sad as close staff had left the club, but this was ultimately mitigated due to the foundations of the club remaining stable. For instance, he spoke about how the manager was one of the longest standing in the league and the team was performing sufficiently, which in turn curated a relaxed and safe environment to dwell within:

The gaffer [manager] has been here longer than any other manager... He can understand it. He does feel, although he might not think he feels a pressure, you can tell when he's a bit more snappier on some days and not having a good day. Obviously, when you're winning a lot, the pressure's relieving, people are playing

well, and he's in a better place, which means then he has better discussions with people. People are more settled and that spreads onto the pitch. People play more relaxed... Um, which then creates a better environment. (Timepoint 3)

From Craig's narrative it implies that if club transitions are communicated and handled in a stable manner, where authentic relationships are present, then psychological safety and subsequent well-being are not compromised (Walton et al., 2023; see Chapters 3.4.2.2 and 4.4.3). This is in stark contrast to Connor's previously mentioned context where stability and psychological safety was absent which impeded well-being experiences. This could be explained by the fact Craig's club's first team were performing better, hence positive results possibly mitigated the influence of organisational transitions on well-being. Conversely, Connor's team (U16s) were performing the best out of all club teams, but the first team was performing poorly, which could imply that first team performances take precedence (Roderick & Schumacker, 2017) and can permeate throughout a club influencing the organisational climate and subsequent well-being states. Craig went on to confirm that not long after his well-being was thriving due to residing within a stable club environment, the manager left the club demonstrating the unpredictability of working within professional football. Interestingly, significant structural changes within Connor's previous accounts challenged his well-being, whereas for Craig he perceived his well-being to remain stable:

Uh, so we've had a change of manager... the chairman said, he spoke to the players and said, I hope to have someone in within 24 hours... I dunno what my role would look like under a new manager, but luckily it was [ex-staff] who'd been with us at the start of season. I remember, you know, we spoke about the loss when him and the goal keeping coach went. So they're coming back in. So instantly it's a bit of a rollercoaster. Emotions, moods raised again...Um, so yeah, I think probably the

stability of the club has meant that in this period that we've spoken, my well-being has been pretty stable. (Timepoint 4)

Craig's well-being stability appeared to occur due to two factors. Firstly, hierarchy clearly communicated changes and an action plan for the club. Secondly, the club reemployed coaching personnel who had a strong relationship with the club and previously aligned with core values and beliefs. Both these factors instilled stability throughout the club, which Craig identified to be paramount for his own well-being to thrive. Therefore, it could be interpreted that a form of attachment security (see Carr, 2009) within organisational relationships is important for well-being in football contexts. For instance, Davis and Jowett (2014) found coach-athlete secure attachment styles mediated athlete's well-being. Thus, the same could be assumed for coach-organisational attachment security and coaches' well-being. Throughout Craig's participation, what was evident in his experiential accounts was the importance of strong relationships across varying microsystems (Bronfenbrenner, 2000) in determining the quality of his well-being:

I think the quality of my interactions with my family and with my colleagues, greatly dictates my well-being. Um, if there's problems with that, then yeah, I think it would be quite obvious. Um, I do want to be somewhere, where, um, you know, similar-minded people, um, in terms of values, connecting, working hard, giving their best... So yeah, the quality of the relationships is really important. (Timepoint 4)

Craig distinguished quality relationships as those where beliefs, values and work ethic aligned. Therefore, from varying coaches' accounts, experiences of well-being appear to be associated with socio-contextual (e.g., organisational) stability, which in turn seem to be related to superior coach-organisational relationships and communication. As a result,

both organisations and coaches should consider how they can foster environments which develop strong interpersonal interactions.

#### ***5.4.2.3 The Future Shaping Present Well-Being Comprehension and Experiences***

Coaches addressed that their understanding of well-being was shaped by how they made sense of literal and potential future experiences and events, thus drawing on the chronosystem (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). For example, Michael captured the duality of future events and how they can shape well-being in a positive and negative manner (see [Figure 5.9](#)). Firstly, Michael addresses how future events which have not happened yet can positively influence his well-being:

#### **Figure 5.9**

*Looking forward to holidays, but uncertain over the future*



Timepoint 2



Timepoint 4

So, bit of a curve ball this one. So fortunate like we've already alluded to in terms of the schedule lightening. Um, I've got four days off next week, Monday to Thursday. So, in a fortunate position, being able to go away with a family and take the kids to Lapland, so found that picture... I'm hoping it's gonna be just us in a log cabin, somewhere away from everything else. Laptop, gone, phone gone, and just spend some time with the family. It's [break with family] been a long time coming. Um, I didn't manage to get away with 'em this year... they went away in

the summer. It's just, it's part of the job and that's what it is. So that's why the odd time when it does come up like this, it's, I suppose it does affect your well-being in a positive way. (Timepoint 2)

Michael was able to capitalise on the U21's breaking for the Winter World Cup and the U18's breaking for the festive period by booking a short holiday, which highlights how academy football seems more conducive for rest periods during the season compared to first team football. For instance, neither John nor Max benefitted from a break due to coaching first team players in League Two. Yet, Michael does convey that he was not able to go away on holiday with his family during the summer (e.g., off season) due to work. Michael's account conveys a sense of imprisonment to the game where he can have sporadic release from it with his family and that such behaviour appears to be institutionally reinforced and accepted, which is concerning for well-being and self-care. A probable reason why an anticipated event (i.e., something that has not happened yet) has positively influenced Michael's well-being is that when he imagines going on holiday with his family or sees the image of a log cabin, he experiences positive emotions that make him feel happy:

I can already feel those feelings when [I think about it], that's why I put the image in there cuz it's, you are looking forward to it almost. Um, in that kind of way. But yeah, it'd be good for everybody else in terms of my wife, the children, because they know that I will be there. Not just there and not there. (Timepoint 2)

Michael's account coincides with Rush and Grouzet's (2012) findings that well-being can be aided when focusing on distant future events that are perceived as pleasant (e.g., going on holiday). Additionally, Michael's comment "not just there and not there" towards the end is in reference to being both physically and mentally present, something

he has struggled with during the season. It appears he feels happy when thinking about spending time with his family because he will be able to disconnect from work, ultimately switch off his laptop and phone, but more importantly his mind (see Chapter 4.4.1). This will provide him the opportunity to rest and recharge his ‘battery’ before returning to work, as he believed energy to be important for well-being throughout a season (see Chapter 3.4.1). This was confirmed during his reflection of all his supplied images:

So good in terms of the December one [timepoint 2], so it’s good to look at that, knowing that around the corner there’ll be a period where you get a bit of a breather or some positive sort of refresh, battery recharge, whatever you wanna call it. (Timepoint 4)

Michael’s seasonal accounts signify the importance of rest, but also how struggling to be present could possibly impede well-being. Adopting an acceptance commitment therapy (ACT; Hayes, 2004) theoretical framework to enrich sensemaking could be useful here, as Michael alludes to the benefits of being more mindful and present within given contexts (Gardner & Moore, 2004; Olusoga & Yousuf, 2023). For example, ACT can enhance psychological flexibility which means having the ability to be conscious of the present moment, and based on what the situation affords, act in accordance with one’s own values and beliefs (Bond et al., 2006). Thus, unlike many other cognitive-behavioural therapies that focus on first-order changes such as altering cognitions (Turner et al., 2023), ACT prioritizes second-order changes by modifying behaviours through the application of mindfulness and acceptance techniques (Hayes, 2004). Adopting ACT principles such as being more present, accepting the situation and engaging in cognitive diffusion could therefore aid his well-being experiences. Michael also alluded to how future events and experiences can negatively influence his well-being, such as in timepoint 4’s image which captured the potential consequences of failure

during 'play offs' for promotion. Michael discussed how he was experiencing emotions of apprehension due to the uncertainty over the future of the club:

Just that uncertainty, that's sort of jumped out at me as an image where, which pathway will we be going on from a club point of view. Um, and also the impact of that, of sort of me personally... I know that the outcome of the playoffs will impact, it'll sort of trickle down and impact us next year in terms of what we've got access to and, and then that will impact what sort of quality we can give to the players... also myself personally as a coach... the outcome of this season at first team level, how will that impact me next season? (Timepoint 4)

Michael captures the 'win at all costs' nature of the end of footballing seasons as this specific timepoint greatly shapes the entire socio-contextual landscape (e.g., ecological systems) of the club. From Michael's account it can be understood that future events, which have not yet happened and are out of his immediate control, can thwart well-being as he was experiencing sustained bouts of apprehension. This was in part due to the uncertainty over the club's future which in turn fuelled ruminations about his personal future. Therefore, focusing on unpleasant distant future events were detrimental for his present well-being (Rush & Grouzet, 2012). This led Michael to assume that cognitions about future and past events can inform present well-being comprehension and experiences:

Obviously, what's happening in the current is probably the most impactful, but then the outcome of that, as in this example [play off outcome], will impact what happens in the future and how you deal with what's happening in the current is guided by sort of experiences from the past. (Timepoint 4)

Drawing on the PPCT model (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006) to aid interpretation, Michael neatly demonstrates the relationship between proximal processes and well-being, as it is apparent that core events (e.g., play offs and past coaching experiences) over time (e.g., chronosystem) shape well-being comprehension and management. Therefore, coaches could benefit from engaging in ACT and related mindfulness practices to help them become more self-aware of which proximal processes and core events (e.g., past or present) could facilitate well-being experiences and related behaviours (Olusoga & Yousuf, 2023; Wagstaff et al., 2019).

#### **5.4.3 Navigating the (In)Stability of Football, Coaching and Life**

This GET captures how coaches made sense of and experienced key temporal and transitional events which shaped well-being over time. Events such as, the COVID-19 pandemic, unemployment and reemployment, as well as transitioning into fatherhood are shared and discussed in relation to shaping well-being comprehension and experiences.

##### ***5.4.3.1 Re-Employment Restored ‘me’ and COVID Helped ‘us’***

Transition of jobs and roles were claimed to influence well-being experiences by several coaches (see Chapters 5.4.1.2 and 5.4.2.2). Thus, for the purpose of this theme, John’s account will be shared to illuminate the importance of employment and his contrasting experience of unemployment due to being the only coach out of work during timepoint 1 and then becoming reemployed from timepoint 2 onward. For instance, both well-being instability and stability was captured in John’s seasonal accounts and images (see [Figure 5.10](#)) whereby at the start of this study he was unemployed and yearned to return to management. John had been trying to get back into football after COVID and had been out of the game for a lengthy period which had felt like a blow to his identity:



**Figure 5.10**

*Importance of employment and family*



Timepoint 2



Timepoint 3



Timepoint 4

So I'm around about 12 months now, it's about 12 months since I have officially worked for a football club, but last season, I was, I went to so many games and a little bit of scouting, a little bit of recruitment for one or two managers. I helped a couple of people, went in and around training grounds when COVID allowed us to open up a little bit... I've learned that no matter how dull or dark things get, I think I'll always get up. You know Tyson Fury against Deontay Wilder in the 12th round of the first fight. He's out cold and he gets up. I think I'll always get up. (Timepoint 1)

John found some solace by up taking activities in and around football, such as scouting to appease his desire to return. Interestingly Eccles et al. (2023) reported how engaging in life outside of sport reduced accumulated frustrations, but for John continuing engagement with the sport in an alternative capacity, appeased his frustrations of not managing. He also compared his desire of returning to the game to being knocked down in boxing, possibly due to having finite time to get up (i.e., return to management). John acknowledged he can feel "left behind" when football moves on without him and reiterates that he's "a better person when in the game than when out the game". This was mainly due in part to John working "in the game all [his] life" and that he has "always been the core of whatever's happening in [his] football world, whether that be a manager,

coach or a player”. Interpreting John’s account, it seems that working in football is integral to his sense of self and well-being:

I suppose my well-being wouldn’t change if I got a million pounds tomorrow, but it would probably change if I got another job or if I got back into the thick of football. (Timepoint 1)

Such findings complement those of chapters 3 and 4, which illuminated how becoming dismissed (e.g., unemployed) within football can fragment one’s identity and subsequent well-being (see Chapters 3.4.2.1 and 4.4.1). As a result, a coach’s lifeworld can become fragmented as routines and habits significantly alter. John’s proclamation that a million pound would not alter his perceived well-being, but returning to football would, signifies how important it is to his daily life. John’s narrative could be interpreted via a social identity lens, as returning to football is of significance due to regaining his identity of being a professional football coach (Lundkvist et al., 2012; see Chapters 3.4.2.1 and 4.4.1). Thus, a strong change in his well-being came when he was reappointed as a first team manager, captured by the image he chose in timepoint 2, whereby he felt like a part of him had been restored:

All the emotions of what you go through when you’re in the game and when you’re outta the game, they’re totally, totally different, chalk and cheese. So, um, you know, I appreciate things, uh, a lot, lot more. I appreciate the family... the game... I suppose it’s, uh, when you’re in the game, you’re a totally different person cuz it’s- as I said, go back to all the words [I] used earlier on. Satisfaction, achievement, purpose in life, discipline in life, you know? So, everything I’ve known, everything I’ve grown up with in my life, um, as a professional footballer for 20 odd years. They’ve all been restored, um, with time, getting out of bed, the purpose in life. (Timepoint 2)

John's account details how past experiences (e.g., chronosystem; Bronfenbrenner, 2000) such as being a professional footballer for "20 odd years" are foundational to his identity and subsequent well-being. Therefore, returning to football management and regaining a sense of "purpose in life" was of utmost importance for restoring his perceived identity and well-being (see Chapters 3.4.2.1 and 4.4.1). Conversely, John acknowledged that whilst being out of football, it afforded him time with his family, something which he lacked when working in first team management. The newly afforded time spent with his family positively shaped his well-being but appeared to cause confusions with his identity (e.g., the duality of being a father/husband with also a coach). This was demonstrated throughout multiple timepoints:

I'm probably the only person in the world, that COVID has helped because it's helped me establish a relationship and a bond and a closeness with my nearest and dearest and my kids and my [wife]... the last couple years, as I say, have been brilliant because I've been at home. After spending so many years away, so just getting to know everybody again and just spending time together and getting under people's feet [chuckles]... it was great. (Timepoint 1)

I was able to spend time with them and just oversee things with them, and that was brilliant. That was really, do you know what, not only energetic, refreshing, but it was also um, mind, body and soul refreshing, if that makes sense... It was really, really nice. It was a relief... [but now returning to management] I know the sacrifices and I know the, um, sacrifice that you have to make when you are in the game (Timepoint 2)

I am determined to spend as much time as I can with my family, which was something else you pricked my conscience on, from speaking to you. So, um,

hence the reason why I chose a picture of the family again today. So, um, yeah, you've pushed a few buttons, you've raised a few triggers, red flags and... have made me more self-aware of, uh, of maybe myself and more importantly others around me. The ones close to me. So, um, yeah, listen, I'm in a stress free state. Um, for the next couple of weeks I'm determined to go away and have a good holiday and have a good break and, uh, spend as much time with the family as I can. (Timepoint 4)

During timepoint 1 John acknowledged the importance of his family for well-being, but within timepoint 2 he implied towards making sacrifices because he returned to a football management role hundreds of miles away from them. This captures a divergence in John's narrative and actions whereby returning to football in timepoint 1 began to detach him from his family who he had only just reconnected with and who facilitated his well-being during his period out of work. Spending prolonged periods away from family is not uncommon for football personnel (Roderick, 2012), but John identified this and tried to rectify it as the study progressed. For example, by taking part in the study and discussing his well-being experiences with the author over multiple sustained timepoints, John widened his well-being understanding (e.g., horizon, Gadamer 2013), demonstrated via his comments "you've pushed a few buttons" and "raised a few triggers, red flags", leading to him becoming "more self-aware". Consequently, John ensured to maintain consistent physical contact with his family where possible to not only aid his well-being, but his family's, something which he never used to do whilst working in management:

Well, it's [time with family] probably been short lived. It's probably once a week or twice a week if lucky, Saturday night, Sunday night. But one thing that we try to do as well, when we're up this end of the country... I tried to get my [wife] and

my [youngest child] across to the hotel and I found that very, very, [gasps and stutters] I hear that word therapeutic, but I don't actually know what it means. But I've found it very, very relaxing. Um, and, and I found it very, very, you know, you can actually take yourself out of the football thought process, the football world for an hour or two... So, there's been small little exercises that we've tried, um, just try and pinch a couple of hours each week wherever we can (Timepoint 4)

John stating "therapeutic" but admitting to not knowing what it meant, implies how such a feeling and experience, or even identity (e.g., husband and father figure) had been absent from his life for so long. John's well-being benefitted because he began to understand that prioritisation of and becoming overly immersed in work, combined with absence from family is detrimental for well-being (see Chapters 3.4.2.1 and 4.4.2). Thus, his revitalised outlook affords him the opportunity to spend more time with family than what he previously did so he can dissociate from football and better manage his well-being. Coinciding with John's account, that engaging with family whilst travelling is therapeutic for well-being, Purcell et al. (2022) argue that organisations should promote the opportunity for family members to accompany coaches during extended periods away from home as they are a crucial support system external from the sporting organisation.

#### ***5.4.3.2 Transitioning into Fatherhood and the Importance of Family Shapes Well-Being***

Several coaches spoke of how family and in particular fatherhood shaped well-being experiences both positively and negatively. This was specifically apparent for two coaches who had not long since transitioned into fatherhood, as well as for another coach who found comfort in spending time with his two young sons. Firstly, Craig made an

explicit effort to share how his sons aided his well-being whilst working full-time as a football coach. For context, during timepoint 1, Craig had two images which were football focused and whilst discussing his images he questioned the author saying “I didn’t know whether you wanted them [images] within work or general... I mean, if it was two general ones, I probably would’ve had a family shot as well.” After having a brief discussion around having the freedom to select any images which he felt captured his current well-being at the given timepoint, he held up his phone to the webcam to display an image of himself and his two sons (see [Figure 5.11](#)). Subsequently, in future timepoints Craig ensured to have at least one image of his sons or family because he believed them to have positive influence on his well-being:

**Figure 5.11**

*Importance of spending time with family*



Timepoint 1



Timepoint 2



Timepoint 3

So, um, I dunno if you can see that [holds phone to camera]. So, you know, that’s the other weekend, there’s me and my two boys on a local model train going around. Um, and it’s just, it’s like mini adventures with them. Um, them being happy and having opportunities is probably, um, sort of central to everything we do... but they suddenly become more important if something’s annoying you at work... So yeah, probably nourishment for the soul, I guess through those interactions. (Timepoint 1)

Craig appeared to experience a positive emotional state and well-being (e.g., hedonia) from spending time with his sons because seeing them happy in turn made him happy, which captures how aspects of well-being like emotions are contagious (Rumbold et al., 2023). For instance, Craig's account highlights the transactional, interpersonal, and contextualised nature of well-being as it fluctuated positively when he was transitioning between microsystems (e.g., engaging with family at home compared to when at work). Moreover, Craig demonstrated through timepoint 2's photo that spending time with his family was a way for him to dissociate from work, which in turn alleviated work-related tensions on his perceived well-being:

I'd say it [photo] represents maybe the other side to well-being and importance of family. Um, and enjoying your time away from your work... we'd lost that day... So there was big disappointment, frustration in that. Um, actually coming home to this, just, yeah, it helps. It helps, cuz now your role's different, isn't it? You're part of a family. It's about enjoying the moment.

Craig's account was grounded within timepoint 2's context which saw a core selection of staff leave the club, hence his emphasis on spending time with family may be because it makes him feel more secure and stable. Craig's emphasis on enjoying the moment also reiterates the importance of being present whilst away from work, implying the need to better manage work interactions (e.g., poor matchday results or staff leaving) so that they do not bleed into personal life. Drawing on ACT, Craig seems to be more mindful of the context which led to behaviours that facilitated his well-being, such as being present in the moment, accepting of the outcome, spending time with his family (i.e., core value), and not being ruled by negative thoughts (i.e., cognitive diffusion, Wagstaff et al., 2019). His use of the phrase "now your role's different" highlights his self-awareness and how he is not only a coach, but a father and that being human and

engaging in such familial interactions that are value-congruent (Gervis & Goldman, 2020) can aid his well-being. This signifies how well-being is experientially shaped by being in the everydayness of the world (Sarvimäki, 2006) and that well-being related experiences can permeate between contexts (e.g., work and home). How effectively this permeation is managed can determine well-being consequences (e.g., happiness and life purpose; Baldock et al., 2020; Didymus et al., 2018). Conversely, for Tom who had not long since become a father and was also transitioning job roles within his club, utilised timepoint 2's images (see [Figure 5.12](#)) to symbolically capture how he is at home, but not present due to managing and balancing work-life:

**Figure 5.12**

*Caring for son whilst transitioning*



I feel the picture of the baby, kinda like he's asleep, he's not really there... I've noticed in the last week or so, I'm at home, but I'm not really there because I am tired. But in contrast to that, beforehand, I was at home, good husband, good dad, kind of good person to be around and I could compartmentalize it, where at home I don't need to work... Um, whereas the last week I've been quite tired... There's been a lot of overwhelming stuff that I've not been able to fully, right, park that, do that.

I have the days where I'm really balanced with my hours and everything seems to be fitting into place and then I've got kind of the opposite side of it where say, like



last week, things have been a little bit more harder to put into balance. But then that's not to say that like the, the two big stones underneath the guy's hands, there are certain core things that I've got nice balances. It's now the, the, the small, tiny things. So not being present at a home enough [and] the complexity of the workload, means I can't get that top balance bit. So it's almost, if you like, a timeline as well, the stones on the left was six weeks ago... and then this is now me trying to get a hold of things.

Tom's narratives are enriched by how he made sense of his chosen images, illuminating how an accumulation of fatigue and workload led to a lack of balance and stability within his life, which is synonymous within footballing contexts and job roles (Roderick, 2006, 2012). Tom's assertion of "beforehand I was at home, good husband, good dad" implies that he believes he is not currently, probably due to the overwhelmingness of his current role transition impeding optimal functioning at home. Moreover, his chosen image of the child in timepoint 2 also connotes the enjoyment his son brings him, with then in timepoint 4, Tom acknowledging how his well-being thrives when he gets to see his son grow. This was captured by his abstract representation and interpretation of the gardening trowel as himself and the fork as his son due to the size difference and the gardening environment depicting potential growth:

Uh, the other side of it is... I'm generally enjoying that part of my life, I'm excited to see him when I'm getting home. I'm annoyed in the morning when he wakes me up at six and all that type of stuff, but, um yeah, they were kind of the two sides of this that is a real happy part of my life. (Timepoint 2)

He [son] kicked a football for the first time, um, I think a week before he was one and I was just like, oh my God, he, this is amazing... And then he's clapping

himself and I'm like, end of the day, everything can just, everything else is irrelevant. That's your, that's the stuff that really makes me happy. (Timepoint 4)

From Tom's accounts it appears as though his well-being can be appeased or even thrive when he is able to bond with his son. The statement of "everything else is irrelevant" suggests Tom adopted the outlook of there's more to life than being fully engrossed in work, which also highlights how interactions away from work enable him to 'reset' (Eccles et al., 2023). This is of interest as Tom's outlook endured the entirety of the season, hence spending time with family may be a beneficial way to dissociate and manage well-being. Contrastingly, Max who had recently transitioned into fatherhood was suffering greatly from fatigue (see [Figure 5.13](#)) which was a common theme throughout his participation:

**Figure 5.13**

*The fatiguing nature of balancing work and a young child*



I just seen the image of him in the bed, basically that's a big part of my tiredness, you don't get a normal sleep now, as much as I'm up at 5:30am and leave at 6am for work, on my days off and everything, this is it. This is us on our days off. Basically, that picture, it's him in the middle of us two desperate for an hours sleep and him basically kicking us [chuckles]... If he falls asleep, brilliant but he doesn't... I'm tired because of the work and everything that's involved. So I just thought rather than put a picture of a car for the traveling, you know, that's my

choice ultimately. I just thought this was a bit more added onto the tiredness of the work basically. It's not necessarily a work thing that's caused it, this is a kind of family thing that's adds to the tiredness. (Timepoint 1)

Max's acknowledgement that "it's not necessarily a work thing" which has caused his fatigue illuminates the interactional nature of microsystems (Bronfenbrenner, 2005) and how transactions within and between them can shape well-being experiences. During Max's interviews he did not disclose any information regarding paternity support but did address the challenges of working in professional football and its demands on home-life. Ultimately, Max's account captures the requisite for organisations to understand that wider contexts outside of work will influence performance and subsequent well-being experiences:

I'm putting all these hours in at work and I want to be successful and to do well, but ultimately I'm doing it for him [son] really anyway... I know it's [job] not close to home, this is just where I am at this point in time, you know? I've got a job that's a positive, because in football we can go a long time without one. I'm getting paid ultimately to pay for things for him and to try and put money aside for him in the future. So, everything I'm doing really is for him and this [fatigue due to long distance travel] is just at this current time the sacrifice I have to make really for that. (Timepoint 1)

Max's account indicates that he tolerates the long working hours and commutes to work because he has fortunately "got a job", something which he acknowledges can elude coaches within professional football for a long period of time. This is further cemented when he addresses that he is trying to set his son up for the future, which is why he sacrifices rest at this current stage of his life. Moreover, Max's comment of not

selecting an image of a car to represent travel because it is “my choice ultimately” appears in reference to not wanting to be absent from his son. Thus, he chooses to place strain (e.g., physically and mentally) on his well-being so that he can be a present and caring father, but ultimately the fatigue is having a detrimental impact on his functioning as a coach:

Just kind of tired really, a part of that's my decision as well, as in I travel to work every day. So logistically [club name] is not ideal for me. It's two and a half hours from home. So I travel every day to and from work. So it's two and a half hours to work, two and a half hours back... It's an early start [6am]... get home about 7:30-8pm as an average. So it's long days, but that's my choice, you know, I could try and rent somewhere up here... But obviously I then sacrifice time with my little boy, which I don't really want to do. (Timepoint 1)

It is tiring. Just everything put together is tiring. You get some frustrations at home... and does that make me frustrated at work? Or is it frustrations at work that make me frustrated at home... how does the work and home life impact each other?... there's probably a general tiredness to it all that just kind of compounds it really. (Timepoint 3)

Max spoke of travel logistics throughout the study, implying that long commutes and time away from home impeded his general well-being. This was due to the time and energy demands associated with travelling, which is of concern given it is a necessity within professional sport (e.g., football away fixtures; Roderick, 2012). Max's statements highlight the complexity of travel logistics due to the proximity of his home to his club, which does not account for the travel demands of away games in relation to his club. The desire to be present for his son has led Max to sacrifice time and subsequent rest due to

the extreme daily travel demands, which he notes compounds fatigue and can shape work performances. Throughout his season long participation in the study and by engaging in the photo-elicitation approach, Max's understanding (e.g., horizons, Gadamer, 2013) of well-being was broadened as he became more aware of how home and work-life interact to shape well-being experiences:

I think for me they're [work and home life] all kinda interlinked. Cause I find it very difficult to kind of [pauses] like just put one to one side, you know when I go home I'm thinking about football and when I'm at football you're thinking about family. So it's very difficult to separate them. So I think they're all interlinked. Like I say, I think there'll be frustrations at home that maybe leak into work or frustrations at work that leak into home. (Timepoint 3)

Max's claim that work and home-life "interlink", are "difficult to separate", and that they will "leak" into one another compounds the ecological nature of well-being experiences (Bone et al., 2015; Purcell et al., 2022; see Chapters 3.4.2.1 and 4.4.2). This was reiterated by Max in timepoint 2, when he endeavoured to remain in a job during the uncertain socioeconomic climate:

So, um, I've been out of a job twice now and I know how hard it is to get back in. So, it is a job, and you're getting paid, and certainly at this time of life and the, you know, the financial crisis, and the cost of living, and everything attached to just everyone living in the world at a minute. It is important you have a job. It is important, you know, that you can provide... So that itself kind of brings its own pressures a little bit and probably the uncertainty of things adds to that as well. Uh, but I just keep telling myself it is what it is. Just gotta get on with it, you

know? And I do get on with it, but, you know, there will come a time when I just [deep exhale] pfffft hit that wall and I go, I can't do this anymore. (Timepoint 2)

Max's apprehension around the current socioeconomic climate (e.g., macrosystem; Bronfenbrenner, 2005) would often be considered unrelated to his coaching role and subsequent well-being, yet it is straining his emotions and influencing his functioning as a coach (e.g., working and commuting long hours leading to fatigue). The fact that Max begins by saying "I've been out of a job twice now and I know how hard it is to get back in" illuminates how he draws on past experiences to inform his current sensemaking around well-being management. For instance, he understands that losing his job would incur significant financial losses and replacing it would be arduous, thus he sacrifices rest and endures fatigue so that he can financially support his family for as long as possible. However, given his deep exhale and admittance that he will not be able to sustain this lifestyle forever implies without changes his well-being will be greatly impeded. Thus, for the group of coaches in the present study, well-being appeared to permeate between domains, which highlights the need to greater understand how well-being is shaped by wider interrelating systems and contexts (e.g., home-life, socioeconomic climate, culture) inside and outside of sport.

### **5.5 Applied Implications**

The findings of the current chapter suggest a range of applied implications for coaches, organisations, and sport psychology practitioners to consider in relation to well-being and its management. Firstly, it was clear from the coaches that cultivating a 'third space' was beneficial for well-being and its overall management. Thus, sport psychologists should work with coaches and organisations to facilitate collaborative reflective practices that can broaden horizons of understanding (Gadamer, 2013) around third spaces and the potential benefits to well-being. This would help both coaches and organisations to

identify which spaces enable time for oneself, rest, and are therapeutic. More generally, organisations have a responsibility to care for their personnel's well-being, hence clubs should actively promote opportunities and time to engage with third spaces where possible.

Secondly, for the sample of coaches being an authentic self was paramount for consistent well-being experiences. Authenticity was often achieved when the coaches felt psychologically safe and when they believed their values and beliefs aligned with their respective organisation. Therefore, organisations and coaches would benefit from working with sport psychology practitioners to collaboratively curate and instil a model of psychological safety (Walton et al., 2023). When applied in practice, organisations should cultivate an environment where personnel feel comfortable to display their authentic selves, normalise well-being related issues, and encourage help-seeking behaviours (e.g., displays of vulnerability) and support.

Another implication to consider for applied practice is for sport psychologists to adopt ACT principles when working with football coaches as being more mindful, self-aware and present appear to mitigate well-being challenges. Specifically, sport psychologists could work with coaches to be more mindful of past and future contemplations as the current sample of coaches demonstrated that they can be either detrimental or positive for well-being management. Thus, when drawing on the past, sport psychologists could educate coaches to avoid obsessive and persistent ruminations and instead draw on key learning events which lead to better practices and present well-being. For example, learning that persistent rumination over a poor result will not change the outcome and that time is better spent elsewhere, such as disassociating and recharging with family or via a third space. Alternatively, coaches would also benefit from learning how to effectively draw on future contemplations which are more within one's control,

such as spending time with family and friends, or booking time off work to engage in activities unrelated. Additionally, from the current group of coaches it was apparent that ruminations over distant future events outside of one's immediate control should be avoided. This was because some coaches ruminated about uncertain and uncontrollable distant future events (e.g., play offs and uncertainty over future) which caused deleterious well-being experiences in the present. Therefore, having sport psychologists educate coaches on ACT and related mindful practices could help improve well-being management and coaching sustainability (Hägglund et al., 2022; Wagstaff et al., 2019).

Fatherhood and engagement with family was also something which multiple coaches believed to shape well-being management. As a result, coaches should be mindful of and try to identify periods of the season where prolonged absence from family may occur and organisations should aim to support coaches during these phases of the season. For instance, the congested winter period fixture schedule of first team football and the 'win at all costs' concluding period of the footballing season where coaches can become overly engrossed with results. Support could be in the form of assisted travel and accommodation for family during away fixtures, offsetting working hours during the week leading up to weekends away, or by simply advocating flexible working routines. However, an exploration of paternity protocols and support systems in professional football organisations seems warranted as it may lead to improved well-being and its management.

Finally, the auto-driven photo-elicitation approach (Romera Iruela, 2023) yielded plentiful rich data which traditional interviews may not have acquired in isolation (Page et al., 2022). The use of images (i.e., visual stimuli) prompted coaches to reflect on tacit and latent experiences (Morrey et al., 2022; Pain, 2012), increasing self-awareness of aspects that are often taken for granted, such as well-being (Seamon, 2018). This



highlights the practicalities of using visual stimuli and its potential application by applied practitioners in psychological intake interviews and subsequent meetings to enrich conversations and sensemaking. Using visual stimuli in conjunction with ACT and mindful practices could lead to meaningful behaviour change (e.g., improved well-being management).

### **5.6 Reflections and Future Research Directions**

A strength of this study is that it has aided the understanding of the demands of a football season by adding much-needed qualitative longitudinal work when exploring the temporality of football coaches' lived well-being experiences throughout a season (Baldock et al., 2021, 2022; see Chapters 3.6 and 4.5). The present study advances the work of Baldock et al. (2022) as it not only focused on an exploration of well-being experiences, as opposed to stressors (e.g., an ill-being focus), but it also utilised an auto-driven photo-elicitation throughout a season to capture rich temporal and experiential well-being accounts of a seldom heard group. This richness was facilitated due to all participants engaging and supplying images throughout the study which captured both literal and abstract interpretations of well-being experiences. Utilising such an approach brought hermeneutic practices to the fore, as not only did the images enhance participant sensemaking and storytelling, but also the author's interpretations and comprehension of well-being (e.g., its socio-contextual nature). Ultimately, the LIPA and auto-driven photo-elicitation approach encouraged the participants and author to adopt reflective practices, which accumulated in a fusion and widening of horizons (Gadamer, 2013) regarding temporal and socio-contextual well-being experiences. This highlights the benefits of multi-modal IPA approaches as combining the foundational approach with creative data collection methods enriched the portrayal of lived experiences but also improved research quality and rigor. Specifically, the use of visual stimuli grounded participants narratives,

afforded them the opportunity to talk about themselves via images, and offered the author the opportunity to provide their reflections (e.g., engage in hermeneutic practices). As a result, future research could aim to implement auto-driven photo-elicitation as an intended intervention to more accurately capture whether the approach improves well-being management and experiences.

Contemporary well-being research has also advocated that the construct is heavily shaped by socio-contextual interactions and socioecological factors (Mead et al., 2021; Purcell et al., 2022; Walton et al., 2023), insofar system-based approaches can help strengthen understanding. Consequently, the present work informed by a bioecological approach (Bronfenbrenner, 2005) helps develop understanding of how well-being experiences and its management is shaped due to reciprocal interactions between person and multi-layered contextual systems. More specifically, the work extends beyond one's tangible environment and relationships and acknowledges the influence intangible factors have on well-being, such as identity and authenticity (e.g., personal), as well as culture (e.g., macrosystem) and time (e.g., chronosystem). Using bioecological theory to explore other sporting samples' well-being and to illuminate any contextualised differences is also of worth.

The present study, however, is not without limitations. Although a strength of the study was harnessing and sharing the narratives of UK based men football coaches who work in the men's game, there are also women who work and coach within this context which have not been represented. The author acknowledges that women coaching representation in men's football is limited but growing, hence future research could aim to explore the lived experiences of women coaches who work within the men's football context and how it shapes their well-being. Specifically, women operating within masculine dominated sports face differing challenges compared to men, such as

pregnancy, motherhood, and marginalisation (Boswell & Cavallerio, 2022; Norman & Rankin-Wright, 2018) which in turn will shape lived experiences of well-being. Additionally, although detailed narratives were yielded from a homogeneous group of football coaches, a limitation could be that all the participants were white men, and their views were informed from a westernised perspective. It is encouraged that future research aims to explore a diversity of perspectives from varying demographics and cultures to create a more complex (rather than complete) perspective of how well-being is experienced and made sense of within football across the world.

In conclusion, a combined LIPA and auto-driven photo-elicitation approach, underpinned by a bioecological framework, enriched how well-being is made sense of and experienced over time within footballing contexts. Future work would benefit from adopting similar methodological designs when exploring well-being within other sporting or wider contexts to capture the dynamism of well-being.

# Chapter 6: Study Four

“Being a Woman in the Men’s Game, it’s Brutal”: A Longitudinal Photo-Elicitation Exploration of a Woman Football Coach’s Well-Being Experiences.

**Peer-reviewed publications associated with this chapter:**

Higham, A. J., Rumbold, J. L., Newman, J. A., & Stone, J. A. (Under Review). “Being a woman in the men’s game, it’s brutal”: A longitudinal photo-elicitation exploration of a woman football coach’s well-being Experiences. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*.

## **6.1 Chapter Abstract**

As chapters 3, 4, and 5 demonstrated, well-being is greatly influenced by bioecological interactions, with chapter 5 specifically capturing how these interactions over time shape well-being experiences and sensemaking. The previous chapters have also illuminated the lived well-being experiences of men who are coaching within men's professional football club contexts. However, a population which has received little attention, if any at all, are women who coach within men's professional football club contexts. Consequently, the present chapter aims to enlighten the research field by sharing a woman's lived well-being experiences whilst coaching within a professional men's football club.

## 6.2 Introduction

Historically within UK professional football environments, women coaching representation has been low, irrespective of gender participation (Clarkson et al., 2019; Norman & Rankin-Wright, 2018). For example, the representation of women head coaches in the Football Association's Women's Super League (WSL) has fluctuated over years (McLoughlin, 2023; Smith, 2023), with only one third of head coaches being women in 2024 (Lee, 2024). Within professional men's football contexts, women coaching representation has always been limited (Clarkson et al., 2019; Reade et al., 2009). Hannah Dingley was the first woman to be appointed as a head coach in UK men's football during the 2022-23 season (Fisher, 2023). This was a progressive move in the sport which received praise, whilst some claimed it to be a publicity stunt, as within the same month Hannah was relieved of her duties (Edwards, 2023). Hannah's experience highlights how the organizational structures of football can shape well-being, whereby like players, coaches can be treated as commodities (Newman & Rumbold, 2024). There are only a select few women coaches working in men's professional club contexts, which is possibly due to football's masculine dominance (Fielding-Lloyd & Meân, 2011, 2016).

Sport itself is considered a hegemonically masculine institution, with leadership roles dominated by men and the entry of women into positions of authority often scrutinized or challenged (Borrueco et al., 2023; Edwards, 2023; Fielding-Lloyd & Meân, 2011, 2016). Within powerful male-typed sports (e.g., football) women's participation remains contested (Fielding-Lloyd & Meân, 2011) and this lack of membership could be in part due to the male discourses that dominate sports (Fielding-Lloyd & Meân, 2016). For instance, sports knowledge and expertise in the coaching role is often associated with masculinity (Knoppers, 2006). Insofar, leadership positions continue to be held by men in both men's and women's football (Clarkson et al., 2019; Fielding-Lloyd & Meân,

2016; Reade et al., 2009). There are some women coaches leading the way by coaching in men's football, but they tend to be appointed within a professional club's academy environment (Fisher, 2023). The club environment a woman coach resides within and the social interactions they encounter greatly influence chances of progression and development (Didymus et al., 2021). This may be why within men's football many women coaches perceive the need to negotiate their gendered identities by assimilating to its masculine cultural norms to feel accepted (Norman & Rankin-Wright, 2018). Even within FA coach education courses, women coaches have reported feeling isolated and ridiculed due to their sex (Lewis et al., 2018). Specifically, women coaches felt a lack of support during their time on the FA courses as male counterparts would deliberately 'wind up', patronize, and engage in derogatory banter towards them with little to no consequence (Lewis et al., 2018). This highlights the severity of the situation, insofar if support for women is lacking during structured FA education, the same could be said within men dominated club environments. If these experiences are sustained whilst trying to navigate men's football, then it may lead to impeded well-being and incidences of dropout and ill-being amongst women coaches (Didymus et al., 2021).

Rather than focusing on the issues with women coaching underrepresentation, Norman and Rankin-Wright (2018) suggest a greater need for contextual understanding, such as how organizational environments (e.g., football clubs) and being within the minority (e.g., a woman in men's football) shape well-being. Thus, to explore such influential experiences on well-being, insight into the social structures of personal and professional lives is required (Diener et al., 1999). Within sports literature, this has been achieved by employing ecological systems theory (see Bronfenbrenner, 2005) to contextualize well-being, a multifaceted construct encompassing mental, physical, and social elements, which is shaped by reciprocal socio-contextual interactions over time

(Purcell et al., 2022; see Chapters 3.2, 4.2 and 5.2). Bronfenbrenner's (2005) Process-Person-Context-Time (PPCT) model progresses ecological systems theory and suggests that personal characteristics (e.g., age and gender), proximal processes (i.e., temporal reciprocal interactions), and contexts (e.g., interrelating socio-contextual environments) would shape well-being experiences and sensemaking. The interrelating socio-contextual environments influencing well-being are the microsystem (e.g. workplace), mesosystem (e.g. player-colleague relations), exosystem (e.g. governing bodies), macrosystem (e.g. cultural norms), and chronosystem (e.g. life transitions). Therefore, a coach's well-being could equally be shaped by sustained interactions at the club or home, via cultural norms, and key life transitions (see Chapters 4.4.1, 4.4.2 and 4.4.3).

For instance, in men's football, the context is demanding with a range of personal (e.g., work-life balance), organizational (e.g., staff relationships) and performance (e.g., managing players) stressors (Baldock et al., 2021). For women coaches working in men's football, these stressors will be compounded by their minority status, intensifying feelings of isolation and marginalization (Norman & Rankin-Wright, 2018). For instance, Didymus et al. (2021) reported that opportunities for women coaches to build work relationships are limited, which combined with a perceived lack of support and intense workloads may result in burnout (e.g., ill-being; Kenttä et al., 2020a). Norris et al. (2024) expanded on the issue of insufficient support for women football coaches by claiming that a large proportion rely on informal support networks (e.g., friends and family) to support their well-being, as opposed to formal systems (e.g., club or governing bodies). Given these contextual demands and how they influence a football coach's coping effectiveness and well-being, a season long analysis is warranted (Baldock et al., 2021; Didymus et al., 2021).



A way to explore temporal well-being experiences in depth is via a longitudinal interpretative phenomenological analysis (LIPA) of a single case (e.g., a woman coach) given its idiographic focus (Farr & Nizza, 2019). An idiographic approach examines a phenomenon as it is experienced and understood within the lifeworld of an individual (Smith & Nizza, 2022). This can result in ‘gems’ (Smith, 2011, pp. 6-7), potent narratives and lived experiences which enhance understanding (Clouston, 2019) and aim to demonstrate existence rather than incidence (see Didymus et al., 2021; Yukhymenko-Lescroart & Sharma, 2022). Understanding the person-in-context and how the relatedness to said context shapes sensemaking is important (Larkin et al., 2006). Therefore, a single case LIPA approach can display how lived experiences unfold in a meaningful manner and helps elucidate individual stories and personal meaning making (Smith, 2011; Smith & Nizza, 2022). It has been demonstrated that research should endeavour to illuminate coaches’ well-being experiences and idiosyncrasies over time (see Chapters 3.6 and 4.5), especially those of minority groups (e.g., women coaches) so that organizations can become better equipped to provide bespoke support (Norris et al., 2022; Norman & Rankin-Wright, 2018). Thus, the present chapter aims to explore how a woman coaching in men’s football experiences well-being over a season.

This chapter reports on a single case named Angie (pseudonym) who had pertinence because she shared narratives which differed to male counterparts, likely because she was a woman working within a masculine dominant context (Fielding-Lloyd & Meân, 2016; Lewis et al., 2018). These nuanced narratives (e.g., ‘gems’) promoted interest and further investigation due to illuminating aspects of phenomena (e.g., well-being) which may otherwise have remained tacit or latent (Clouston, 2019; Smith, 2011). Consequently, it was important to foreground Angie’s voice and experiences related to well-being (Larkin et al., 2006; Zehntner et al., 2024) given the scarcity of women

coaches working in men's professional football club contexts. In doing so this afforded the opportunity to share her lived experiences in an accessible format (e.g., using images) to help develop understanding of well-being which could in turn aid coach learning (McMahon, 2013). Thus, her 'gems' were encouraged to 'shine' in the form of a single case to illuminate how well-being is experienced and made sense of contextually and temporally.

## **6.3 Methods**

### **6.3.1 Design**

A single case LIPA design was used to demonstrate potent narratives and lived experiences (Smith & Nizza, 2022) of a woman coach's well-being within the context of men's football. Clarkson et al. (2019) suggest that a solitary woman coach in men's football can effectively represent the wider population of women coaches in this context. Single case designs facilitate the exploration of phenomena as they intend to demonstrate existence, as opposed to incidence, and can display how lived experiences unfold in a meaningful manner (Smith & Nizza, 2022). For instance, case studies can help elucidate individual stories and personal meaning making within varying contexts (Smith, 2011). This design was informed by an interpretivist philosophical paradigm, a social constructionist epistemology, and a relativist ontology. Social constructionism informs the chapter because it is believed that coaches' well-being knowledge and experiences are constructed by sociocultural and contextual interactions. Whereas relativism believes well-being can be interpreted and perceived by coaches in varying ways. A LIPA approach complements such views as its foundations are phenomenological, hermeneutical, and idiographic, which facilitate the exploration of lived experiences and phenomena in relation to a person's lifeworld over time (Farr & Nizza, 2019; Smith & Nizza, 2022). This enlightens the inextricably linked person-in-context nature of

experiences because they are often shaped by the subjectivizing influences of language, culture, ideology, and assumptions (Larkin et al., 2006). The phenomenological component of LIPA is heavily influenced by Dasein, interpreted as there being or being there, which implies as humans our natural disposition is to always be somewhere, located, amidst and involved with some meaningful context (Larkin et al., 2006). Likewise, for human well-being there is no ‘being’ without ‘place’ because it serves as the condition of all existing things spatially, environmentally, and temporally (Seamon, 2018). Thus, interpretations of phenomena (e.g., well-being) will be influenced by socio-contextual interactions.

### **6.3.2 The Case: Angie**

Institutional ethical approval was obtained (Converis ID: ER44690456; see Appendix 5.1) due to adopting a trauma-informed approach (Zehntner et al., 2024) which considered psychological and physical risks, and the influence of history, gender and culture on implementation and interpretation of the work. For instance, it was acknowledged that although well-being is traditionally perceived as positive, personal interpretations may vary and lead to sensitive topics being discussed that diminish well-being, such as gender-based violence and bullying (Zehntner et al., 2024). Thus, the lead author was sensitive to the context (Yardley, 2017) by being mindful of the sociocultural contextualisation and linguistic phrasing of Angie’s narratives over time. Consequently, Angie was not pressed on matters that seemed traumatic, she was empowered to direct the interview by choosing images she felt comfortable discussing regarding her well-being, and she was offered the right to withdraw at any moment during the study. Angie was purposefully recruited as she identified as a woman football coach operating in a men’s professional

football club<sup>4</sup>. The following participant details have been deliberately left vague for anonymity due to the unique nature of the case. For instance, women coaching representation in men's professional football is limited which could lead to identification if specific details are disclosed (Martin & Bowes, 2024). Thus, during the study Angie was aged between 25-35 years and worked two job roles. The study focused on her academy coaching role at an English men's professional football club. Angie was also studying a degree during this period, meaning she had to manage educational commitments alongside work. As the study progressed, Angie enrolled onto a Union of European Football Associations (UEFA) coaching qualification, further adding to her workload.

### **6.3.3 Interviewee and Procedure**

Aligning with LIPA's idiographic nature and to capture the richness of her well-being experiences whilst coaching within men's football, a multi-modal LIPA approach was adopted (Smith & Nizza, 2022). This approach combined LIPA with auto-driven photo-elicitation (see Romera Iruela, 2023), which entailed conducting semi-structured interviews with visual stimuli throughout the season (Smith & Nizza, 2022). Prior to participating in four separate interviews, Angie was asked to supply images which best captured her well-being experiences at four stages in the football season (see [Figure 6.1](#) for interview timelines and context). Angie was given the freedom to take her own images or source copyright free images as it provided her with flexibility and the opportunity to creatively express hard to convey and implicit notions (Morrey et al., 2022). Angie decided to use copyright free images throughout the chapter. All interviews were conducted online, and audio recorded via Zoom, resulting in a *Mean duration* of 94

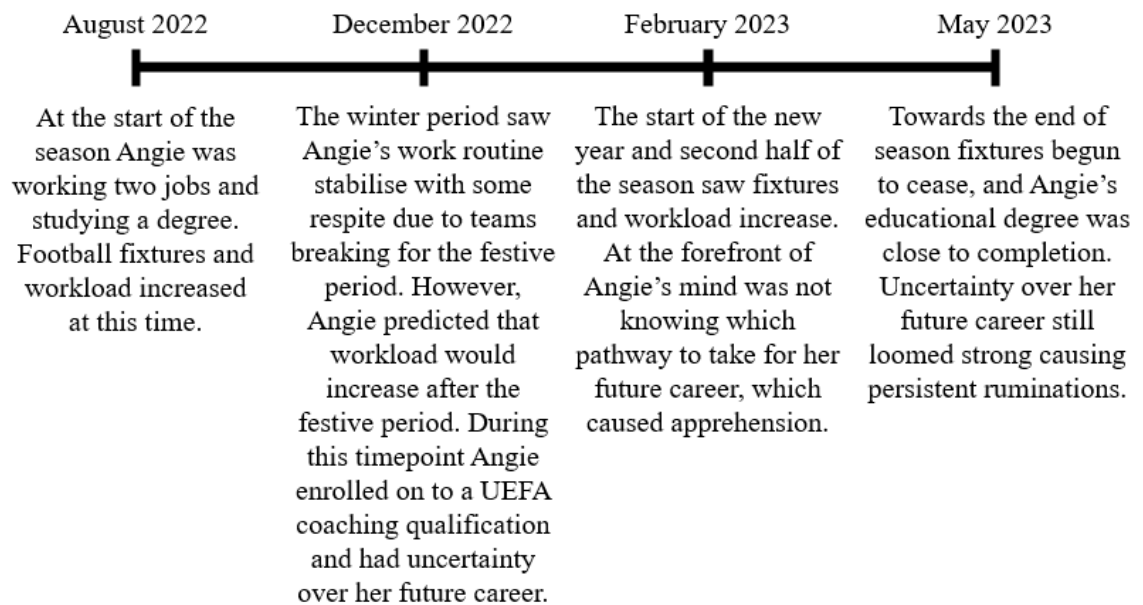
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<sup>4</sup>Recruitment was part of a wider LIPA study exploring UK football coaches' well-being experiences and sensemaking over a season.

minutes (Interview 1 = 86 minutes; Interview 2 = 88 minutes; Interview 3 = 104 minutes; Interview 4 = 99 minutes).

**Figure 6.1**

*Four interview timepoints throughout the season*



### 6.3.4 Data Analysis

The data analysis for this chapter follows the same LIPA best practices (see Farr & Nizza, 2019; Smith & Nizza, 2022) used within Chapter 5.3.5 but applied to a single case. A brief outline of the steps taken were (i) transcribing timepoint one's interview verbatim; (ii) rereading interview data to immerse oneself in Angie's lived experiences; (iii) line-by-line analysis of timepoint one's interview and taking exploratory notes. Exploratory notes contained either descriptive, linguistic, or conceptual comments in the righthand margin of text. For example, Angie's linguistic repetition of "career" to convey her relentless pursuit to progress in men's football; (iv) formulation of experiential statements informed by the exploratory notes were made in the lefthand margin which captured pertinent converging and diverging experiences; (v) the clustering of experiential

statements into potential personal experiential themes (PETs) were established once the authors had come to agreement on the PETs' scope. Considering emergent themes in IPA are drawn directly from the voice of the participant, the double hermeneutic was used by the lead author as a tool to aid analysis by elucidating meaning and acting as a reflexive lens to review interpretations (Clouston, 2019; Finlay, 2002). Finally, (vi) all analysis steps were then repeated for the remaining timepoints which facilitated the comparison of well-being experiences over time, to see if change had occurred or not. This resulted in the formulation of group experiential themes (GETs) which captured convergences and divergences in Angie's narratives across all timepoints.

### **6.3.5 Research Quality and Rigor**

The present chapter was informed by quality indicators on how to achieve excellence in IPA (Nizza et al., 2021). For instance, constructing a compelling, unfolding narrative in the analysis is paramount. Therefore, data were carefully extracted from the transcripts to compose a seasonal story of Angie's experiences of working in men's football and how it shaped well-being. Throughout this process, the researcher used the participant's images along with experiential accounts to convey compelling insights and vigorous accounts that flowed through time (Nizza et al., 2021). Additionally, the researcher committed to close analytic reading of transcripts (e.g., linguistics) and observation of images (e.g., abstract and symbolic meanings) to enrich interpretations. This was evidenced in the theme "If I'm not coaching, what am I?", whereby Angie's meaning making was enhanced by both her and the researcher's interpretations of language and images.

Considering the unique nature of this research with a singular woman football coach, and given the author is a man interpreting a woman coach's well-being experiences within men's football, it was deemed important to maintain high levels of reflexivity (Finlay, 2002). Specifically, unconscious male biases could influence sensemaking (Levi

et al., 2023), hence the author and supervisory team met after each interview to evaluate personal assumptions and interpretations. Additionally, the author sought feedback on the findings and interpretations of the work from a fellow colleague, who was a woman sport psychologist with experience of working in men's and women's professional football contexts. The collective supervisory team and woman sport psychologist facilitated a network of critical friends whereby the authors' presuppositions could be analysed, which was not to reach consensus, but to constructively challenge and strengthen interpretations.

## **6.4 Findings and Discussion**

Four GETs were created during the analysis: "I can't hide that I am a woman, so it is gonna be different for me", "I don't really know which direction to go in", "I'm trying to get the balance between professional and personal life", and "If I'm not coaching, what am I?". The findings are described, interpreted, and discussed in relation to the supplied images, as well as appropriate literature, to facilitate sensemaking (Clouston, 2019). Bronfenbrenner's (2005) bioecological theory is employed as a framework to explore how well-being experiences are shaped via person-context interactions across systems (e.g., microsystem through to chronosystem). Angie's quotes from different timepoints are presented to provide readers the opportunity to interpret for themselves some of the stable and fluctuating experiences of well-being.

### **6.4.1 "I Can't Hide That I am a Woman, so it is Gonna be Different for me"**

This theme captures how Angie endured tough environments (see [Figure 6.2](#)) throughout the season, whereby difficulty exacerbated for her due to being a woman working within men's football. This appeared in specific relation to the masculine culture (e.g., macrosystem; Bronfenbrenner, 2005) which dominates men's football and how it cultivates ideologies, stigmatization, or taboo subjects:

## Figure 6.2

*Navigating the brutal conditions of male football contexts*



Timepoint 3

I guess it can be challenging at times... I don't need to get offended if someone asked if I'm the physio when I'm at an away game like, I just get over it... If I got annoyed at that, my well-being would be plummeting all the time. So, I don't need to... But again, because I'm so used to the environment, I think it's sort of the norm for me. (Timepoint 1)

I think working in like male professional football... it's a very, very brutal, tough environment, and I'm also a woman [chuckles]. So, there's no-- I can't hide that I am a woman, so it is gonna be different for me in terms of also when I have children or whatever it might be... I think it's a very different sort of situation for me compared to men up there. Like it's tough anyway, in terms of sustaining your job... the hours that you have to work... and then let's not forget that I'm also a woman... I obviously want a family eventually... having children, like that's another layer. But in terms of just being a woman, in the men's game, it's brutal... So, it is just another layer on top that's just gonna add to those brutal conditions at the top of the mountain. (Timepoint 2)



Angie's comment of "I can't hide that I am a woman" is interesting as it connotes that other aspects of a person's identity which could be targeted for abuse (e.g., sexuality and religion) can be hidden, but ultimately her 'womanness' cannot be suppressed and is constantly visible. In this case, it implies that the environment does not lead Angie to feel like she belongs for being her true self. Thus, during timepoint 1 Angie appears to accept and normalize that she will be mistaken as a physiotherapist, claiming "it's sort of the norm for me" which implies a temporality to such incidents. Her account suggests she has been exposed to such sexist treatment for so long that she has had to demonstrate resilience to protect her well-being but has potentially gone about it in a maladaptive manner via emotional suppression. The suppression of emotions and dissenting voices systemically occurs for women coaches as they often reside under dominant masculine cultures, whereby they experience derogatory, misogynistic, and sexist remarks (Levi et al., 2023; Lewis et al., 2018).

Angie reiterates during timepoint 2 the challenging and brutal context of working in men's football, and that being a woman adds additional layers. For instance, one challenging layer she mentions is having children and starting her own family (Martin & Bowes, 2024), which she implies would diminish her well-being experiences as a coach. Pregnancy and maternity within coaching can be seen as a taboo subject as women coaches feel their job may be at risk if they pursue motherhood (Borrueco et al., 2023). Thus, like how Angie cannot hide her 'womanness', she would not be able to hide pregnancy or children. Starting a family would ultimately make her feel more vulnerable than she already is within men's football. The other 'layer' she acknowledges is the 'brutal' nature of being a woman who is trying to progress in men's football. Angie's use of the image was to capture her trajectory to the top of the mountain (i.e., becoming a men's professional football coach) and the toll it takes on her well-being (e.g.,

psychologically, physically and socially) as she is relentlessly working in isolation with little self-care. For instance, during the interview she depicted the people in the foreground and background of the image were all her, demonstrating how she is slowly progressing her way up the mountain (i.e., men's football) which can be isolating. Angie's comment of "men up there" combined with this image symbolizes how she perceives that she must work even harder (e.g., scale a mountain) to be on the same level (e.g., mountain summit) with male counterparts which can be physically and psychologically draining. This outlook has been shared by other women coaches operating within masculine dominated contexts (Clarkson et al., 2019) and women in wider societal workplaces (Sojo et al., 2016), whereby the workplace environment is not conducive for well-being due to masculine cultural norms (e.g., macrosystem; Bronfenbrenner, 2005). This in turn led Angie to adopt a lifestyle which she acknowledged is not sustainable but endures because she is young and wants to progress within her career while she can:

I think I'm sort of just aware that—it's not forever, but I sort of mean the lifestyle that I'm living isn't sustainable in terms of the hours that I'm working... like working weekends and those sort of things... So I think it [well-being] shouldn't [be sacrificed], but I'm sort of willing to take the hit because I know that it's gonna get me to sort of the next stage, but I wouldn't recommend it. (Timepoint 3)

The statement "it's not forever" captures in general how many football coaches give their all to football because coaching careers can be finite. For instance, coaches bend values and make sacrifices, all to stay alive within the game (Higham et al., 2021). This appears to be the case for Angie, who throughout the chapter not only acknowledged the challenges of any coach progressing in men's football, but the challenges of being a woman coach (e.g., starting a family and being in the minority) which can make her time in football more finite. Thus, Angie demonstrates that she is "willing to take the hit" on

her well-being so that she can progress as quickly as possible within coaching. However, due to signing off the conversation with “I wouldn’t recommend it”, there is a sense that she is not happy with the sacrifices she is making. For instance, Angie reiterates the lifestyle sacrifices she must make in timepoint 3 and then goes on to demonstrate in timepoint 4 that sometimes she would like to set aside her career aspirations and simply live:

I think you sort of have to make a decision on what you want. Like you have to choose whether you’re gonna have like loads of fun, excitement, whatever in your twenties and just sort of work nine to five... with coaching, you can’t really do that. You’re either in it or you’re not... if you wanna get to places, you’ve gotta go all in... do all the hours... the horrible traveling... And that sounds really awful cause I love coaching, but I do think that is sort of what you have to do, especially if you wanna work in professional elite football, like you’ve gotta graft and even when you do all that, you still might not get to where you wanna get to, it’s brutal.  
(Timepoint 3)

I think about it [goals and aspirations] every day... I think cuz all I do is coaching, it’s always to do with that football bubble, coaching bubble, it’s sort of never ending... it’s sort of always ongoing in terms of what the next thing is, where I’m going. So yeah, [goals and aspirations] do play a massive part in my well-being, one hundred percent. Whether that’s good or bad in terms of some days it might be good and other days I’m like, I need to just forget that, and just live, and not always focus on that end goal. Just sort of live in the moment if that makes sense.  
(Timepoint 4)

Angie comparing a carefree twenties’ fun lifestyle to pursuing a coaching career in men’s professional football captures how she has sacrificed a lot of her life for her

career. This is compounded when she states, “You’re either in it or you’re not”, an almost all or nothing attitude which mirrors her coaching lifestyle and mindset, as well as the professional football cultural norms (e.g., macrosystem; Bronfenbrenner, 2005) she interacts with (see Chapters 3.4.2, 4.4.1 and 5.4.3.1). Here, Angie demonstrates workaholic like tendencies (Lundkvist et al., 2016), as she has sacrificed physical, psychological, and social aspects of well-being throughout the season, which is often expected within professional football contexts (Higham et al., 2021). However, her wanting to “just live and not always focus on that end goal” during the conclusion of the research suggests that dissociation and time away from coaching, possibly to rest, could benefit her well-being (Eccles et al., 2023). For example, the phrase “Just sort of live in the moment” illuminates a potential desire to cease intense workloads and ruminations, and to escape the “football bubble” to be more present.

#### **6.4.2 “I Don’t Really Know Which Direction to go in”**

This theme captures how ruminations and anticipations over future events and life transitions (e.g., chronosystem; Bronfenbrenner, 2005) outside of one’s immediate control can shape present well-being experiences. Throughout all Angie’s timepoints, she placed emphasis on uncertainty over her career. For instance, timepoint 2 and 4’s images (see [Figure 6.3](#)) capture her uncertainty in a symbolic way, whereby there are a multitude of doors (i.e., opportunities) and roads (i.e., pathways) she may or may not be able to take in relation to her career:

### Figure 6.3

*Uncertainty over what the future holds and which direction to take*



Timepoint 2



Timepoint 4

So I've obviously spoken about how much I've got on next year and I think there's so many different like doors. This is how I'm imagining it... more to the end of next year, so many doors I'll be able to go through and opportunities, but I dunno which one I'm gonna go through [or] pick, which I wouldn't say I've got anxiety about it, but I'm like, "oh God." Yeah, I'm in a really, really, really, good, privileged position, but I'm also like, "oh shit, where am I gonna go? Where's it gonna take me?" (Timepoint 2)

Angie's reference to having a lot on next year was because she had recently enrolled onto a UEFA qualification which would increase her already hectic workload due to balancing two jobs alongside an educational degree. Angie denies feeling anxious regarding her future, though appears to show apprehension, ruminating over her future, indicating emotional suppression (Norman & Rankin-Wright, 2018). Therefore, like Rush and Grouzet's (2012) work, Angie's prolonged engagement in uncontrollable and unpleasant ruminations over distant events, evidenced by her uncertain future life transitions (e.g., chronosystem; Bronfenbrenner, 2005) being mentioned during each interview, demonstrates how it can shape present well-being sensemaking. For instance,

she stated that some doors may not even open, which further fuelled her apprehension about what her future holds:

I just think because I don't know and it's not confirmed, that's what's probably like, oh I'm not sure then... And I think in terms of my well-being... Next year will probably be one of the most challenging things because, it's outta my control... I'm like, some of these doors might not even be open... So that's also like, but then what do I do?... So I think like in terms of my well-being, it's sort of the unknown, and I like to plan... I think not knowing is probably the thing that's gonna affect like my well-being. (Timepoint 2)

Interestingly within timepoint 2, Angie had a greater amount of control in the present because of job role stability, as well as coaching and educational demands easing for the December festive period. However, due to a lack of controllability and uncertainty over her perceived future, Angie continued to ruminate and dismiss the present. For instance, Angie's forethought to next year being challenging and doors not opening captures how distant future anticipations may prevent optimal well-being experiences in the present (Rush & Grouzet, 2012). Her statements of "I like to plan" and the future is "sort of the unknown", reiterates that ruminations over events which have not yet occurred, or may not even happen can hinder present well-being management (see Chapters 4.4.3 and 5.4.2). Although Angie spoke positively regarding her career and opportunities, the number of potential opportunities and associated uncertainty leads to perceptions of life feeling 'manic', suggesting negative connotations. This is enriched by timepoint 4's image of a stack interchange which conveys a complex network of roads (e.g., routes):

I wanted a picture that sort of represented like a road and loads of different directions because I feel like, although like I've said, everything's positive, I feel

like this is sort of my mind at the moment because it's coming to the end of the season... I know where I'm going in terms of the end goal, but I don't really know which direction to go in. So that's what this sort of replicated here in terms of loads of different routes. It's a bit manic. (Timepoint 4)

The image captured how during timepoint 4, Angie's emotions were fuelled due to her current context, whereby her education and other part-time work began to conclude, and her present coaching role within a men's club did not align with her ambitions (e.g., coaching men's first team). Angie's narratives illuminate how uncertainty over life events or transitions and focusing on distant uncontrollable life events (e.g., chronosystem; Bronfenbrenner, 2005) can adversely influence present well-being experiences and sensemaking (Rush & Grouzet, 2012). This suggests focusing on what is within one's control would lead to better well-being management.

#### **6.4.3 "I'm Trying to get the Balance Between Professional and Personal Life"**

This theme illuminates Angie's pursuit of work-life balance and her endeavour to improve self-care for improved well-being by working in to her busy schedule personal time and space. To represent her balancing multiple aspects of her life and how her well-being felt on the precipice, Angie sourced an image (see [Figure 6.4](#)) of someone balancing on a fence:

**Figure 6.4**

*Trying to maintain a balance between professional and personal life*



Timepoint 1

I chose this picture, because in my head, and in general terms of my well-being, I'm balancing a lot. So, I'm trying to get the balance between professional and personal life. I'm trying to get a balance between downtime and when I'm one hundred miles an hour. (Timepoint 1)

Angie's "one hundred miles an hour" comment appears in reference to how fast paced her life felt at timepoint 1, which followed a break period within the football season. Angie's fast paced comment could also be in reference to her unrelenting passion to progress within men's football, whilst juggling two jobs, a degree, coaching qualifications, and her personal life. Obsessive passion can cause instability and a perceived loss of control (Yukhymenko-Lescroart & Sharma, 2022), potentially resulting in conflicts within and between microsystems, such as work-life balances (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). Later within the interview, Angie acknowledged that her work-life routines were not sustainable:

I know that it's [lifestyle] not sustainable. So, I can do it for this year, maybe two years, and it will pay off in the future. I think with coaching as well, I think everyone knows it isn't healthy, but you have to really graft, you have to put in the hours. So, I've always been aware of that, especially being a woman wanting to work in the men's game, I know I've got to do that [chuckles] a little bit more, or a lot more. (Timepoint 1)

From discussing her well-being throughout the interview, Angie began to acknowledge that her pursuit to succeed as a woman coach in men's football was fuelling her "one hundred miles an hour" work ethic and subsequent unsustainable lifestyle. This demonstrates Angie's willingness to sacrifice her short-term well-being for longer-term goals. Angie's overt immersion in work could be explained by insights from workplace literature, which suggests that women are often subjected to higher performance standards



by employers compared to men in the same job role (Gorman & Kmec, 2007). Thus, the influence of her intense workload on well-being was apparent when Angie communicated her “energy” fluctuated on a regular basis, with many days leaving her “drained”, questioning what percentage of her energy is left for herself:

I feel I’ve got energy today, but then there’s some days where I just won’t because I’m just drained. So, when I’m coaching, obviously I always try and give 100%. But after I might not feel like that, because I’m just drained... that’s the one thing I’m aware of is because I’m doing so much. I’m quite stretched. So again, that’s why I’m aware it’s not sustainable because I want to be able to give 100% to all these places. But I can’t do that because all I’ve got is 100%... I want to be able to give my all, but if I do that, what’s left for me? (Timepoint 1)

The persistent reference to 100% could be interpreted as Angie viewing well-being like a battery (see Chapters 3.4.1.1 and 5.4.2.3) which depletes in line with her demands. Due to Angie being “stretched” by her multiple job roles and demands she is unable to give 100% to everything, which in turn leaves little energy for her to recharge (e.g., focus on herself). Rest is critical for coaches’ well-being (Eccles et al., 2023), which became apparent to Angie the more she discussed her well-being throughout the interview, as she identified the need to take control over lifestyle routines:

How do I experience well-being? Um, I think, I’m trying to get better at like controlling the controllables. So like well-being is me like, I’m in control of it, like how much sleep I get... training myself and getting into a better routine... So I think when I’m in a good routine, my well-being is better because I have structure. (Timepoint 1)

Taking control may be in reference to her chosen image, as she wants more control and stability so that she does not *fall off the edge*, which she later clarified as “when I say

falling off, I mean burning out”. The contextual nature of timepoint 1 may be fuelling such feelings as workloads had just increased due to the start of the new season, which appeared to make Angie more aware of the need to better manage routines. Angie’s narrative and image captures the fragility of her current context as she balances on the edge of a cliff, signifying how prolonged engagement in this state (e.g., challenged well-being) could lead to a detrimental outcome (e.g., burnout; Olusoga et al., 2019). This could be explained in relation to proximal processes, which are most influential when there is sustained engagement (Bronfenbrenner, 2005), meaning for Angie, prolonged exposure to demanding contexts led to signs or symptoms of ill-being (i.e., burnout). The wider life context of a coach has been known to influence symptoms of burnout (Lundkvist et al., 2012), which seems to be the case for Angie, as during this timepoint she had started working two coaching roles whilst studying a degree. Later in the chapter, these sustained work-life interferences led Angie to critically reflect on time utilization:

I stopped going to the gym because I felt like I didn’t have time... but, I loved that over the summer I was going to the gym loads because I wasn’t coaching as much. I was going literally every day and then as soon as coaching starts, “I can’t do it now”... I think I convinced myself I haven’t got time because I do so much, when better habits would obviously help my well-being anyway if I was going to the gym, because it would be like me time. (Timepoint 2)

Here, Angie was able to identify that she stopped going to the gym because she perceived to not have enough time, but that better habits and routines could facilitate time for self-care. This thought may have arisen due to timepoint 2’s stage of the season affording her more time to reflect as it was the festive period where academy football and educational demands eased. Angie’s reference to “me time” can be interpreted as wanting time and space for herself away from work and general life demands. For instance, within

timepoint 1 Angie stated, “football is all I do” and that when she does have “me time” it usually entails doing tasks like “shopping, washing, and cleaning” which she identified as “not me time really”. Oldenburg’s (1999) work on ‘third places’ may help illuminate what Angie means by “me time” in relation to benefitting her well-being. A third place is somewhere other than work and home where people often go for self-care, relaxation, and to escape the pressures of life (Oldenburg, 1999). Thoughts over curating a third place continued into timepoint 3, possibly because of becoming more aware of her own well-being via periodically reflecting on it via the photo-elicitation approach and the timepoint of the season which perhaps makes engagement in alternative activities more achievable:

I think it [gym/exercise] gives me a different focus. So, I’m focusing on myself and getting fitter, getting healthier, but like mentally I think it’ll help me massively... I don’t wanna say an escape because it sounds like I’m in a hell hole, like I’m fine [laughs], I’m doing all right. But it just gives me, I think it’s just a different environment and focus... a focus that’s not like my career, my career, my career. (Timepoint 3)

Angie’s use of language is interesting, stating she is “fine” but then communicates how going to the gym and exercising would afford her an opportunity to “escape” and gain a “different environment and focus” possibly because it is a slower pace and somewhere she has control over. The repetition of “career” also captures her relentless career driven focus that she wants to switch off from, with the gym as a possible solution. Yet switching off is at odds with Angie’s mindset of giving 100%. Angie’s narrative appears to be oxymoronic, as she acknowledges that football coaching is demanding and there are benefits of spending time away from the role but is reluctant to do so because football expects coaches to “really graft”. Thus, such cultural working norms could explain why Angie is resistive to self-care and prioritizes work. Interestingly, third places

like gyms are stereotypically associated with physical well-being gains, but for Angie it seems a place for psychological relief, which may be due to the gym being somewhere she can be herself and have more control over what she does. Consequently, due to discussing and processing her well-being throughout the season, Angie joined the gym in timepoint 4 to manage her well-being:

I think actually when we last spoke, I think I said I was gonna join the gym... So I joined... Routine is definitely good for me... I think because I've sort of been looking after myself more in terms of going to the gym... although I'm on my own a lot anyway, I think it's nice just to be in a different space. So, it's definitely helped me have that sort of me time. (Timepoint 4)

As seen over the course of the entire season, Angie began to understand the importance of self-care and making space and time for herself. Angie found solace in the form of the gym because it was somewhere she could have control (e.g., a routine) and alternatively focus on herself rather than her career. Although this only came to fruition in the final timepoints of the research possibly because the latter stages of football season afforded more opportunities to dissociate and taking part increased her awareness and helped forge intentions through reflecting. Thus, given Angie's desire for a space that enables "me time" and one where she can focus on herself, Oldenburg's (1999) conceptualization of third places can be built upon, as traditionally they are considered communal and conversational in nature, prioritizing socialization. Whereas for Angie, a third 'space' does not have to be anchored in or prioritize social interaction away from home and work contexts but must purely orientate around and prioritize time for herself. Hence, with the coaching profession revolving around social interaction, which can be beneficial for well-being, this could also be mentally fatiguing and in turn gives rise to loneliness (e.g., desire to seek out solitude; Coplan, 2019). A core component to

acknowledge in Angie’s accounts throughout the season was ‘time’, as without crafting time for herself it would not be possible for her to access the gym (i.e., third space). This implies a form of lifestyle or job crafting (Rumbold et al., 2023), which enables more free time and the opportunity to rest can be beneficial for well-being. What was evident from Angie’s seasonal insights were third ‘spaces’ that have low cognitive demands, place focus on the individual, allow for ‘me time’ (i.e., personal time), and provide controllability can yield greater gains for well-being. However, as Angie demonstrates with the final image she supplied (see [Figure 6.5](#)), football coaching can be unrelenting:

**Figure 6.5**

*It does not really end when it ends*



Timepoint 4

I wanted something to represent, the end, but also the start because it’s sort of like, it doesn’t really end when it ends, something else starts. That was sort of what I was going for because of how football works... I know we’ll finish for June and then suddenly it will be July and I’ll be like “Oh it’s preseason.” (Timepoint 4)

Angie’s narrative here (e.g., end of the season) exemplifies how time for oneself in football coaching can be sparse due to the cyclical nature of the seasons. Angie goes on to state “I love the role and the profession... but you just have to be careful with giving yourself time in the break to actually... breathe”, which she follows up with “I sort of

need the break cause I'm coming to the end. Um, in terms of like mentally, physically, and just needing something different for a bit before we go again." Her references to "something different for a bit" and needing to "breathe" can be interpreted as wanting to dissociate from the role to rest and recover (Eccles, et al., 2023; see Chapters 3.4.2.1, 4.4.2, 4.4.3, 5.4.1.1 and 5.4.3). Thus, Angie's concluding remarks during this period are indicative of a cyclical nature to not only football seasons, but also football coaches' well-being experiences.

#### **6.4.4 "If I'm not Coaching, What am I?"**

This theme conveys how Angie endeavours to *shine through* her coaching personality, as others and sometimes herself, find it hard to see past the coaching tracksuit. For instance, Angie supplied an image (see [Figure 6.6](#)) during timepoint 1 to originally express how her well-being is positive (e.g., light shining) but there are factors (e.g., cloudy intervals) challenging it:

#### **Figure 6.6**

*Sunny with cloudy intervals*



Timepoint 1

In my head I was thinking things are clear to some extent, but then also it can be quite cloudy, because it's so busy at the moment. In terms of this picture... the sun is still coming through, but it's just a bit cloudy... I think that's currently

where I'm at. It's not like blue sky, sun, because it's the start of the season again, seven days a week. It's a lot, so I think this sort of represents it quite well in terms of my mental state. (Timepoint 1)

Here, Angie acknowledges that her well-being is challenged, or possibly *clouded*, due to the start of the season increasing workload and time commitments. This is expressed by her saying "it's the start of the season again, seven days a week", implying she perceives her coaching commitments as unrelenting. Angie's narrative demonstrates how seasonal transitions (e.g., chronosystem; Bronfenbrenner, 2005) play a role in shaping well-being experiences. However, as Angie discussed her coaching role it was apparent that it formed a large part of her identity:

I'm always coaching, I'm always in that role, I'm always in my [club] kit, so I never wear normal clothes... Yes, I'm myself, and I'm not like, I've not changed who I am, I'm still myself because I love the environments I work in, but I'm always a coach, I'm not seen as like Angie... that can be draining sometimes... I'm like I just need time off from being that person because I'm also a person outside of just being a coach. (Timepoint 1)

Angie appears conflicted by how she is viewed as a coach before being seen as her true self, the "person outside" of coaching. Her stating "that can be draining" and "I just need time off from being that person" suggest that she needs to dissociate from the role to aid her well-being, possibly by resting and being authentic. Angie distinguishing two different people not only portrays how she is balancing two identities, but that she may feel unauthentic because of continuously prioritizing coaching over life outside of work (see Chapters 3.4.2.1, 4.4.1 and 4.4.2). By saying "I'm always in my [club] kit... so I never wear normal clothes" could be interpreted as she does not step out of the coaching role, even when away from the workplace. From Angie's account she appears to

demonstrate strong immersion-in-place (Seamon, 2018) and struggles with displaying her authentic self (Sarvimäki, 2006), with both placing strain on well-being. Angie reflects on this further within timepoint 2, and acknowledges how there appears to be a connection between her coaching workload and well-being (see [Figure 6.7](#)):

**Figure 6.7**

*Everything's clearer but there's still a mountain to climb*



Timepoint 2

I always go into coaching mode. People will be like “How’re you doing?” I’m like, “yeah, coaching’s fine.” I feel like I always do that because that is all I do, because it like consumes me in a good way... I never actually say, oh yeah, I’m actually alright... If you flip it on the other side, I’m alright, because everything around me seems a bit calmer in like my life separate from coaching because the coaching’s calm... I think this time of year is fine, but I think after Christmas it’ll probably pick up again. (Timepoint 2)

Angie’s default response of “coaching’s fine” when being asked how she is, signifies how her coaching career is prioritized over her personal life and interests, something she acknowledges by saying it “consumes me.” The consumption of her role is clear as she believes her personal life thrives when her coaching is calmer, demonstrating the interactional nature of her role demands on wider well-being



experiences (see Chapters 3, 4 and 5). Moreover, Angie identifies during timepoint 2 (e.g., festive period) there was a lull in workload, enabling her personal life to be “fine”, but foresees the period after Christmas to challenge her well-being due to increased workload. Thus, the image provided by Angie (see Figure 6.7) could be interpreted as conveying a sense of serenity and a soothing nature given the calm waters and clear sky, possibly representing how she is not as *clouded* compared to timepoint 1. However, the mountain in the background captures what she perceives is a tough and challenging time ahead (e.g., start of new year and second half of the season). The post-Christmas demands were captured during timepoint 3 (see [Figure 6.8](#)) as Angie felt a lack of control:

**Figure 6.8**

*Going 100mph*



Timepoint 3

So for me, this is I’m on the road and I’m missing a lot of the stuff going by because I’m going one hundred miles an hour... looking at the image, that’s what I’m seeing, like it actually makes me go a bit dizzy... but it’s just like a blur because I feel like I’m going so fast and am never given the chance to just settle and like be still. So, this picture captures I’m on the road, which is great, but everything that’s going by me, I’m gonna obviously miss stuff. (Timepoint 3)

Angie's feeling "dizzy" looking at the image and things currently are a "blur" can be interpreted as losing control and stability in her life due to propelling herself into work. This can be supported by her stating she is "on the road" (e.g., pathway to coaching men's football), but due to thrusting herself into multiple work-related commitments to excel her career, she's passing by and "missing" things (e.g., socializing with friends and family). Angie's obsessive passion to excel as a woman coach in men's football appears to be destabilizing wider aspects of her life (Yukhymenko-Lescroart & Sharma, 2022). This is not uncommon amongst other women coaches who highlight the need to work twice as hard as men which subsequently leads to increased pressure and workloads (Clarkson et al., 2019). Later within the interview, Angie also states "I don't wanna be like, who am I? Cause that's so dramatic but if I'm not coaching, what am I?". This excerpt can be enlightened by her chosen image during timepoint 1 (see [Figure 6.6](#)) as the image portrays clouds and a ray of sunshine, whereby her coaching identity and commitments (i.e., clouds) are clouding her true self (i.e., ray of light). Angie wants her authentic identity and 'womanness' to radiate through, hence it could be assumed that well-being can be impeded when one's authentic self is inhibited (Sarvimäki, 2006; see Chapters 3.4.2.1, 4.4.3, 4.4.4 and 5.4.1).

### **6.5 Applied Implications**

The findings of the chapter demonstrate that Angie's well-being was facilitated when she was able to make time for herself, usually in the form of seeking out third spaces away from work-life commitments. It is recommended that coaches, organizations and NGBs (e.g., the FA) are educated on the benefits associated with third spaces (e.g., facilitates rest and authenticity). Once educated, dialogue can then be initiated between the coach and organization as to what personalized time and space can be curated throughout a season via a form of mutual job crafting (Rumbold et al., 2023). A sport psychologist with

support from the FA would be well placed to mediate such an approach. Additionally, support from organizations and NGBs would be greatly welcomed in the form of updated well-being policies and practices within football, as Angie's narratives reiterated the need for professional football to reconsider its 24-hour, 7-days-a-week working culture, where false views around resilience ultimately end in potential maltreatment, to the detriment of well-being (Newman & Rumbold, 2024). Furthermore, Angie detailed how she felt the need to work excessively and unsustainably to progress in men's football. Organizations (i.e., clubs) and NGBs (e.g., the FA) need to improve their awareness of the deleterious consequences of workaholic tendencies on well-being, such as causing wider life implications and identity conflicts. This is especially needed in women coaching populations who feel marginalized and not respected in the same regard as men coaches, because such experiences fuel intense working cultures (Gorman & Kmec, 2007). This relates to broader equality and diversity issues in football whereby the sport actively promotes equality, yet the underlying culture remains resistive. Therefore, clubs have a duty of care to better safeguard women coaches' well-being and reassess organizational structures and policies (i.e., ecological systems) to levy sustainable changes within men's football (e.g., greater women representation and support).

### **6.6 Future Research Recommendations**

Throughout this study, Angie's narratives revealed that her well-being was closely linked to her authenticity both as a woman and as a person outside of football, highlighting how motherhood and misogyny could halt her beloved coaching career (Borrueco et al., 2023; Martin & Bowes, 2024). Future work could explore such significant life events in women coaching populations using a combined LIPA and photo-elicitation approach to track and illuminate temporal lived experiences. More broadly, exploring how women coaches navigate their environments and manage well-being over time using such a combined

approach could help illuminate the tacit and latent experiences associated with the profound difficulties women face compared to men in the coaching realm, especially within football. Angie's narratives highlight the temporality of well-being and how it can fluctuate over time due to temporal focus, attitude and distance (Rush & Grouzet, 2012). Therefore, future coach well-being work would benefit from exploring the temporality of well-being in more depth and via creative methods, such as employing both visual and auditory approaches like photo-elicitation and digital story telling (Martin et al., 2019; Romera Iruela, 2023). Additionally, there is scope for this work to be extended by exploring organizational leadership's and NGB's attitudes to supporting women coaches' well-being within men's professional football contexts. This is important because organizations and NGBs have more power to instil changes at policy and club levels, meaning such insights would be invaluable.

### **6.7 Conclusion**

This chapter addresses a prevalent research gap by providing necessary insights into a woman coach's well-being experiences whilst working in a men's professional football club. Not only did the chapter capture temporal aspects of well-being throughout a season, but how it can be shaped by a wide array of socio-contextual systems outside of the coach's control. This signifies how individual approaches to manage well-being suffice to an extent, but wider systemic changes are required for women coaches' well-being management to thrive. There is scope for this work to be extended by exploring organizational leadership's attitudes to supporting women coaches' well-being within men's professional football contexts.

# Chapter 7: Study Five

Can a Picture Speak a Thousand Words? Reflections on the  
Practicalities and Implementation of an Auto-Driven Photo-  
Elicitation Approach to Capture Football Coaches' Well-Being  
Experiences

**Conference proceedings associated with this chapter:**

Higham, A. J., Newman, J. A., Rumbold, J. L., & Stone, J. A. (2024, June). *Reflections on how an online longitudinal photo-elicitation approach aided football coaches' well-being awareness and management*. 6th International Coaching Conference (CRiC), Northumbria University, Newcastle, UK. <https://doi.org/nbzt>

“One thing I’m conscious of since speaking to yourself, actually, I’m very, very conscious of, and since- because look, we’re all alpha males. We’re the bravado side of us. We don’t speak, we don’t actually delve too much into the emotional state that you go through. But it wasn’t- it was this realization speaking to yourself and just going through this journey, this pathway with you, just actually opening up on things, and looking at things and realizing ‘Jesus!’ It’s okay to actually talk to somebody about how you’re feeling emotionally, or how you’re feeling mentally and physically. You know, it’s okay to bloody swap a couple of stories or a couple of tales with a fellow man or a fellow human being. Um, so I suppose that’s been a big thing for me because if I’m being honest I never did then. I never would and I never thought I’d ever get to that stage. But yeah, it was good just swapping and chucking those type of, um, those hours that we’ve spent. It’s just, it’s been good reflecting and it’s been good getting things, unloading, getting things off your chest and obviously trigger points that you’ve helped us to look for and that. So, yeah, look, it’s [well-being] probably, um, in a much better place you would’ve thought, but knowing this sport, knowing this job that will only last for a short period of time before you start the cycle again, and you get on that emotional rollercoaster again.”

(John, First Team Manager).

## 7.1 Chapter Abstract

Throughout this thesis football coaches' lived experiences and sensemaking of well-being have been explored in a variety of ways: (i) Chapter 3 utilised an IPA approach to explore how football coaches experienced and made sense of well-being over a single timepoint; (ii) Chapter 4 accessed a seldom heard group in first team head coaches based within two of the most prestigious leagues in world football. Docuseries data was then used as a window through which well-being experiences were interpreted; (iii) Chapter 5 explored the male football coaches' well-being temporally across a season using an auto-driven photo-elicitation approach; and (iv) Chapter 6 foreground a woman coach's voice and lived experiences related to her well-being while working within a men's professional football club throughout the course of a season.

What was apparent from conducting this body of work was that the coaches who took part in the research appeared to benefit from the cathartic and therapeutic nature of the methodological approaches implemented. Namely, having someone to talk to openly without judgement and the power of images to capture their well-being experiences, thoughts and feelings. This reflective piece adopts a multi-perspective approach (Smith et al., 2022) to provide a more in-depth and richer understanding of the intricacies of implementing a combined IPA and online auto-driven photo-elicitation approach throughout a season. The narratives provided may help to crystallise (Ellingson, 2008) understanding, as gathering multiple types of data can create a more detailed and complex picture of study implementation and participant experience. The hope of adopting this approach is that it will encourage the reader to resonate and empathise with the presented material (Tracy, 2010), leading them to form their own opinions as to whether the combined IPA and photo-elicitation approach aided coaches well-being sensemaking and management. Therefore, this reflective piece is informed by coaches' narratives from the

original LIPA study (see Chapters 5 and 6) which are then further enriched by the coaches' reflective debrief comments about their engagement in the study and the author's season/study long reflective diary insights. The overall aim of this chapter is to reflect on the practicalities of implementing a combined IPA and online auto-driven photo-elicitation approach, with the general intention of illuminating how the combined methodological approach enlightened well-being lived experiences and inadvertently acted as a well-being management aid for the sample of coaches.



## **7.2 Methodological Reflections**

Here the author provides reflections on methodological decisions and concerns that occurred prior, during and after chapters 5 and 6 whilst drawing upon reflective diary insights and general observations.

### **7.2.1 Research Design and Participants**

I remember when I first designed the longitudinal study that I was concerned about the challenges of recruiting professional football coaches to take part in a season long exploration of well-being. I remember going through the what ifs: “What if no one wants to take part? What if coaches drop out? What if I am not able to collect rich data?” These questions were constantly running through my mind which made me realise that they needed addressing.

The first to address was coaches’ participation in the study. I was in the fortunate position whereby I had done a lot of the hard work during Chapter 3 as I had previously recruited coaches and connected with a variety on LinkedIn. This created a strong foundation to work off as I initially reapproached those coaches who had taken part in the first study to see if they would be interested in a season long exploration of their well-being. The first study comprised of six coaches and of those four agreed to take part. The next step I took was to reach out to my coaching network on LinkedIn which I had exponentially grown since the first study. This then resulted in four more coaches agreeing to take part, meaning eight coaches were available for the longitudinal study. However, I was still concerned over the potentiality of sample attrition which led me to critically think about how I could engage coaches. Three things came to mind, the first was empowering the coaches and placing the focus on them via an auto-driven photo-elicitation approach. I have always been interested in creative research methods and how they can harness data and tell stories in differing ways to traditional approaches (e.g.,

interviewing). Given my interest in IPA I found work which had combined it with visual stimuli (Burton et al., 2017; Duara et al., 2018; Morrey et al., 2022; Morrison & Williams, 2020; Reid et al., 2018). This then led me to see how the multi-modal approach could enrich narratives and empower participants to discuss topics which may otherwise have gone unnoticed. For instance, a core reason why IPA and photo-elicitation were combined was because they both strive to acquire a “phenomenological sense” (Harper, 1986, p. 23) regarding experiences which in turn complement one another in illuminating idiographic accounts (Berg & Lune, 2017) and insider perspectives (Burton et al., 2017). Coaches were empowered to pick and choose which images they felt were relevant and the opportunity to lead discussions around them in interviews. This was to hopefully boost coaches’ involvement in the study and actively engage them in co-producing understandings of well-being within the football context.

Secondly, the interviews themselves needed to be engaging and stimulating for if coaches were to remain active throughout the four seasonal timepoints, which is why a photo-elicitation approach was employed, but also why I tried to adopt the role of facilitator, prompting and probing where necessary and reducing my amount of speech in comparison to the coaches. I thought it was pertinent to build as much rapport as possible with the coaches before discussing their well-being so that they felt comfortable addressing something which can be deemed a sensitive topic area (Hägglund et al., 2023) and one which is hard to express (Duara et al., 2018). I would try to begin the interviews by asking if the coaches could tell me how they got to where they currently are and/or how they got into coaching, just to purely learn about their lived experiences up until this point (taking part in the study). This not only enabled them to discuss something they were familiar with to ease into discussions but also enabled me to tailor questions around their lived experiences. For example, one coach spoke of just getting married and having

a child, this was a great way to start interviews as I was able to ask how his son was doing and how family life was progressing. The hope was to establish a genuine connection, but it is also in my nature to be caring and sincere, hence I became invested in all the coaches' seasonal journeys – not only as coaches, but as parents, partners and general human beings.

Reflecting on why I may have adopted what appears to be a humanistic approach to interviewing could be due to my MSc in Sport and Exercise Psychology experience at Sheffield Hallam University. During this period, I learnt of and practiced Motivational Interviewing (MI) which is grounded in humanism and is classed as a clinical communication method (Miller & Rollnick, 2009). MI is a collaborative process that evokes client's own motivations and honours their autonomy which is only possible with a strong client-counsellor relationship (Miller & Rose, 2009). This is why the therapeutic skills of emphatic listening and understanding are imperative (Miller & Rose, 2009) which is informed by the therapeutic conditions of empathy, congruence, and positive regard (Rogers, 1959). This can create an atmosphere of safety and acceptance, so clients feel free to explore and express change. Through learning about and practising MI I developed my interviewing style where the use of open questions, affirmations, summaries, and reflective listening were second nature (Miller & Rollnick, 1991). My supervisors expected interviews to progressively 'dry up' and become more challenging, but my interviewing style appeared to be engaging. The MI approach may in part explain why I was able to engage the coaches and have them 'open up' about their well-being throughout an entire competitive season. It could also explain why some coaches found taking part in the study to be therapeutic because I was unintentionally drawing on my MI skillset.

Thirdly, after timepoint one, the supervisory team and I met to discuss the magnitude of the study and concerns over sample attrition. Something that I had noted from timepoint one was that spending time with family and disassociating from work appeared to aid coaches' well-being experiences and management. This presented an opportunity to solidify such benefits by rewarding them at the end of the study. Thus, it was agreed that a portion of my PhD budget could be utilised to reward sustained engagement in the study via the means of a gift voucher. The gift vouchers could then afford coaches the opportunity to use them so they could spend time with their family or engage in personal hobbies. When the study finally concluded, several coaches thanked me for the voucher stating it was greatly appreciated, but also that it was not necessary, suggesting remuneration came in the form of taking part in the study itself. For instance, one of the coaches, Max stated, "Firstly, thanks very much for the voucher. That's very kind of you, it's greatly appreciated. However, there was honestly no need to do such a thing. It was a pleasure to be able to help and contribute to your study." Others also commented how they "enjoyed taking part in this study" (Connor) and it "has massively helped" (Angie). This suggests that the coaches would have continued to take part in the study even if gift vouchers were not offered. However, knowing that the coaches could use their vouchers to redeem an experience with their family (e.g., an evening meal or sociable activity) made me feel at ease as doing so would align with previous findings of dissociation from work and spending time with loved ones for well-being (see Chapters 3 and 4). In summary, all coaches enjoyed taking part in the study and commented on the benefits of taking part, which will be discussed further in this chapter.

### **7.2.2 Photo-Elicitation Procedure**

An online auto-driven photo-elicitation approach was implemented over the course of a football season to explore how coaches made sense of and experienced well-being

temporally (see Chapter 5.3.4). The auto-driven (i.e., reflexive) approach was deemed paramount as the production and/or selection of images were completed by the participants, as opposed to me (the author), so that they could share images that facilitated their well-being sensemaking. I asked participants to supply images which best portrayed their well-being experiences at four timepoints throughout the season (e.g., August, December, February, and May). This was to capture the start, midpoints, and conclusion of the season, whilst allowing time in between for potential change or indifference. An online approach was specifically selected due to the geographical spread and sporadic work patterns of the coaches, which is commonplace for professional football personnel (Roderick, 2012). The online flexibility enabled me to recruit and collect data from a larger sample compared to a face-to-face approach as the online video Zoom meetings were utilised to conduct the photo-elicitation interviews over long distances whilst maintaining a personal connection due to visibly seeing one another.

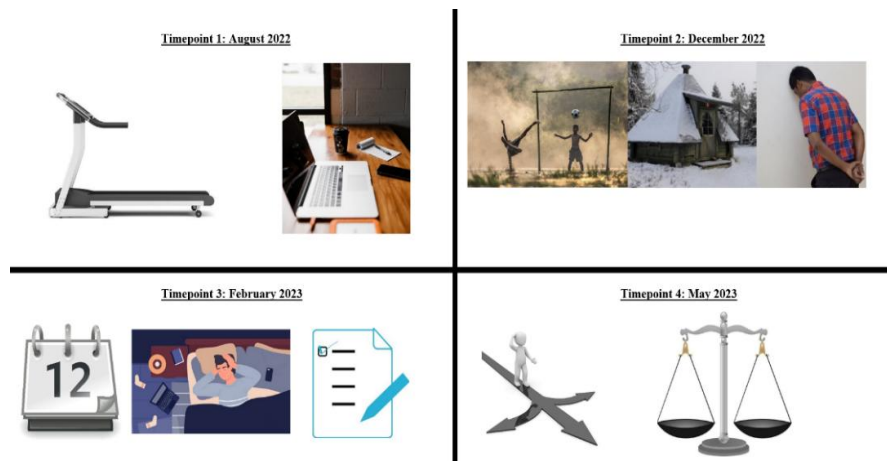
Prior to each online interview, all participants were given a photo-elicitation guidance sheet which provided information on how they could source their chosen images (see [Appendix 9](#)). For instance, participants were promoted to either capture their own images (e.g., via a smart phone and camera) or source them from copyright free websites (e.g., Unsplash and Pixabay). The rationale behind this was threefold; (i) to provide the coaches with as much flexibility as possible due to their hectic work routines; (ii) not wanting the photo-elicitation process to feel like another arduous task to add to their workload; (iii) from a methodological viewpoint, I wanted coaches to have the choice of being able to capture and make sense of their well-being in either a literal or abstract manner. For instance, variety in images enable participants to creatively express complex and sometimes hard to define concepts (Glaw et al., 2017) and they can be used as a vehicle for exploring important events and feelings (Duara et al., 2018). In addition,

within the guidance sheet coaches were briefed on ethical photography practices, such as seeking verbal consent from individuals or organisations who appear in captured images. Coaches were also asked to provide a minimum of two images with no maximal limit during each timepoint so that they felt able to express themselves freely with no restrictions on their ‘voice’.

One week prior to the start of each photo-elicitation interview, I would contact the coaches via email asking them to think about their well-being at that given timepoint, with a request to send their chosen images via email at least 24 hours prior to the interview commencing. The rationale behind this was twofold: (i) by asking the participants to think about and collate images which best captured their well-being a week beforehand initiated cognitive processes prior to the interview; (ii) it enabled me to check image quality, familiarise myself with the content of the image, and allow for a seamless sharing of content online. For example, having access to the participant’s chosen images prior to the online Zoom interview allowed me to seamlessly share my screen of the chosen images during the interview, which replicated the face-to-face nature of placing an image on a table to discuss. After timepoint one the study progressed in subsequent timepoint meetings by enabling participants the opportunity to view their previously provided images. For instance, during timepoint two’s interview, after discussing the participant’s chosen images, they were then presented with the opportunity to comment on their previous timepoint’s images. This enabled temporal comparisons and promoted critical sensemaking regarding whether the images and their well-being experiential accounts were still relevant. Finally, during timepoint four a summary of images was displayed for each participant (see Reflective Diary Insight A) so that they could view the seasonal timeline of their experiential well-being.

### Reflective Diary Insight A.

Within timepoint 4, I presented participants with the opportunity to view all their chosen images throughout the season. This enabled the participants to see the temporal flow of their season and general well-being sensemaking at those given timepoints. I thought this was important as it allowed the participants to pass comment on whether their well-being states had remained the same or fluctuated, as well as whether the past experiences still resonated during the current timepoint. This came about as I noticed during the study that coaches would allude to past timepoints or previous images they had chosen. I thought by resharing their previous images it was an appropriate way to naturally capture and prompt coaches to discuss whether their well-being had or had not changed over time. It also appeared to initiate bouts of reflective practice as coaches began to be more self-aware of how they previously felt in comparison to the present moment. Additionally, it led some coaches to identify periods of the season that may have been more beneficial for well-being than others. For instance, Michael's four seasonal timepoints are displayed as an example regarding how all the timepoints were presented to the coaches during timepoint four. Michael was able to identify that although the winter period presented some challenges, it also afforded him the opportunity to rest and go on holiday with his family which aided well-being. It aided his well-being as he was able to disassociate from work and 'switch off' (23/05/23).



Another aspect of the photo-elicitation approach which played on my mind was the use of participant images. Prior to the start of the study, it was ethically approved that

participant images would be blurred if identifiable features were present to maintain confidentiality and anonymity. The participant information sheet and consent form clearly stated that images would be used for research and publication purposes, such as within journal articles, conference oral presentations and posters. Thus, coaches were briefed that when they were taking photos, they should be mindful of where they are taking the photos, who is present within them and seek verbal consent. Although, this was guidance as I wanted coaches to capture well-being experiences which mattered to them the most. Afterwards, I would then endeavour to blur the images where possible to maintain confidentiality and anonymity. What played on my mind the most after completing the study was would others question the authenticity of the blurred images, and would they claim the coaches' lived experiences could only be demonstrated if shared openly? My hands were already ethically tied. The last thing I wanted to do was break any ethical procedures and agreements. It left me wondering how images would be interpreted by readers if they were mostly blurred. Do they lose authenticity? Does it lead to ambiguity? Can they be misinterpreted if facial expressions are missing? Would study outcomes have changed if I had communicated to participants that their images would not be anonymised? Upon reflection, I think so and possibly for the worse. I believe providing the coaches with a safe and confidential space to talk about their well-being was more powerful than displaying their images without modifications.

Combining the photo-elicitation approach with interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) afforded the opportunity to convey lived experiences in a detailed and transparent manner (Burton et al., 2017). Given IPA interpretations are grounded in the data (e.g., interview transcripts and supplied images) it was my responsibility as the interpreter to convey the participants' lived experiences as closely to how they communicated them whilst also illuminating the tacit and taken for granted aspects



(Larkin et al., 2006; McCoy et al., 2017). This is why it was important for me to provide context regarding individual timepoints, outlining coaches' current situations whilst supporting this information with excerpts and images to enrich understanding and sensemaking. Nevertheless, it would be interesting to see if researchers could collaborate with coaches in the future to openly share their well-being lived experiences as it may help reduce stigmatisation. For instance, would stigmatisation be reduced if readers could put a name or a face to a coach and their voice? Would this in turn help authenticate the reality of their narratives?

### **7.2.3 Interview Guide**

The interviews were semi-structured in nature as a prompt sheet was developed to keep participants on topic. Although where possible I allowed participants to discuss what they felt was relevant regarding their chosen images and well-being experiences. Also, I structured the interviews to begin with generic discussions around the participants' lives and in subsequent interviews about the time periods in between interviews to ease them into the conversation. For example, initial interviews would start with prompts such as "tell me a bit about yourself" and "how did you get into coaching?", whereas subsequent timepoints would begin with prompts like "fill me in on what I have missed since we last met" and "how have you been since we last spoke?". This approach was imperative to build rapport with the coaches as I was ultimately asking them to display vulnerability in the form of discussing their well-being, which is frequently stigmatised within high-performance sport (Hägglund et al., 2023; Olusoga & Kenttä, 2017). Regarding questions in relation to the supplied images I would ask participants which image they would like to start with. The rationale for this was twofold; (i) it was deemed a subtle but important way to empower the participants so that they did not feel I was dictating the discussion; (ii) I did not want to disturb any sensemaking or storytelling elements (see Reflective

Diary Insight B) in case images were linked (e.g., selecting images in the wrong order causing disruption of thought). Thus, when images were chosen by the participants, I would ask them to articulate why and how they expressed their current well-being (e.g., Why did you select this specific image? How does the image capture to your well-being? How do you make sense of your well-being through this image?).

I consciously maintained generic questioning in the initial phases of the interview or until specific details were divulged by the participants to reduce researcher bias. However, as part of the hermeneutic and interpretive endeavour of IPA (Smith et al., 2022), I would pose certain questions underpinned by their interpretations of the presented images. This is because photo-elicitation interviewing is a collaborative process which encourages joint theorising (Curry, 1986; Glaw et al., 2017). For example, within Reflective Diary Insight A, during timepoint three, Michael selected a stock image of a list which he said captured how he was trying to balance work-life related responsibilities to maintain well-being stability. After initial discussions, I interpreted the image as a priority list and posed the question “where do you [the coach] reside on that priority list?”, to which Michael responded, “I’m not on it”. This question, derived from interpreting the image, prompted Michael to critically evaluate what his absence from the list may mean for his well-being, leading him to widen his horizon of understanding (Gadamer, 2013). Insofar, Michael acknowledged that maybe if he prioritised himself more (e.g., engaged in activities beneficial for his well-being), it may make accomplishing the work-life related responsibilities on his list easier. I continued this approach of using direct questions throughout the study as it encouraged coaches to reflect more deeply about their chosen images. This suggests that asking probing questions that situate the person within the context of the phenomenon may be an essential component for greater well-being management. The use of images helped me situate the coaches within their given context

as they captured and represented current well-being. More effective well-being management may therefore be achievable if coaches were supported to engage in reflective discussions. This suggests that having regular check ins with a sport psychologist who facilitates the reflection on contextual circumstances over time would improve the management of well-being.

### **Reflective Diary Insight B.**

Within timepoint 3, I noticed that some participants were connecting timepoint images to tell a story. In doing so this formulated a narrative and added additional layers to their interpretations, arguably enriching discussions. For instance, Angie’s portrayal of her well-being was articulated in the form of a journey (i.e., her desire to progress in her coaching career within men’s football contexts) as the images pieced together to create a fuller picture. This led Angie to interpret her current well-being in relation to being a woman in a masculine dominant context, whereby she felt as if she was scaling a mountain (e.g., endeavouring to overcome challenges). As demonstrated by Angie’s images, she tries to convey how she would scale one challenge to then start again with another in the distance (20/02/23).



Timepoints 1 – 4

### **7.3 Participant and Author Reflections on Using Photo-Elicitation**

Within this segment, participants’ interview excerpts, provided images, and debrief reflections, as well as my reflective diary extracts and general reflections are used to illuminate how combining the use of visual stimuli with a LIPA approach can be advantageous for both participants and researchers. As a result, both mine and the participants’ reflective accounts of using a longitudinal photo-elicitation approach will be shared in the findings.

### **7.3.1 “I Don’t Really Think About it Until I Have These Kind of Conversations”:**

#### **Widening Horizons of Understanding**

This reflective theme is informed from a selection of participant accounts and my reflective diary extracts to convey how the combined LIPA and photo-elicitation approach widened our horizons of understanding (Gadamer, 2013). For instance, as the study progressed, I noted that multiple coaches perceived the photo-elicitation approach to have intervention-like properties (see [Reflective Diary Insight C](#)).

#### **Reflective Diary Insight C.**

After timepoint 2, I became aware that the photo-elicitation approach began to act as an inadvertent intervention in the sense that it showed signs of a potential well-being management tool. This was because it promoted discussion and enriched sensemaking using images. Coaches began to openly express thoughts and feelings as the study progressed. Also, via reflection the approach appeared to increase the coaches’ self-awareness of experiences which may thwart or facilitate well-being. At the time my reflective diary extract ended with “Hermeneutics – widening horizons?”, suggesting that at this period I had started to see how the images facilitated the interpretation of well-being experiences and developed understanding (03/01/23).

This was noted during timepoint 2 due to seeing how the participants’ perspectives began to differ from the start of the study (e.g., during timepoint 1). This may have been a result of the hermeneutic nature of the methodological approach, as it encouraged the participants and me to interpret how they made sense of their well-being. For example, they were tasked to supply images which best captured their current well-being, and then they were encouraged by me to interpret the images within an interview. Arguably, the interpretation of visual stimuli may not have been as effective if I had not been actively facilitating the process using prompts and reflective summaries. However, through using images to capture and discuss well-being, the coaches’ self-awareness appeared to improve:

Don't take this the wrong way. You probably see it [taking part] as a bit of a pain in the arse at first, because it's another thing on your plate. It's another thing on that hectic image (see [Figure 7.1](#)). But then, taking the time out to actually sit and talk to somebody, about that process, and what's going on. Again, it probably helps certainly sat here thinking now... like I've never really thought about what I can do to control it [well-being]. (Michael, Timepoint 1)

**Figure 7.1**

*Workload challenging well-being*



Michael's narrative illustrates that coaches often struggle to recognize their own well-being during the season without external support, highlighting the importance of prompted conversations. While using images can enhance coaches' self-awareness, the LIPA approach, which incorporates interviews, reveals that coaches may still require a sport psychologist to probe and prompt them during discussions for greater awareness. Without these scheduled conversations, coaches are unlikely to independently recognize fluctuations in their well-being throughout the season, even with the aid of images. What was also clear for most coaches, as captured by Michael, was the benefits of having the opportunity to talk about their well-being. His comment of "taking the time out to actually

sit and talk to somebody” can be interpreted in many ways. For example, “taking the time out” can be interpreted as carving out time from his work schedule, possibly detaching from work to gain time. Then “to sit” represents the notion *to stop*, cease involvement in the non-stop profession for a moment to make time for oneself. This is concluded with “talk to somebody” which speaks volumes, as Michael could have chosen to say partner, friend, colleague, or sport psychologist, but instead stated *somebody*. The impersonal nature of the term ‘somebody’ suggests that having any opportunity to talk openly and have *somebody* (anybody) listen is of benefit as it provides the chance to be heard. The photo-elicitation approach was not originally implemented to increase self-awareness, but it appeared to be an outcome as demonstrated by Michael:

The best example is, like I say, that treadmill (see [Figure 7.2](#)) can be nearly vertical, but your well-being can actually be pretty good because you’re enjoying it. I think it’s really important to have those conversations and get some context around what’s going on. Alright, you’re full on and you’re really busy and you’re not seeing your kids at the minute, but does that mean you’re feeling negative and it’s something that needs to change in that immediate term. It might not be. For me, that could be a really good period professionally. I’m really busy, full on, but do you know what I mean? It’s positive cause we’re playing, well, we’re winning football matches, and that is actually having a positive impact on my well-being and as long as I’m aware of that time with the children is limited, does it then allow me to plan for better time with the children? Do you know what I mean? So it’s, it, it’s, it’s really hard to explain it. You’re turning a negative into a positive really, aren’t you? It’s how you perceive it and it’s how you organise then to make sure to make the most of that limited time. (Timepoint 4)

## Figure 7.2

*Seasons are like treadmills which are tied to well-being*



Here, Michael displays how towards the end of the study his understanding and perspective on well-being was influenced and widened due to supplying and discussing images. For instance, during timepoint 1 he supplied [Figure 7.2](#) to capture the relentless nature of football seasons and their toll on well-being, as seasons come and go like they are on an endless conveyor belt. However, in timepoint 4 Michael reacknowledged those challenging periods, but how his well-being can also thrive depending on the context. Maintaining awareness on various microsystems (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006) such as, club (e.g., successful performances) and family life (e.g., time spent with children) appeared to facilitate the management of well-being. Not only was the participant's perspective widened, but so was mine. For example, when the treadmill image was supplied, initial interpretations led me to perceive exercise as being important for well-being, as images of physical and everyday objects are often more accessible and recognisable to facilitate interpretation (Burton et al., 2017). However, as established through discussions with the participant the image was not a literal representation, confirming the photo-elicitation approach to be successful as understanding had increased through the interview process (Glaw et al., 2017; Harper 2002). Thus, the ability to supply

diverse images not only enabled flexibility but facilitated abstract and symbolic participant interpretations and sensemaking leading to new insights for myself. This widened my horizon of understanding (Gadamer, 2013) not only towards the contextualised nature of well-being, but that the photo-elicitation approach can enrich how well-being experiences are conveyed and made sense of. A lot of thought went into how the auto-driven photo-elicitation approach would be implemented, with specific considerations over the toll it could take on coaches' well-being (see Reflective Diary Insight D).

#### **Reflective Diary Insight D.**

After I had confirmed the use of a photo-elicitation approach I took some time to explore what would be the best way to apply it. For example, I settled upon the auto-driven method as it empowered the participants to actively source their own images, as opposed to me presenting generic images that I thought may be relevant. By placing emphasis on participants having control to bring images they thought was most relevant felt more authentic and aligned with an IPA approach of capturing idiosyncrasies. The next component I pondered over was the amount of images coaches could supply. I did not want to limit or restrict the coaches' abilities to express themselves, but I also wanted some richness from images to facilitate discussions. I decided to encourage coaches to supply a minimum of two images with no maximum restrictions. This was in part to mitigate them picking the first thing that came to their mind with little effort and to encourage deeper and meaningful thought processes. Then it was a matter of deciding what type of images can coaches supply. I remember sitting and pondering over this for some time, reading relevant academic papers and texts, which led me to a scientific but also pragmatic decision that placed the coaches' well-being at the forefront of the study. The decision to



enable the coaches to supply both literal (e.g., real-life) and symbolic (e.g., copy-right free) images was to provide them with flexibility (the pragmatic decision), as well as the opportunity to convey hard to conceptualise thoughts and experiences (the scientific decision). Personally though, I sat there and thought:

“I’m conducting this study and programme of research because I want to help coaches to become more aware of what shapes their well-being and how it could be better managed. I know that their workloads are arduous, and seasons can be relentless, do I really want to add more work to their hectic lives? How can I make it ‘easier’, more convenient, appealing? Will coaches have the time to go round with a camera? Will they even be allowed in their professional club environment?”

With these thoughts, I wanted to place the coaches’ well-being at the heart of the study and to do as much as I could to make it less of a hinderance on their lives. With that in mind coaches were encouraged to express their well-being via literal and/or symbolic images which led to some fascinating interpretations (see Chapters 5 and 6). Looking to my reflective diary, timepoint 2’s extract captures my concerns well “I am trying to be mindful of me/the study adding to their workloads – This timepoint is near to when they will be on holiday/annual leave – some have said they are desperate for a break” (06/12/22). This illustrates that to comprehend how coaches make sense of well-being over time I needed to see both good and bad elements of it. This was conflicting as I never want to see another human being struggling but it was obvious most coaches were overwhelmed and ‘desperate for a break’. Albeit hard to witness, it afforded an opportunity to see the bad and sometimes ugly side of well-being experiences and how coaches make sense of the construct. To create a more holistic picture of well-being I needed to see how coaches perceived all aspects of well-being experiences.

### **7.3.2 “It Sparks a Good Conversation”: Empowering Participants and Increasing Self-Awareness Through Using Reflective Images**

The use of photographic images in interviews have a multitude of benefits such as, prompting the discussion of tacit or latent details which may have otherwise gone unspoken (Harper, 1986; Morrey et al., 2020) and capturing emotional connections to events or experiences curating more meaningful accounts (Kunimoto, 2004). Thus, it was deemed important that coaches were provided the opportunity to source either their own (i.e., literal) or copyright free (i.e., symbolic) images (Duara et al., 2018). This was not only to empower the coaches, but to facilitate discussions around well-being, which is often trivialised, hard to convey (Glaw et al., 2017; see Chapter 3.4.1) and suppressed (Manley et al., 2016; see Chapters 3.4.1.2 and 3.4.2.2). John discusses the power of images over multiple timepoints:

I’ll give you another pat on the back. I don’t ever talk about myself the way I have earlier on... So, um, yeah, I must have been, must have been relaxed. I must have been Okay. I must have been happy speaking, to talk to you. So, uh, cause I don’t do that and I should. (Timepoint 1)

It’s one of the big things I’ve taken from obviously doing this with yourself. Um, the, the power of images, the power of reflection... So those type of images are really, really powerful tools that I’ve started using in meetings and individually and collectively in debriefs (Timepoint 2)

From John’s accounts in timepoint 1 to 2 there appears to be a change in behaviour as his comment “I don’t do that [talk about himself] and I should” indicates a lack of reflection on personal well-being. Whereas, in timepoint 2 he admits to using images as tools to prompt reflection, not only for himself, but within team meetings. This appears to capture stages of the transtheoretical model of behaviour change (Prochaska & Velicer,

1997). For instance, John started in the pre-contemplation stage as he had never considered talking openly about himself or the use of images to facilitate that process. Due to discussing his well-being and becoming familiar with the use of visual stimuli, John entered the contemplation stage as he considered to be more open about his well-being. Then after engaging in the study for a while he widened his horizons of understanding (Gadamer, 2013) on well-being and the use of images as he started to be more open and employ images in his own practice. John's new outlook continues within timepoint 3 when he states "Photos do reflect the bubble or the environment or the place you are [in] at that moment in time." His choice of the word 'bubble' can be considered symbolic, implying the images helped him identify how he is often encapsulated and confined by the coaching context. For example, those operating within professional football can get caught up in its bubble, becoming inhabited by the game they inhabit (Jones & Denison, 2017; McGillivray et al., 2005), suggesting for many in professional football their lifeworld centres around the sport as it is the only thing they have ever done or known. However, the images then led John to *burst* the 'bubble', as he goes on to state:

You probably won't realise or understand how, uh, how, um, you've maybe helped us and reflect and ask questions and maybe even get some answers as well. You've- it's been very, very strong, very powerful from my point of view. So, uh, I've enjoyed it. (Timepoint 3)

Interestingly the 'bubble' John refers to may also capture the masculine culture that surrounds the male football context. In timepoint 2 (see Chapter 5.4.3.1) John previously alluded to how he has been ingrained in football since a young boy and had been a professional footballer for '20 odd years', which suggests he will have been exposed to the game's cultural norms for a significant part of his life. This has historically been the norm within men's football where young men are immersed in a masculinized

game from their early teens (Gearing, 1999). John conveys “everything I’ve known, everything I’ve grown up with in my life” is a result of him being a footballer. However, John reiterates in timepoint 4 how speaking to me and the use of images helped *burst* the stigmatisation ‘bubble’ around talking openly about well-being:

One thing I’m conscious of since speaking to yourself, actually, I’m very, very conscious of, and since- because look, we’re all alpha males. We’re the bravado side of us. We don’t speak, we don’t actually delve too much into the emotional state that you go through. But it wasn’t- it was this realization speaking to yourself and just going through this journey, this pathway with you, just actually opening up on things, and looking at things and realizing ‘Jesus!’ It’s okay to actually talk to somebody about how you’re feeling emotionally, or how you’re feeling mentally and physically. You know, it’s okay to bloody swap a couple of stories or a couple of tales with a fellow man or a fellow human being. Um, so I suppose that’s been a big thing for me because if I’m being honest I never did then. I never would and I never thought I’d ever get to that stage. But yeah, it was good just swapping and chucking those type of, um, those hours that we’ve spent. It’s just, it’s been good reflecting and it’s been good getting things, unloading, getting things off your chest and obviously trigger points that you’ve helped us to look for and that. So, yeah, look, it’s [well-being] probably, um, in a much better place you would’ve thought, but knowing this sport, knowing this job that will only last for a short period of time before you start the cycle again, and you get on that emotional rollercoaster again. (Timepoint 4)

By taking part in the study throughout a season, John was able to reflect on men’s football’s masculine norms and how they can shape one’s identity, as well as inhibit well-being and potential help-seeking behaviours (e.g., openly talking about emotions). I

noticed that his repetition of ‘very’ when claiming he has become more conscious (i.e., aware) signified how his horizon of understanding (Gadamer, 2013) on macrosystem influences (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006) had been widened. I found his proclamation of ‘Jesus!’ pertinent as it encapsulated how it was possibly a eureka moment for him, something which seemed incomprehensible, such as speaking about how one feels in men’s football is beneficial for well-being. I interpreted John’s claim of “I never did then” as reference to never discussing his well-being with others previously, demonstrating a history of suppression, possibly to upkeep the “alpha male” and “bravado” identity professional men’s football demands (Parker, 1996, 2006). His disclosure of “unloading” made him feel good and enabled him to identify ‘trigger points’ which captures the benefits of reflective practices on well-being management. The work of Hägglund et al. (2022) suggests approaches that can raise coaches’ self-awareness regarding demands they encounter will be beneficial for sustainable coaching performance and well-being. They reported after implementing an 8-week mindful self-reflection SMS-intervention that coaches’ self-awareness, perspectives on vulnerability and self-compassion improved (Hägglund et al., 2022). Similar outcomes are demonstrated in the present programme of research, whereby coaches’ comprehension of contextualised systems and how they specifically shape instances of well-being were perceived to improve over a season long period. By prompting coaches to supply images that best captured their well-being at four timepoints throughout the season I helped many to identify how micro (e.g., family life, club performances), meso (e.g., wider staff relations and behaviours), exo (e.g., governing body and train union support), macro (e.g., cultural and gender norms), and chronosystem (e.g., past playing careers and life transitions) interactions influence well-being experiences over time. John was an exemplary case as to how my employment of the

auto-driven photo-elicitation approach increased self-awareness and management of well-being (see [Reflective Diary Insight E](#) and [John's debrief response](#)).

### **Reflective Diary Insight E.**

Where to start here? I was so nervous when I met John, thoughts like “Wow he’s a professional first team football manager” and “He’s not going to have time for me” were ringing through my head. But I was able to push them to one side and approach him at a networking event I attended. We chatted for a while, and then I invited him to take part in my study. He says “of course, grab my info from the organiser” and we parted ways. I left it a while before I contacted him, not to seem too eager.

Whilst I drafted an email together, I remember thinking, “He’s not going to respond, he was just being polite.” I sent the first email which received no response, I followed up with a second to which I received a response from John’s wife, claiming they had been away on holiday and that the email I had been provided was used by her. She apologised on John’s behalf and passed on another email. While all this was happening, I was nervous to not lose the opportunity to interview someone of John’s calibre. To my surprise, after a third email I received a positive response, whereby John said if I wanted to meet in person we could do so over a “cuppa”.

We arranged our first interview, and it was only then, when we were on the online call, that I remembered how intimidated I felt by John. He’d not done anything wrong, but he was your traditional ‘man’s man’, who was direct and to the point. I was trying to be so careful around how I would word questions and approach topics. I vividly remember an incident during the first interview where I thought I’d blown it, and he was going to say he didn’t want to take part anymore. It was towards the end of the interview, and I asked him “How have you found this experience then?” to which John abruptly responds, “You want me to pat you on the back here don’t you?”, my heart sank due to the tone of his voice. I genuinely thought “This is it. He’s going to say I’ve been leading him into desirable responses, or I want gratification”. After a bewildering pause, that probably only lasted a couple of seconds, but for me felt like a minute, John then chuckled and said:

“You know what, I’ll be honest. I found it really positive, um, because I’ve never actually sat and looked at images of myself. Who sits and looks at images of themselves and talks about images of themselves? Uh, so I’ve never done that. So that was nice, decent. Um, I dunno whether you deliberately-- or you’d done that before previously, but it was very, very, very refreshing. I liked it, it’s maybe something I could take on in my own career or life”

I was relieved, not only that John wanted to continue with the study, but that it seemed to have a real meaningful impact for him, reiterated when he followed up with “I’ll give you another pat on the back. I don’t ever talk about myself the way I have earlier on.” As we engaged in more interviews over several seasonal timepoints, it was evident that John’s awareness of his and others’ well-being had improved. As seen from John’s supplied images, his attention shifted from prioritising football to focusing on his family, and how engaging with them led to better management of his own well-being.



Timepoint 1



Timepoint 2



Timepoint 3



Timepoint 4

### **John's Debrief Response.**

It helped me ask questions of myself that I would not normally have done. I became more self-aware of my words and actions upon other people's well-being. Time out or reflection time became a vital tool for me going forward. I've definitely become a more balanced husband, Dad, and coach. Finding key moments to have family time has been a great addition to my weekly planner. I don't allow situations to grow anymore I deal with them in a more pragmatic way and I'm always looking at my staff and players for signs of fatigue stress or other issue that may occur. What is well-being was a constant question you asked... I'm still not sure I can answer that comprehensively but I'm definitely more aware of myself and others' feelings. I've developed strategies to deal with situations and to stop issues building up... which helps not only my working environment but my home life as well. Thank you for asking me to take part in this study. I've got so much from it and if ever you undertake another case study, I would be more than happy to participate. (24/05/23)

Reflecting on a segment of John's earlier narrative, I found it interesting how he initially said fellow man, but then followed up with human being:

You know, it's okay to bloody swap a couple of stories or a couple of tales with a fellow man or a fellow human being. Um, so I suppose that's been a big thing for me because if I'm being honest I never did then. I never would and I never thought I'd ever get to that stage. (Timepoint 4)

Taking a closer look at John's passage it could suggest that he was initially comfortable to 'open up' and "swap a couple of stories" regarding his well-being because I was a "fellow man". Could this imply that for men coaches operating in the alpha male, masculine football culture that they would prefer, or even need a "fellow man" to be able to offload their feelings and emotions as they can more easily relate to one another. It has me thinking, would the entire LIPA study and its findings have been completely different if I was a woman? Would I have experienced resistance, or would coaches have been more inclined to be open and display vulnerabilities? Chapter 4 illuminated how Mikel



and Diego confided in their wives, which points to the importance of trusting relationships, but possibly the naturally caring dispositions associated with women. John does then follow with “human being” which suggests his natural disposition to gravitate towards a “fellow man” could have possibly changed due to taking part in the LIPA study. He now recognises the benefits of confiding in others, whoever that may be, and that they do not need to be a man. I think his ordering of the phrase and abrupt, almost correction captures his widening of horizons (Gadamer, 2013) of ‘opening up’. Now, I understand this can be open to interpretation, but hopefully from my elaborations it can be seen as a possibility. I take great pride in John’s well-being development, for example when I received his debrief response, in combination with the multitude of perceived behavioural changes during the LIPA study (e.g., ensuring he regularly made time for family during the season), I felt like I had made a meaningful difference to his life.

John was not alone in how he found his participation in the study and the use of images beneficial. For instance, Connor addressed how using images was a creative way to express well-being:

Yeah, [using images] that’s a good way of doing it [discussing well-being]. I think it probably sparks a good conversation. I think in truth it just probably gives a good insight into where your head’s at within that moment when you’re searching whichever word you’re using and what you’re searching for... I think it’s quite creative way of doing it, and probably made me think about it, where you don’t always. You’re probably not always in the space to think about it, because you’re so rushed. (Timepoint 1)

I found Connor’s insights interesting as his use of the phrase “sparks a good conversation” suggests that images *ignite* discussions that possibly would not have happened. It is like the timber and kindling (e.g., suppressed emotions, feelings, and

related well-being challenges) are lying their waiting for a “spark” to ignite them (e.g., a question or an image prompt) so the flames can glare (e.g., ability to see and discuss suppressed aspects) and then finally be extinguished (e.g., managed better). Another insight of interest was that Connor articulated how acquiring a symbolic image to capture his well-being meant that he would search for a word or phrase. This means he was cognitively active (Oliffe & Bottorff, 2007) and attributing meaning to his chosen images. Specifically, they were not random chosen images, but images which he perceived to capture an element of well-being. Given during timepoint one Connor stated he was uncertain as to what well-being was, the use of images afforded him the opportunity to articulate something which he initially struggled to (Glaw et al., 2017). I think this is a meaningful contribution to the well-being research field, because well-being will be perceived differently, for different people, in differing contexts and what better way to capture and express that than with images. Upon further reflection during timepoint 1, Connor also identified that asking questions in combination with supplying images increased his self-awareness:

You know as much as you try to reflect, for me on those journeys home and stuff. I think being asked questions that maybe sometimes you don't ask yourself, or it's useful just to talk through it, and like anything, sometimes I find myself again saying things that I think I should be doing that maybe I'm not doing. (Timepoint 1)

Specifically, Connor acknowledged that he would sometimes come up with his own solutions by talking through his well-being, leading him to identify things that he should be doing but has not maintained. For example, Connor spoke often about going for walks or seeing friends which helped his well-being, but that he had stopped engaging in such activities. I believe this highlights how having the opportunity to talk through

one's well-being can actively lead to self-identifying how behaviours could change to improve well-being management.

### **7.3.3 “I Just Hope I’ve Helped you as Much as You’ve Helped me”: Photo-Elicitation as a Well-Being Management Tool**

This reflective theme captures coaches' reflections on the application of the photo-elicitation approach and the research more generally. A common theme was coaches found that bringing and using visual stimuli in interviews was beneficial and they enjoyed having the opportunity to engage in discussions around their well-being:

I found it [photo-elicitation approach] useful. It doesn't happen very often, I've actually looked forward to a lot of them [our conversations], which, you know normally for research studies you do them, but you don't really look forward to them, because normally you're just hoping to give a bit back. This one I've actually looked forward to because it's been quite good talking through [well-being]... It's not just benefiting you. I know it can feel like that, but for me, I do honestly find some of the stuff, some of this one's been particularly useful for well-being and managing myself, but also other things that people have done. It makes me pull a lot of ideas together. I do often finish it [the interview], make notes, and it comes together to something (Connor, Timepoint 4)

This is first one [opportunity to reflect] and it's good. Not kinda sounding funny or clever, I enjoy it. It's kinda good to have that conversation. So again, maybe structurally change, that might be a method. So we've talked about using the player care, it might be a structural change where yes, that role changes to player and staff and the method is the availability of them to sit and have a chat and basically do what you've done there with me. Potentially that changes coach's well-being and it lightens the load, and it stops that feeling of sort of endless [deep

breath] one thing after another and getting dragged down with it. I don't know. It certainly does that for me. If that was an option in the workplace, I would probably take that up based on this process with you. (Michael, Timepoint 2)

A possible explanation why the coaches enjoyed taking part in the research could be because it was most likely their first opportunity to openly discuss their well-being and associated feelings. Connor expressed how engaging in the research had led to better management of himself and well-being as he was able to take notes after interviews and increase his general self-awareness. Moreover, due to Michael enjoying his engagement in well-being discussions, he began to ruminate over how it could be implemented within a club. His enthusiasm was captured when he stated that if the research process of using photo-elicitation to discuss his well-being was offered as an option within the workplace he would engage in the activity. Within timepoint 2, Michael brainstormed with me around how clubs have player care systems in place, but coaches are often neglected:

So that conversation there, as stupid as it is and as simple as it is until you just said it there, and I never thought the head of player care could actually look after staff as well, and that's what I say, you just get wrapped up in it. You think such a simple idea doesn't register with people. (Timepoint 2)

For Michael, engaging with me in discussions around well-being support sparked a moment of realisation, whereby his horizon of understanding around club systems widened (Gadamer, 2013). Michael suggests that one can become engrossed in institutionalised practices and norms, insofar new ideas or ways of operating do not always register. This could be explained via Seamon's (2018) work, whereby an individual can become overly immersed in their given place (i.e., context) leading to a lived obliviousness as to how slight changes in their actions and everyday environments could result in improved well-being. Transitioning into timepoint 3, Michael became

overtly aware that the only available opportunity to check in with his well-being was via the present research:

I think I said it to you before. I find it [taking part in the research study] really useful, but because that's out the norm, because obviously this is a personal thing and it wouldn't be happening unless you got in touch and we were doing this, you know, it's not like you work at [this club] and this is a regular thing built into it-- You're back to that conversation... it's a regular thing for players, to kind of be aware of their well-being and give a score on it. That's kind of a daily, weekly, regular process. Whereas for us [coaches], it never happens. So, it only happens when I have these meetings with you. (Timepoint 3)

Michael reflects on how his well-being was only benefiting due to taking part in the present research and that his club does not afford him the opportunity to explore his well-being or provide structured support like they do for players. This captures how coaches are deprioritised in comparison to the players at the club, which could possibly be due to institutionalised norms. For example, it is engrained within coaches to care for others (e.g., players), yet personal self-care is often neglected (Cronin et al., 2020). The photo-elicitation approach sparked discussions that led Michael to realize how this applied to his own experience:

If I'm saying it's [using images to discuss well-being] positive and it's helpful from a reflective point of view, makes you more aware in the moment of how you're feeling, what you're prioritizing, what you should be doing. Like you think how many times in this conversation I've said, uh, never thought about it like that. So I selected the list [image] of prioritizing (see [Figure 7.3](#)). Until you said to me, "where are you on it?" Not till that point, I thought, "Actually, I'm not on it or could I be on it? How could I be on it?" It never even enters your head. You just

get on and do the task that you've gotta do. So, it makes you more aware, doesn't it? And potentially it affects your behaviour, which potentially affects your output, doesn't it? (Timepoint 3)

Michael's narrative captures how the use of visual stimuli can prompt collaborative and negotiated interpretations between the participant and the researcher (Bates et al., 2017; Curry, 1986; Romera Iruela, 2023). For instance, I was able to use the participant's supplied image as a prompt for more inquisitive questions (see Reflective Diary Insight F), which subsequently led to a widening of horizons (Gadamer, 2013).

**Figure 7.3**

*Prioritising helps well-being*



**Reflective Diary Insight F.**

I initially used the participants' images to prompt discussion as I would ask questions about how their images captured well-being and why they had chosen it. However, IPA is an interpretative endeavour which equally relies on the researcher to interpret the participants' narratives. Thus, it seemed relevant to offer interpretations on the images that were supplied. I found that my interpretations, which I sometimes formulated into a question, would often provide the participants the opportunity to broaden their horizon of thinking. For instance, Michael supplied a stock image of a to do list (Figure 7.3) which was to capture how prioritizing helped manage his well-

being. Due to him supplying this image it sparked the thought of “where does he reside on this list?” I asked the question, which led Michael to come to the realisation that he was not on his priority list. Michael then pondered for a while over whether his well-being would improve if he prioritised himself more, as it would enhance his work efficiency on other tasks because his mind would be in a better state. It was not my intention for this revelation to be the case, as I simply wanted to offer my interpretation of the image which seemed to capture work as the priority. What this and other similar instances throughout the study led me to realise, was that the interpretative endeavour of IPA and the use of visual stimuli complemented each other well as it developed richer interpretations and sensemaking (23/05/23).

Michael went on to question whether his and other coaches’ well-being could be better managed if they were exposed to more regular check-in periods where they could discuss their well-being:

I think it’s [photo-elicitation approach and talking about well-being] all beneficial. Um, it’s just whether it could be more beneficial if it’s more frequent, because there’ll be certain things that happen between those periods, do you know what I mean? Where potentially you need to get a bit of a handle on sort of the emotions and the swinging of the scale, so to speak. So, so like August to December potentially. If you split each of them into two and you end up with eight points of reflection... it’d be interesting to know what the impact of that would be. Whether it sort teaches you maybe to keep a constant handle on it, rather than put it away in a box and get on with it and then get it back out again. (Timepoint 4)

Michael’s account captures how sustained engagement in the study, or a similar workplace intervention could be more beneficial for well-being management. This aligns with the process-person-context-time (PPCT) model’s proximal processes element (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006) as it suggests prolonged interactions over time have a greater impact than those more sporadic. Also, due to Michael discussing the option to

have more timepoints and demonstrating intrigue in the approach, it implies that he would like to partake in similar practices for a longer period. Michael goes on to state that the study will have a lasting impact:

Um, obviously it's been a great process for me, really enjoyed it and been useful, and it's, without sounding corny, it will have sort of a lasting impact for me and like I say, it's that increased awareness and, and how you manage that [well-being]. Um, so yeah. Thank you to you from me for that because I know it'll have an impact on me. (Timepoint 4)

According to Michael, the study and its methodological approach seem to have improved his self-awareness and well-being management. Similarly, John addressed how his participation in the study has also had an impact:

I would just say, um, uh, maybe this wasn't supposed to be the outcome or the conclusion of this project, but you've actually helped me. So, um, as much as, uh, I've probably been helping you along the way. You've been helping me along the way. So, I don't know whether it's worked well for us both or what, but I didn't actually think coming into it-- I thought I was just going to help you. Um, I was just going to help somebody out and that's as far as I thought about it, really if the truth be known. Then as I went on, I'm going, "Well, Jesus", it's proven really beneficial towards me... Now, I'm not sure that was supposed to be the way, uh, initially when we started, but it certainly ended up, uh, taking that pathway or that course of action. So, it's, um, been really beneficial for me as well to, have that hour and that chat and every now and again, really, to be fair. So, I've really enjoyed it, I have to say. Um, I probably wouldn't answer the phone or I'd probably just say no, really. But the, the fact that I've really bought into it and



gone with it. I've really, really enjoyed it, to be fair. So, I just hope I've helped you as much as you've helped me, if that makes sense. (Timepoint 3)

John's narrative captures the collaborative process of the study as he had not only helped me by offering his well-being insights, but I had also supported John by providing him the opportunity to openly discuss his well-being lived experiences. With qualitative work it can be challenging to demonstrate 'impact', especially in comparison to quantitative approaches, but accounts like John's affirm that the study has demonstrated impact in many ways. For example, the study not only provides insight into football coaches' well-being lived experiences and sensemaking, but it captures the benefits coaches perceived from having regular well-being check-ins. John reaffirms how participation in the study has led to behaviour change:

Well... from our conversations, from our uh, chats and on reflection of images. Do you know what I do now with the players? So, we presented to the players, and I've done it this morning... what I've learned from speaking to yourself, um, and over the course of the conversations I've had with you, I always, always include positive images. (Timepoint 2)

It's been positive reflecting back on pictures and I've actually done that to, um, my two previous jobs. I've gone back into coaching pictures of me, uh, interviewing and pictures of me on the touch line and I'm thinking, "well, why was I in that state? Why am I getting myself worked up? Why am I getting, letting me emotions spill over and things like that." So, I've certainly got more control of my own self, well-being and emotions. (Timepoint 3)

John's narratives demonstrate how his participation in the study over time has led to positive behaviour changes, such as in the form of his coaching practices and self-awareness.

### 7.3.4 “I’ve Just Gotta Pick the Kids up”: Navigating Work-Life Complexities

This reflective theme captures how some coaches during certain timepoints were ‘shoe horning’ their participation in the study into their already busy lives. This became apparent throughout the season long study as there were several instances whereby interviews were rearranged, interrupted, or squeezed in during coaches’ downtime due to limited spare time. For example, during timepoint 1, Connor conducted his interview at home where he was interrupted twice. The first instance was by his wife, “Yeah, so I mean the age group I’ve got... my wife has just come in with the dog” and then by his son, “Sorry my lads come in... say hello quickly and then go... Alright has mum said you can have something? Just get rice cake quickly then.” At the time, this highlighted to me that coaches were fitting me in and around their personal time, something which was already restricted due to work demands. This continued for Connor, as in timepoint 3 he once more conducted his interview at home, which led to confusions with spending time with family as demonstrated by his son interrupting the interview to be in the same room as him:

[child enters room] “gimme two seconds... [child enters room again] two secs my lads coming in [chuckles]. [son], you alright? What’s up? Are you just gonna sit down? Yeah, keep the volume down then... He’s [son] in the room now, so I’ll have to stop swearing [chuckles].”

This highlighted how the study and I were taking precious time away from coaches and their family which did not sit well with me. Especially when the study progressed, and I began to realise the importance coaches placed on spending time with family and dissociating from work for their well-being (see [Reflective Diary Insight G](#)).

### Reflective Diary Insight G.

Prior to starting the interview, Connor had just picked his child up from school. When they arrived home Connor jumped straight on the call with me to take part in timepoint 2's interview. At the one-hour point of the interview Connor's child wanted to come into the room whilst he was on the call. At first, I did not think much of this interaction and believed that it was just how children behave. However, it was not until afterwards when I reflected on the conversation that I am a probable cause behind such behaviour from his son. For example, I wrote "am I taking away the precious and little time they (coaches) get with their family?" The last thing I wanted to be doing was disrupting work-life balances, which is why I made a conscious effort to ensure coaches were in control of the interviews and when they needed to leave by. I remember interjecting at points throughout the study telling coaches they could leave at any point if they needed to, and this also became a common theme when starting the interviews whereby I would ask coaches their availability. For example, at the start of interviews I would ask how long they could speak for or if they had to leave at any point. This was so that I could navigate the conversations in a timely manner, without keeping them any longer than they had to give. I wanted to ensure that their participation was not a hindrance on their personal life, most importantly because the study itself focuses on coaches' well-being and I did not want to be contributing negatively towards it, and because I did not want any of the coaches to decide they could no longer take part due to its demands on work-life balance (03/02/23).

Alternatively, another reflection on this situation may highlight how I am not the ‘problem’ as a PhD student asking coaches to speak about their well-being as not one of the coaches were forced or coerced into taking part. As I have reflected, I actively made sure interview dates and times were chosen by the coaches to suit their schedules and made sure coaches had a voice at the start so they could clarify their availability on the day. This begs the questions “Do coaches have a tendency to give so much to other people (like me in the interview) because they are hardwired to care for and support others?” and “Could it be their natural disposition to put others before themselves which may be compromising their own well-being and work-life balance?” Possibly others and I are not the problem, but how coaches have been educated to care for others is, as the caring for others aspect of their role may have gone too far that they disregard themselves too easily.

Work-life demands were apparent for all coaches as demonstrated by Michael when he said that he had to leave at 3pm during timepoint 2’s interview because he had “gotta pick the kids up” from school. Moreover, John’s availability became reduced after returning to full-time management, to the extent where we would arrange calls late in the evening (e.g., calls at 6:30pm and 7:30pm) after he had returned to his hotel or Airbnb. For example, during timepoint 2 and 3, John stated that he would struggle to give me his time due to just walking in from work:

“No, no, no. Listen, I’ll just, uh, I’m fine. I’ve got half hour, 20 minutes, half an hour. It’ll be fine. No problem at all. I’m gonna get away and watch that [televised] game and get my dinner, and then I’m gonna have, uh, I’m due a shower as well. I’m not-- I’m only in, I’m not long in, I just, uh, just came in off the training ground.” (Timepoint 2)

“Well, I’ve just had a bite to eat... I, I’ve got through the door. Um, I just had a, a quick bite to eat. I, I said I better have something to eat because, uh, if I’m on the phone for an hour, I’ll be peckish when I got off.” (Timepoint 3).

I remember during this timepoint thinking it was late for an interview and when John divulged that he had just walked through the door I felt torn between conducting the interview or rearranging (see Reflective Diary Insight H).

#### **Reflective Diary Insight H.**

When John had told me that he had just walked through the door I said, “I really appreciate you trying to fit me in, but again, if at any moment you do need to get off or you know, I’m going on a little bit, just let me know and, uh, we, we can wrap things up.” It was one of those moments where I wanted to obtain his well-being insights, but I did not want to do so at the expense of his well-being. Consequently, I ensured to check in with John at multiple points throughout the interview to see if he was doing okay for time. When the interview concluded we had been speaking for just shy of an hour which upon reflection possibly demonstrates the beneficial nature of taking part and having honest conversations about his well-being. For example, John must have felt comfortable talking as he had initially only provided me with 20-30 minutes. Time constraints played a big part in this study as I had referenced them in the reflective diary during every timepoint. For instance, within the diary I commented that most coaches I initially contacted to take part in the study did not because they were too busy or did not have enough time. I also, took note around timepoint 2 (November/December) that I was mindful of adding to coaches’ workloads due to that specific period of the season being where some coaches could

take annual leave and be on holiday. In addition, this led me to reflect on when I was contacting coaches, such as sending messages or emails outside of working hours. This was a conflicting experience as I found that coaches were only available outside of working hours, but it meant them ‘sacrificing’ personal time to respond and engage in the study. As a result of such active reflections during the study, I decided to give the coaches more autonomy. For example, rather than me telling coaches my availability for our interviews, I asked them during the concluding segments of interviews when would be best for them to next meet. The rationale for doing so was twofold, firstly coaches could select a time and date that best suits them and their schedules, but I also placed emphasis on them selecting times in a rough month period that would best capture their well-being (e.g., start of month, mid-point, or end). This enabled coaches to tailor study interviews around their given contexts.

However, one of my final reflections within the diary said “am I taking away personal time? Time to switch off?” This was something that continuously played on my mind, but I would like to think from the coaches’ positive reflections and debrief comments that their participation in the study was worth it (24/05/23).

In addition, Michael’s and John’s accounts demonstrate the complexities of interviewing and create a more holistic account of quality, as opposed to descriptive mean values of interview times. For example, some interviews were restricted in length not due to my interviewing approach, but due to the limited availability of the participants. Thus, interview mean durations and ranges are poor standards of quality. I believe that actively engaging John for an hour as opposed to the initial 20-30 minute timeframe he provided in an ethical and supportive manner is more meaningful than the interview duration itself. Similarly, Michael’s timepoint 1 interview is 45 minutes in length, but this was the case due to the only availability he had. Therefore, contextual sensitivity should be given to

qualitative work and used as markers of quality (Yardley, 2017) as opposed to positivist traditions like quantity over quality.

### 7.3.5 “No-one to Turn to”: A cry for Support?

A multitude of coaches addressed how they were often deprioritised and neglected in comparison to their players. Within this segment, Max’s reflective accounts and stark debrief response are used to capture how taking part in the research was able to provide a platform for coaches to openly share their voices. Throughout the study, Max highlighted the lack of support in place for coaches’ well-being:

There should be more help for coaches and managers. There should be more help. I think the intense nature of the job and the demand for instant results that we talk about and the pressure and as a result that’s put on them and what they go through day on day and what their families are put through. I think there needs to be more in place for these people... [because] what help do you get? The higher up you go they might have more help in terms of a psychologist, or you know, they might have, somebody, they might get a bit more support because financially the club’s able to do it. So, for the Liverpool’s, you know, that’s nothing, but for us that support’s not given because it’s a financial burden to a football club... they can’t give that support because they can’t afford it basically, or they don’t want to pay the expense probably. I think they probably could afford it, but they don’t want to because it’s a service that they don’t see any value of. (Timepoint 1)

Max’s account highlights how psychological support is lacking for those residing at the lower tiers of the football pyramid. According to Max this was due to the finances associated with employing a sport psychologist and how club’s may see their services of little value. Whereas Max see’s the value in having a sport psychologist because they are someone to talk to:

There could be a psychologist, it could be a mentor, it could be somebody that you can pick the phone up to somebody that you can meet and just talk to. They might not have answers-- I listen to a lot of managers podcasts and speak to managers, and they all say it's a lonely place. Being a manager is lonely. [Famous first team manager] says when you go into the manager's office after the game, the managers always gravitate to each other because they just know what they're going through... It's just constant nonsense and dealing with just rubbish all the time. Dealing with like abuse and you know, and whatever. They're the ones that go through it cuz they're the face of the organization. The face of the team. They need something, by something it is probably an expert ideally, a psychologist. (Timepoint 1)

Max goes on to claim that the League Managers Association (LMA), Players Football Association (PFA) and clubs need to think about how they can better support managers and coaches from a "psychology and well-being point of view". Max believed one way in doing so would be for such trade unions and organisations to provide mentors for clubs:

A mentor from the LMA or somebody that I described earlier, that's not doing the job, but somebody that would be doing the same job as me as what I'm doing for a player. Just somebody that's there. They're just there to talk to, you know? And they can give their advice and they can give their expertise of having been a manager and being in that position. They might not be able to give them specific expert like things to do, try this, do that, and things mental. They can't give them things that you get from a degree in psychology, but they can give advice from having been in that role from their own experiences. And I just think sometimes just talking or having somebody that you can talk to. Again, everything I read



about mental health, you know, everything's just talk to someone, just talk, talk, talk. That's the biggest thing for me. Don't keep it in you. You keep reading it. Don't keep it in. Don't bottle it up, talk to somebody. You know, you hear about unfortunate incidences of suicide and it's like, well they never talked to anyone, nobody was aware of the situation. It's the same kind of thing. Just having somebody that you can talk to and almost just be like, "oh [exhale] God, I got off my chest now or now I've said that to you actually. It's like, yeah, you said that a bit clearer now. Oh, actually I've thought of this now where I've--", you know, just somebody you can bounce off. And I think it's very hard for a manager to, I think it's hard to do that with somebody that, an assistant who you're with all the time, or your family. You don't want to burden them. You don't want to, you know, just somebody, separate, and I say the same for players. A psychologist, it doesn't have to be a psychologist for the football club. Just someone that comes in once, every now and then, who's separate from the staff... You know, who's maybe not in your bubble. (Timepoint 1)

The severe comparison made by Max of coaches operating in isolation and suppressing their emotions to suicide appears to be a cry for help, which could be because football coaches stereotypically do not vocalise their feelings or demonstrate vulnerability. This is not a reflection on coaches restricting their voice but is more of a reflection on how the environment and culture does not afford opportunities to vocalise how they truly feel. It almost suggests that coaches do not vocalise how they feel because there are no appropriate support systems in place, but then no support systems will be initiated if true narratives are not shared, a never-ending cycle of silence.

### Max's Debrief Response

The biggest impact your study had on me personally was simply the fact of getting me to open up and actually talk about my well-being. I've always been aware of my well-being, although possibly not enough, but have never openly discussed it with anyone else. Just by talking about it, it naturally makes you more conscious of where you are at that moment in time and take notice if you feel you need to do anything about it. This has enabled me to realise the importance of reflection. What I will take away from the process of the study is to have continuous period of reflection over a set period of weeks. By doing so, I feel I'll be able to address the rights and wrongs of that period, take note of ways to improve my well-being in similar circumstances but most importantly, create the opportunity to reset, refresh, and start again with clarity in mind. It also made me question the possibility and importance of not only doing this individually but with all coaches as whole department. Overall, I stressed many times about the lack of support for Managers in particular. It's such an isolated job at the best of times with ridiculous amounts of stress/pressure placed on them but more often than not they have no-one to turn to. Just the ability to talk to someone professionally would make such a huge difference to a manager's well-being in my opinion. Psychology is valued as extremely important for players so why wouldn't such an importance be placed on the figure head of the whole organisation. After all, this sole person, is the constant, for the message which is being distributed to everyone else on a daily basis. Unfortunately, as I continue to say, money is the deciding factor in all of this. Until football clubs and owners in particular understand the importance of training the mind and the impact a manager's well-being can have on the whole environment, nothing will change, and excuses will continue to be made as to why they can't invest in to such a process (24/05/23).

Something to note which I think speaks volumes is that all of Max's narratives to this point, excluding his debrief comments were made in timepoint 1. Thus, this could be because Max has gone so long without being able to voice his well-being concerns. He appears to have grasped this opportunity to communicate how he and other coaches and managers are struggling in isolation with little support. Max maintains his stance within

timepoint 3 as he states how participation in the study is good for his well-being but that consistency with such approaches is paramount:

I think this [taking part in the study] is good for well-being. I go back to the psychology thing, somebody to talk to. I think that's good for well-being, I think it's vital for well-being. Use of images are great as in it highlights things and it maybe makes you aware of things or certainly puts things into perspective or focus or whatever... [but] I don't think it has a massive impact and change unless you're doing it consistently and I think that's probably the key, is consistently doing these kinds of things... Monthly minimum doing that in terms of talking and going through it and just making you self-aware of things. (Timepoint 3)

The consistency element Max speaks of resonates once more with the PPCT model's (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006) proximal processes, as he claims that it would be more beneficial if regular conversations were scheduled. For instance, Max goes onto to state that he would not necessarily need the images, but just someone he can openly speak with and demonstrate vulnerability to:

I wouldn't necessarily need the images for that. I just need to talk, I just need a chat, I think, and that's when I go back to that psychology, just the thing for people to open up. The ability to open up and be vulnerable. Just that I think is massive. I think that's massive and vital really, and like I say it doesn't happen anywhere near as much as what it should... But I think I would get benefit from having, even if it was a monthly, a fortnight, a monthly chat with someone. It would benefit me cuz it would just keep things in the back of your mind ticking over and maybe make you conscious of things. (Timepoint 3)

I believe that Max's accounts, as well as all the football coaches who took part in the study, demonstrate the need for more, or any at all, consistent psychological support

and that organisations must do better to cultivate environments that afford coaches the opportunities to have open conversations about their well-being and demonstrate vulnerability. A step in the right direction would be to make men's professional football environment's more psychologically safe as it would hopefully encourage coaches to demonstrate more help-seeking behaviours, such as asking for support.

### **7.3.6 A Summary of Components Which led to Better Well-Being Management**

I believe it is necessary and important to reflect upon and consolidate what components of the multi-modal approach appeared to aid well-being comprehension and management. Insofar, that they could formulate the key components of a well-being management tool in future research.

Firstly, the use of creative methods such as the auto-driven photo-elicitation approach can help individuals articulate their feelings more effectively (Bates et al., 2017; Kunimoto, 2004). The integration of visual stimuli into discussions of well-being can enhance self-awareness and make the reflection process more engaging and insightful (Burton et al., 2017). The use of such methods is essential for illuminating tacit and latent well-being experiences and sensemaking (Glaw et al., 2017). Without the use of images, I do not believe that interpretations would be as rich and insightful as they currently are, as the use of images prompted coaches to go beyond surface level accounts and initial reflections towards more meaningful interpretations.

It was apparent that providing coaches with regular opportunities to 'check in' throughout a season can significantly aid the management of their well-being, as it allows them to identify and address issues or challenges as they arise, rather than letting them accumulate. Sustained engagement in such check-ins over time appeared to positively impact well-being management, possibly because prolonged interactions (e.g., proximal processes) have a greater influence than sporadic interactions (Bronfenbrenner, 2005).

For instance, having four check-ins across a season is more beneficial than a single check-in, and suggests that monthly check-ins may be even more effective for promoting potential behaviour change. Moreover, coaches appeared to benefit from the guarantee of confidentiality and anonymity during their participation. This in turn likely cultivated a safe space for them to openly discuss their well-being without any consequences or judgment.

The use of IPA and MI principles (Miller & Rollnick, 2009; Smith et al., 2022) during interviews, like researcher interpretations (e.g., hermeneutic endeavours), open questions, affirmations, reflections, and summaries were beneficial. I highly doubt the coaches would have engaged as much as they did if no IPA or MI principles were implemented within the semi-structured interviews. Future well-being interventions and management tools should aim to build practitioner-client relationships and be a collaborative process (Bates et al., 2017). For instance, participant-led understandings can be enriched with practitioner interpretations and insights to create a far richer picture of well-being. This reiterates the importance of having someone like a sport psychologist to initiate and prompt collaborative conversations about well-being.

A humanistic approach (Rogers, 1959) and its foundational components would benefit well-being interventions and management tools as its use of empathetic listening and understanding, helps participants feel comfortable to ‘open up’ about their well-being. This is mainly because the approach builds a strong relationship between the interviewer and the participant, fostering a safe space for honest and reflective discussions. This reflective practice can increase self-awareness and highlight factors that influence their well-being positively or negatively. The humanistic approach also empowered participants by giving them control over the discussion topics and encouraging them to lead the conversation. This empowerment is crucial for well-being as it respects the

participants' autonomy and promotes their active involvement in managing their well-being.

### **7.3.7 Personal Reflections on the LIPA Study and Well-Being**

There was a multitude of things that went well during the LIPA study and others that challenged the LIPA process. All of which subsequently shaped my personal well-being during this time. One reflection focuses on the magnitude of the LIPA task and how much data it yielded. The LIPA study harnessed approximately two days' worth of audio data and 84 well-being related images from 32 interviews. Saying that out loud really hits home how demanding the LIPA study was and its impact on my well-being throughout the ~10-month period. For instance, purely organising the interviews for each of the four timepoints was a real challenge as I had to be flexible and work around the football coaches' busy work schedules. This meant at times conducting interviews late in the evening such as from 8pm onwards. It also led me to conduct some interviews on the same day, there were multiple instances where I would have two interviews a day and then one case where I had three. Two was just about manageable, but three was so taxing on my personal well-being. It was mentally and physically taxing because I was not conducting 20–30-minute snapshot interviews, but engaging photo-elicitation interviews with an average length of 87 minutes throughout an entire day. I vividly remember the time where I had booked in three interviews on the say day thinking “It cannot be that bad, as all I am doing is speaking to people.” How wrong I was. It was the 1<sup>st</sup> of December 2022, and I had three interviews scheduled for 11am, 2pm and 4pm. All of them lasted over an hour with an average time of 80 minutes. I was so drained. I was going from back-to-back interviews with very little time for respite in between. Turning to my reflective diary for insight into the demands of interviewing, it was apparent my well-being was being thwarted (see [Reflective Diary Insight I](#)).

### Reflective Diary Insight I.

“Something I have become aware of is how draining the interviews can be for my well-being. [It’s] Mentally demanding thinking of prompts and listening and interpreting what they say. Also, some interviews flow naturally [whereas] others demand a lot of effort and focus. The well-being states [the] participants are in tend to shape this.” (06/02/23)

“The LIPA study can be draining, and [my] own well-being can take a hit at times. Especially when booking in multiple interviews on the same day (e.g., 2+3 same day). [I] Feel tired and want to get data collected – trying to maintain upbeat and positive in interviews, but they demand a lot cognitively. Active listening and engagement/interpretation.” (10/05/23)

“Three interviews in one day were draining and overwhelming – I would not advise but was done due to participants’ schedules and commitments. Some interviews took place in the evening as working around the coaches was paramount – same with cancellations and rescheduling – whatever suited them. Ironically that meant I had to sacrifice some of my well-being to get the job done.” (23/05/23)

As captured by my reflective diary extracts, the interviews did challenge my well-being at times due to a multitude of reasons, such as how engrossed I was in them (e.g., active listening and interpreting), scheduling multiple interviews close together, working around the coaches’ busy workloads, and the length of the interviews, which were all compounded by the duration of the study. As the thesis’ findings have demonstrated sustained and prolonged exposure to proximal processes (e.g., reciprocal interactions) within our environment can have the greatest influence (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). Therefore, it is no surprise that my fixation with and inurement in the LIPA study and its

respective data over a 10-month period took its toll. Upon further reflection, engagement with the LIPA data and analysis far surpassed 10-months as this timepoint was the conclusion of data collection with most analysis ongoing. The matter of the fact is analysis has been ongoing for approximately two years. This might explain my bouts of demotivation throughout this period as I have been immersed in the same data for over half of my PhD.

Something which did motivate me though and aid my well-being was the coaches feedback and responses to taking part in the study (see Chapter 7.3.3). It is always nice to receive positive feedback, but for me it was the reassurance I needed. Reassurance that what I was doing was not only working but benefitting the coaches. I experienced imposter syndrome quite regularly throughout the LIPA study and there were periods where I doubted myself, such as the first set of interviews. I remember questioning if coaches would ‘get on board’ with the idea or whether they may be resistive and disengaged. I had to back myself and hope that being my usual authentic and genuine self would radiate through to the coaches. I think it is important to show that you are human, you’re going to get things wrong, or things may not run smoothly. I recall briefing coaches on the call that it is a new and novel process they may have never experienced and that is fine because I had not either till this point. Almost to make it a collaborative learning process between me and the coaches (Curry, 1986; Glaw et al., 2017). Yes, I had tested the technology and procedure. Yes, I had read around the photo-elicitation research. However, no, I had not done any of this with the coaches I was about to interview. You can predict to an extent what may happen, but the rest is free flowing, and you must be flexible, go with the flow, and that’s what I did. I’ve looked back at my reflective diary, and it was clear to see that coaches respected my approach to the interviews, and they saw the perceived benefits (see [Reflective Diary Insight J](#)).



### Reflective Diary Insight J.

On the 23<sup>rd</sup> of May 2023 I wrote a selection of ‘concluding feelings and thoughts’ about the LIPA study. I will now share some:

All participants stated they enjoyed taking part in the study and most, if not all stated they benefitted from it. I finished several interviews with a smile. Not purely because that was one less interview but because of participant feedback and complements. I felt overwhelmed with praise [which is] not something I’m used to, but it was greatly appreciated.

Personally feel that good rapport was established between me and the coaches. One even text me about his well-being after his team won a pivotal football match. The text was sent at 00:14am.

I was praised by some coaches for just listening and questioning rather than trying to provide advice or solutions. The questions got them thinking and reflecting.

Phrasing questions or prompts as ‘correct me if I am wrong’ or ‘from what I understood.’ This allowed them the chance to correct or add further clarification/interpretation.

Allowing the coaches to see all their chosen images throughout the season by creating a summary page was beneficial. Visually see well-being change or remain constant – good for prompting and questioning.

I think it is important to further discuss the reflections offered in Reflective Diary Insight J. For instance, what greatly helped my well-being was the feedback from the coaches. As I mentioned I did feel quite overwhelmed by the positive feedback at times as I do find it hard to take complements and I was not expecting it. However, I think it helped my well-being as it motivated me and made me feel like I was making a difference, almost giving me a purpose. The rapport I established with coaches helped to solidify my well-being, as there seemed to be a mutual respect and interest in each other’s lives. For

instance, towards the end of interviews and specifically during the final timepoints coaches would ask:

It'd be really interesting to see, to sort of read it and see the differences across-- I presume you're speaking to coaches across different sort of backgrounds and professions and that kind of thing... Out of interest, without giving too much away, what was the findings from sort of the first team manager in terms of well-being? (Michael, Timepoint 4)

Out of interest. I know, you know, you can't get specific, how are, how are other coaches doing? Are they doing okay? They find things tough? Is it sort of club specific? What are your sort of general thoughts initially? (Craig, Timepoint 4)

Coaches appeared to demonstrate a genuine interest in the study and how other coaches' experienced well-being throughout a season. It is interesting how so many coaches wanted to know how others were getting on, which may raise the question as to whether they ask fellow coaches how they are? Were they interested because they do not speak about well-being with others and therefore do not know how others are feeling? The genuine interest in the study and in me as a person also came across when I received a text message from Michael at 00:14am saying "Just to confirm Andy... My well-being is very good tonight! [wink face and thumbs up]". For context, the men's first team at Michael's club had won an important game. The fact that I had crossed his mind during a period of happiness and what he perceived to facilitate his well-being, in my opinion, is a real success story around building rapport. Moreover, John, who I was originally intimidated by in timepoint one (see section 7.3.2), but then went on to build strong rapport with throughout the study, encouraged me to stay in contact after the completion of the study:

If you need anything, it'd be good. Uh, even if ever you wanted to take in a game or a day's work, a day's experience, come down to see us, or, you know if I ended up at a big club and you were ever interested in coming in and applying for a role, whether that be a liaison role or whatever, I don't know what pathway you will take. What career pathway you will go. But, uh, for sure hold onto my number and look me up and stay in touch. And if ever you want to spend some time in the industry, just shout me and come in. No problem at all. (John, Timepoint 4)

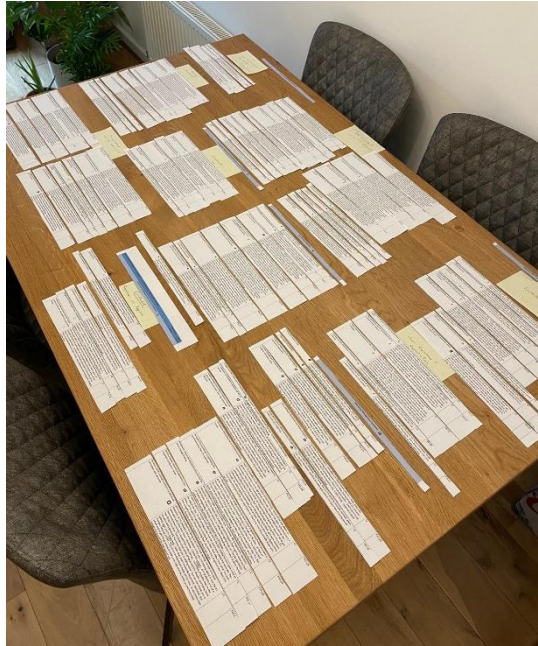
John became one of my biggest supporters during the study, as demonstrated by a selection of his accounts throughout this chapter. He specified that we should remain in contact, and that I should reach out to him in the future for if I want to immerse myself in club life or a job role. I believe this speaks volumes towards how I was able to build rapport and possibly aid him and other coaches in 'opening up' about their well-being. My approach to interviewing and speaking with coaches may in part be why rapport was strong. As my reflective diary highlighted, I would actively listen to coaches and phrase prompts as 'correct me if I am wrong' to make them aware that I was engaged. It becomes even further apparent the more I reflect that I had to have drawn on my MSc experiences of learning and using MI (Miller & Rollnick, 2009). I must have naturally drawn on its supportive and empathic counselling style (Rogers, 1959) knowing that MI 'rolls with resistance' and aims to resolve ambivalence by eliciting participants own motivations for change (Hettinga et al., 2005). It seems like an 'instinctive decision' that I drew upon the MI approach to overcome the inured and institutionalised masculine cultural norms.

Conducting the LIPA study naturally made me more aware of my own well-being. However, I probably did not take on board some of the study's findings for myself when I probably should have done. For example, I spoke about being engrossed within the

analysis (see Figure 7.4) and there were instances where I should have disengaged or worked on something else to break up my immersion.

**Figure 7.4**

*Engrossed in data analysis*



This parallels how coaches alluded to wanting to take time out from the relentless football schedule and even partake in personal hobbies or spend time with family. I should have actively scheduled more time away from the work or even rewarded my engagement with hobbies. I do recall two instances where I would try to do this, but it was hard to maintain. Firstly, I tried the reward system of working hard and then trying to reward my behaviour with a hobby. A hobby I was into and one which was convenient was gaming. I could complete a day's worth of transcription and analysis and then reward myself with some gaming. However, the issue I encountered was that I would spend most of the day in my office working, to then continue the rest of the day in the same environment. My well-being suffered as I went through periods of barely leaving the house and feeling

guilty when I was not actively working. I felt like I had so much data to transcribe and analyse that I could not waste time. I was almost catastrophising the situation to make me think I had to be working on the thesis 24/7. The challenges towards my well-being were exacerbated by a lack of change of scenery. Therefore, I noticed the importance of variance in routine for well-being, something which football coaches appear to lack as they go through the same seasonal cycles on a yearly basis.

Secondly, to initiate a change of scenery and variance in routine, Laura (my partner) and I agreed to schedule in days and nights out. Days or nights where we would go out and do an activity, which created variance and was rewarding after working hard on the thesis. I noticed that it did help my well-being to focus on something else, but to also have social interaction with others. For example, going to places like Barnsley or Sheffield and taking part in activities like crazy golf, retro arcade nights, or the cinema (see Figure 7.5). Sometimes it would be the two of us or we would invite others. Having something to do and talk about other than the thesis helped. However, it was hard to maintain, because it is so easy to fall back into the same old routine. “Oh we can do it next week” and then it gets forgotten about. I think this highlights how without active prompts and encouragement to do something it is hard to maintain. This makes me think about the coaches during the LIPA study. I actively prompted them and arranged interviews which afforded them the opportunity to discuss and reflect on their well-being. Now the study has concluded, and I am gone, how many coaches will still take the time to meaningfully reflect on their well-being and how it is managed?

## Figure 7.5

*Days and nights out to aid well-being*



To conclude, I think what is important is having someone who genuinely cares about you, can understand your context and is perceptive enough to know when something is not right. For me, I was lucky to have Laura who would ask me “How are you? How has your day gone?” She would be perceptive enough to know if my demeanour had changed or if I was not my ‘usual self’ which would prompt her to ask, “Is everything okay?” I also had my supervisors, where we would often meet monthly to check in on how I am and how things are progressing. Furthermore, I had wider family and friends who I could talk to, as well as fellow PhD students who personally knew my context. I had genuine and caring support systems in place across various ecological domains where I felt psychologically safe enough to display vulnerability and be honest. I believe, and the high-performance sport research (Hägglund et al., 2019, 2023; Vella et al., 2022; Walton et al., 2023) suggests, especially within men’s football (Gibson & Groom, 2019; Higham et al., 2021; Potrac et al., 2012) that having a safe space to be open and ask for help is not always the case.

# Chapter 8: Thesis Reflections

## **8.1 Chapter Abstract**

Throughout this programme of research, I have encountered challenges but also experienced successes. I have loved conducting this work but also experienced periods where I loathe it. The thesis has led me to experience a spectrum of emotions that continuously fluctuate on a daily, weekly, monthly and yearly basis. There have been days where I have not been sure as to what I should be doing and others where I have not left my seat or computer due to being enthralled in the task at hand. I have experienced countless bouts of writer's block and the infamous cognitive brick wall that raises when you least want it to. This is the section of the thesis where I lay out bare reflections of the PhD journey for all to see with the intention of illuminating how my perspective and experiences of well-being have developed.



## 8.2 What is Well-Being Andy?

Before starting this PhD journey if you were to have approached me and said, “What is well-being Andy?” I would have probably paused, thought for a moment, and then responded saying “I’m not sure. It’s probably something along the lines of being well.” Now if you were to approach me and ask the same question, I still think I would say “I’m not entirely sure.” Entirely being the key word added here because I believe my understanding of it has greatly improved, but I am human and not naïve enough to say I know everything about it and what it exactly should be or mean for everyone. The reason for this view is because I do not believe well-being should be the exact same for everyone as it appears ever so more complexly tied up in values and beliefs, one’s identity, socio-contextual circumstances, and temporal interactions which make it vastly idiosyncratic and personal. I feel like well-being is personal but is such a multifaceted and complex system of psychological, physical, and social components, to name but a few, that are greatly shaped by individual characteristics and ecological systems over time (Bone, 2015; Kiefer, 2008; Mead et al., 2021). For instance, within a mental health position stand, Schinke et al. (2024) postulate that well-being is:

A dynamic state or experience of quality of life in one or more of life’s many domains, such as physical, psychological, spiritual, emotional, interpersonal, social, familial, cultural, financial, occupational/professional, recreational, intellectual, existential, and environmental (p. 3).

There appears to be a drive towards more holistic and ecological descriptions of well-being which account for various aspects of a person’s life (Schinke et al., 2024). A focus on *being* in well-being is therefore important (Holst, 2022) because being human is to experience all the life domains Schinke et al. (2024) has highlighted. Thus, Holst (2022) argues that well-being should be viewed in relation to spatial, temporal and interpersonal

coordinates in one's life. For instance, Kenttä et al. (2024) highlights in their position paper that coaches' wider life systems shape well-being, such as work-life boundaries and familial interactions. Both Schinke et al.'s (2024) and Kenttä et al.'s (2024) position papers were written and published whilst this programme of research was underway, which captures how this body of work complements and aligns with contemporary well-being thinking and calls for well-being research and best practices. As alluded to, well-being is shaped by varying ecological systems and for sports coaches a core context will be the work environment (i.e., organisation and/or club they reside within). Contemporary work has shown that high performance sport environments like many other occupational settings can place high demands on their personnel (Kenttä et al., 2024). However, shifts in cultural expectations and valuations of personal well-being has seen organisations passing laws and mandates to protect personnel from excessive workloads and forms of exploitation that damage well-being (Kenttä et al., 2024). I believe this is a step in the right direction and something which should be sustained over time, mainly because for meaningful cultural shifts to happen prolonged and consistent engagement in new practices and policies are key. The thesis' programme of work has highlighted how a coach can only do so much (e.g., personal management strategies or coping mechanisms) and that organisations have a duty of care to support coaches. Therefore, well-being is a shared responsibility. It can have personal meaning, and it can have collective meaning (Simpson et al., 2023), but how it should be managed, supported and even cared for, should be a shared responsibility.

I think the response to the question, "What is well-being, Andy?" can and should be enriched by the findings of the programme of research. The thesis has highlighted throughout that well-being and coaching are idiosyncratic in nature (Cushion et al., 2006; Kiefer, 2008) and that the context a person finds themselves in significantly shapes

experiences and sensemaking (see Chapters 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7). Therefore, in the context of this thesis and the population of focus (i.e., football coaches), my perception of well-being is inapt in comparison to the coaches' perceptions. The question should not be "What is well-being, Andy?" but "What does well-being mean to the coaches you spoke with who were working in men's football, Andy?" The term 'means' is important here as it places emphasis on how they (i.e., coaches) interpret well-being and the value they attribute to it. Yes, some general assumptions could be offered for the entire population of football coaches operating in men's football, which will be signposted in the epilogue chapter, but the IPA approach relishes the opportunity to share idiographic narrative accounts that have personal meaning. Thus, hopefully this thesis has gone some way to make the present sample of coaches feel heard and has illuminated how they endeavoured to experience and make sense of well-being in the context of men's football.

### **8.3 "I'm Absolutely Towing Flowing": My own Well-Being Experiences During the Thesis**

When I first started my PhD scholarship, I could not have been any happier. I was over the moon that I had secured such a prestigious and highly sought after opportunity in the form of a personally tailored PhD scholarship. For context, I had the fortunate opportunity to pitch and present my own bespoke research idea to a panel of Sheffield Hallam University academics and I was one of a select few who successfully acquired a completely personalised PhD. Applying for and securing the PhD was a big decision and core transitional event in my life as prior to becoming a PhD student, I was a full-time higher education lecturer. I was leaving behind a stable job in my local area to rebecome a student. I was apprehensive about what was to come, but also excited. During this time, I had just secured my first home with my partner, which I am not going to lie, did exacerbate my nerves. This was mainly because I now had a mortgage to pay, and I had

just decided to leave my full-time role and take a pay cut. However, looking back, would I change anything? No. Not in the slightest. Although, what a time to be finishing your PhD and looking for full-time job roles in this current higher education landscape. I digress but will most likely come back to this towards the end.

So, I started my PhD scholarship late February 2021 due to having to work my notice period at University Campus Barnsley. Although I was excited to get started, this was not an easy time as the COVID-19 pandemic was still rife, with restrictions in place. This meant that I was pretty much isolated and alone when I started my PhD. I do recall maybe having some online calls, but in the main it was exchanges via email. There were days where I had no idea what I was doing, whether what I was doing was right, and I was even questioning what a 'PhD student' should be doing. It was a complete lifestyle change as previously I had always been used to attending seminars or lectures and having a schedule to my student life, but this was completely different, compounded even more so by the COVID restrictions. Throughout my time on the thesis I have used this phrase a lot, "echo chamber." This captures what my first 5 months were like as I was mainly isolated in my spare room (or what I like to call the office) with my own thoughts. I had no one other than Laura (my partner) to speak with in person but I tried to arrange online calls where possible. However, in my opinion online calls are not the same as being in the same room and batting ideas off one another. So, taking a moment to reflect on my well-being during this time it was quite unstable.

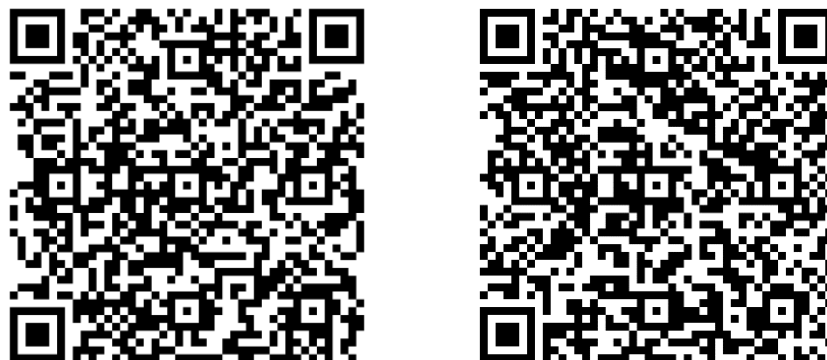
Luckily, there came a point where I was introduced to three other PhD students who had secured their graduate teaching assistant PhD scholarships at the same time as me; Will, Elysa and Jimi. We arranged to meet online one evening via Zoom to get to know each other. It was nice to discuss common thoughts, feelings and questions, albeit online, but it reassured us all that we were experiencing the same challenges. I found interacting

with other PhD students to help maintain my well-being throughout the scholarship which may point to the importance of social support or even the interpersonal nature of well-being. There were a multitude of instances where I would be wavering and uncertain as to whether ‘I was good enough’. However, when I would meet with fellow PhD students, I was reassured that what I was experiencing seemed to be the norm. Funnily enough, most of us experienced periods where we doubted ourselves and questioned whether we knew anything at all. I am sure there were instances where we existentially questioned our entire existence or at least I know I questioned my free will (I went down a philosophical rabbit hole as to whether free will exists and yeah, it got messy from that point onwards and I had to stop).

Imposter syndrome was rife early on, and it continued to visit all the way towards the very end of the thesis. Even though I did receive reassurance from my supervisors that I was making good progress, that self-doubt kept creeping in. I do not think social media helps, especially the likes of LinkedIn or X. It can be amazing for networking and sharing achievements, but it can also be a place where you lose yourself by comparing to others. I decided to share some insights and be open via LinkedIn throughout my PhD (see Figure 8.1)

**Figure 8.1**

*LinkedIn posts discussing aspects of my well-being during the PhD*



I do not think my well-being benefits from spending too much time on social media platforms. For instance, when you post something, you may get a short-term buzz from likes but that soon drifts away. This relates to the football coaches where some stated that social media can be a horrific place at times as it can enable abuse, but in my opinion the buzz of likes compares to the buzz of positive matchday results. In chapter 3.4.2.1 Max addressed how the buzz of winning soon wears off, which suggests that well-being should not be attributed towards such short-term fixes. So alike coaches, I think it is important for myself to focus on what I can control as opposed to what others are doing around me. This sense of control for well-being was expressed within chapters 5 and 6, such as controlling the controllables. I would like to think I got better at this as the thesis progressed, shifting my attention from things I simply could not control (e.g., participants cancelling meetings) towards what I could have control over (e.g., analysing data). I personally feel that my well-being would benefit when I took a step back from immersion in work to assess what was in my control and where my efforts would be best placed. This leads me to think about the coaches and how adopting a similar mentality and focus could help with the management of their well-being.

Two core series of interactions come to mind regarding when I believe my well-being was facilitated. The first is when I was speaking with the coaches during data collection. I thoroughly enjoyed getting to know them and being able to glimpse into their lives. On average, interviews would far surpass the hour mark, and I think that was the case because the interviews were natural and conversational. It genuinely felt like the coaches wanted to be there and so did I. It did not feel forced, but more so collaborative. I found myself sometimes brainstorming with coaches, such as when Michael and I were thinking about how players have a well-being and/or player-care officer, but coaches do not and what it

could mean if coaches did have access to such support. Also, as demonstrated in chapter 7.3.7, coaches showcased a genuine interest in study findings and outcomes. All these encounters and experiences fuelled me, they topped up the mental and physical ‘battery’ for lack of a better word. I would occasionally feel drained if I had completed multiple interviews in one day, but most of the time where it was just the one interview, I would leave them feeling energised, ideas bouncing around the room. I would leave the calls, make some final notes and then run to the other spare room where Laura would be working just to articulate my thoughts. It felt rewarding because it seemed as though I was helping the coaches in some shape or form.

The second series of interactions are when I attended research conferences. There is just something about bringing likeminded people together and discussing research and work that you are passionate about that fuels me. I have been fortunate enough to attend five research conferences during my time at Sheffield Hallam University. Two were the Northern Research and Applied Practice Showcase (NRAPS) in Leeds and Sheffield. Then there was the 14<sup>th</sup> International Council for Coaching Excellence (ICCE) Global Coach Conference (GCC) in Singapore; the 6<sup>th</sup> International Cluster for Research into Coaching Conference (CRiC) in Newcastle; and the 17<sup>th</sup> European Congress of Sport and Exercise Psychology (FEPSAC) in Austria. All of them were amazing experiences where I was able to meet so many new people in the research field, too many to name specifically though. I will never forget Singapore as it was my first international research conference. It was amazing for a multitude of reasons, but what stood out for me was being praised for the work I was doing. For context, I was somehow assigned to the biggest room with hundreds of people in the venue, three cinema size screens behind me, and a microphone in hand (see Figure 8.2).

**Figure 8.2**

*Presenting at the 14<sup>th</sup> ICCE GCC 2023 in Singapore*



I am not going to lie the nerves were kicking in prior, but afterwards I was happy with how my presentation went. What solidified this positive experience was the amount of engagement that came from it, such as questions on stage, to people approaching me throughout the conference. Things like “you’re doing great work” and “keep doing what you are doing” gave me additional motivation. The ‘icing on the cake’ was when two of the keynote speakers shouted me out on stage, I will never forget that. Michelle De Highden and Lorraine Lafrenière (see Figure 8.3) both praised me and my work during a keynote which I was not expecting in the slightest, but it was a welcomed surprise. For example, when Lorraine was asked what her key takeaway from the conference was, she said:

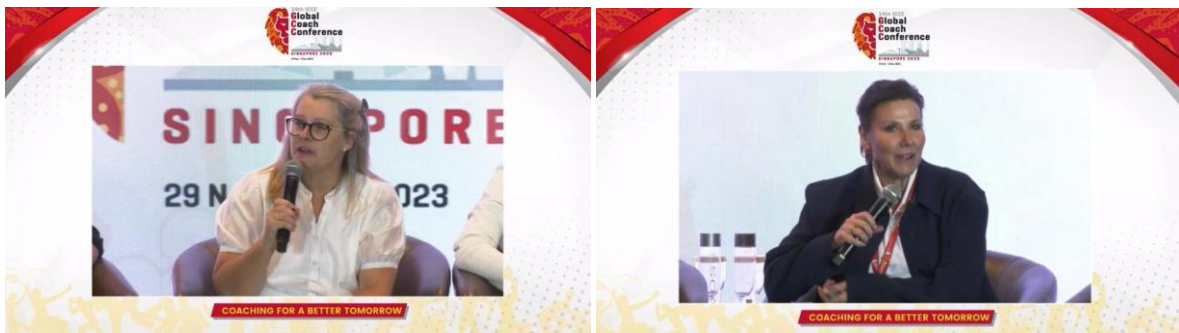
My key takeaway is how I continue to be so inspired by the next generation of coaches, coach developers, coach researchers, and sport system believers. So, I had the chance to sit beside some younger people, so Andy from Barnsley, I don’t know if you’re in the room? How great are you? I just love your theme and your research on “who takes care of the care giver, the coach?” Erm, and I am very inspired by them



and that's my takeaway about how good I feel about the community and its growth and the younger generation and their contributions.

**Figure 8.3**

*Shout-outs from keynote speakers at ICCE GCC 2023 in Singapore*



I made sure to save these video clips from the conference to remind me that others see the value in me and what I am doing. Over the course of the PhD, I have started many conversations and presentations with the saying:

“Who is looking after the person who is looking after everyone else?” (see Figure 8.4)

**Figure 8.4**

*Who is looking after the person who is looking after everyone else?*



For me, this is something that has been overlooked or even deprioritised in the past but has recently started to receive the much-needed attention it deserves. Receiving such praise made me feel like I and my work had been acknowledged which helped mitigate the imposter syndrome feelings I had recently been experiencing. A similar situation

occurred at FEPSAC, which also relates to the current higher education landscape and the job hunting I mentioned at the very start of this reflection. I applied for a research position at another UK university, but just fell short of acquiring the position. The feedback I received was extremely positive to the point I was asked if I would consider working with this university to acquire a research scholarship so that I could conduct my work with them. I was dubious at first, thinking they were saying this to make the decision easier, but I then received an email from one of the job interview panellists expressing the same interest. Long story short I was able to meet a lot of the staff based at this institution in person out in FEPSAC and I was blown away by their praise. A professor made the effort to speak with me in person and reaffirm what a great job I did, another associate professor met with me to discuss their desire to work with me, and other staff members I had not had the privilege of meeting before were approaching me and praising me. It was a surreal situation I had never experienced before, but once more as the imposter syndrome had crept back after several unsuccessful research position interviews, this praised helped. Hearing that “I should keep doing what I am doing because I did a great job” and that it was “splitting hairs making the decision” ‘pulled me back up’ when I was struggling.

So, my well-being at this present moment? It is constantly in fluctuation because my life is in fluctuation. This has been the most unstable period of my life whereby I no longer have a job. I have no income, and I have a mortgage to pay. You may be wondering what does this have to do with your PhD and well-being? Well, it comes ‘full circle’ to the take home findings from this PhD. Well-being is contextual and can be shaped by and made sense of considering the multitude of reciprocal socio-contextual interactions that occur within our life. Have I been struggling to write my PhD these past 6 months? Yes. Could that be because I knew the end was in sight and I would not have a stable job come the end? Most likely. Have I been distracted by constantly looking for future work? Yes.

Does applying for jobs and writing job applications take a lot of time and effort which can be draining? Yes. Have I sacrificed working on my PhD at times? Yes. Have I sacrificed looking after myself at times? Yes. Have I felt guilty for trying to prioritise myself and my well-being at times? Yes. Was my well-being thriving when I first started this PhD? Yes, it was amazing to be doing something I loved whilst getting paid. However, this opportunity is coming to an end, so no wonder why my well-being has taken a hit. If you add up all the challenges, demands and transitions which are occurring at once it is no surprise I may be struggling. Currently, I feel out of control. I am controlling what I can, but there still feels like there is a lot I cannot control which is hindering my well-being. For example, I can control my preparation for and performance in a job interview, but I cannot control the final decision. The uncertainty over my future is scary which relates to what a lot of the coaches from this programme of research were experiencing (see Chapters 5.4.3 and 6.4.2). This begs the question; can one effectively perform if their well-being is hindered? Thus, it is important that wider life systems and interactions are accounted for when we come to make sense of how well-being is experienced and managed within varying contexts, such as sports.

#### **8.4 Family and Friends' Reflections on my PhD Journey and Well-Being**

In keeping with the programme of research's use of qualitative approaches (see Chapters 3, 4, 5 and 6) and multi-perspective accounts (see Chapters 4 and 7), I thought it would be enlightening to present alternative narratives to illuminate the nuanced nature of my PhD journey and related well-being experiences during this scholarship. Who better else to ask for their reflections than my family and friends. The first reflection offered is from my partner, Laura. She has been present at the start to the very end of my PhD and would provide a novel multi-perspective account. The second is from my father who would regularly check in over the phone to see how I was getting on because he lived in the

south of England for most of the PhD and now in the later stages lives abroad. The next few reflections are offered by fellow PhD students, Will and Elysa, as we started our PhD journeys together at the same time. There were many instances where we would confide in and support one another; hence they are well placed to comment on our shared lived experiences of well-being and the PhD Journey. In sum, the following reflective insights presented are from my family and friends to offer alternative insights and enrich this reflective chapter.

#### **8.4.1 Laura's Reflections on my PhD Journey and Well-Being**

I would describe the process of Andy doing his PhD as being like a rollercoaster, with many climbs, drops and loop-de-loops all combined. Over the course of the last four years, I think there have been three noticeable states or phases in the project of Andy's own well-being and the feeling of our shared environment.

##### **Phase One: Building momentum**

At the beginning of Andy's PhD journey, I would say his well-being was consumed by his eagerness to learn. He would regularly come into my office telling me about a new theory he'd found or to talk through an idea he'd been presented with. At the time he was doing a lot of reading, and there were many moments of clarity and excitement during this stage of the project.

We were both working at home at this point, due to the ramifications of the pandemic, meaning we were also consciously managing the amount of time spent outdoors. We were eager to make sure we had social connection at this point because we were restricted from seeing people overall. Andy was regularly checking in with friends and family, as well as colleagues online. I think at this stage, Andy was enjoying the work-

from-home balance of life, and like many of us at the time, found the routine of this appealing.

### **Phase Two: The highs**

Of all stages of the research project, I would say that Andy's well-being was at its most positive during the data collection phase. Having conversations with participants and talking through ideas with both me and his supervisors seemed to fuel Andy. He would regularly celebrate moments in discussions, he would regularly make big reflections on his work, and he would regularly discuss the achievements from sessions with participants. I would say that the word to describe Andy's well-being at this stage is that he was 'motivated'. He had a clear path, his days were moving quickly, and he was regularly pitching for other opportunities as part of this - whether for other publications or presentations.

### **Phase Three: The lows**

Since this stage, I would say that Andy has struggled with mental ill-being. Upon completion of the data collection, Andy was more isolated in his work, especially since his teaching commitment on campus ended. With less interaction among peers and fewer conversations with others from his industry, I think the pressures of working remotely were felt the most, leading to him feeling stressed and possibly lonely.

He has also been amid data analysis for what seems like a very long time, writing up findings. I think Andy has been bored in this stage, because of the monotonous nature of this type of work not fuelling his creativity until very recently. This stress has led to episodes of health flair-ups, anxiousness, and frustration. Combining this with a few external factors in life which have cropped up throughout the last year for both him and myself, I would say that this has been the toughest period.

We saw this happening and consciously made plans to leave the house and do something exciting via date nights, but this became less conscious, to the point that at some times Andy hasn't left the house in days.

I do think however that this has changed as we have come into this final couple of months of the project, with Andy being more conscious in his decision to meet people on campus/virtually, to meet up with family and friends, to organise things to look forward to. I think it's very much been a "light at the end of the tunnel" and now he can see that his mood has lightened too.

#### **8.4.2 My Dad's Reflections on my PhD Journey and Well-Being**

My recollection of the past three years is that you have overall coped very well. I do recall times mainly after about 14 months in when you did seem to be under some stress at times, I'm assuming that was linked to the PhD, however, could have been things happening I wasn't aware of. I do feel like you should step away from things a bit quicker when you start to feel frustrated or under pressure. I'm sure that issues with the car and bathroom for example contribute to the overall level of stress. What I don't know is would you have felt or dealt with those issues differently if you were not feeling pressure from your PhD workload? Overall, though, as I mentioned at the beginning, I think you have worked really hard and coped pretty well under the circumstances. Also, I'm very proud of you and know you will find your perfect job, wherever it may be! To quote Del Boy "The world is your oyster my son."

#### **8.4.3 Fellow PhD Student: Will's Reflections on my PhD Journey and Well-Being**

I think you and I obviously have-- You've been my main point of contact to kind of just verbalise stresses I've had about the PhD in general, and I think I've been quite similar with you, in giving you that opportunity just to get things out and that for me has been

very important to have, with Elysa as well. I think us starting at the same time, and there being very few people before us in the cohort, meant we were kind of pushed on one another and that we were kind of forced to talk to one another in that sense. Now, at the start, that was quite difficult, wasn't it? We were online and we didn't actually meet face to face until well over six months into the PhD journey from what I can remember. And I think we've both shared that along the way the PhD is actually a very lonely experience. It's a strange thing where it's your project that you care an awful lot about and no one else really cares in the same way that you do. And I think that combined with doing stuff on your own and having a lot of time to think about stuff, can actually manifest itself into quite a lot of mental strain and I think just getting it out has been something we've improved at over the years.

I'd still say going back there's points where you probably could have spoken to me more and I could have spoken to you more or at least sooner before things got a bit too stressful. But it's definitely been a good way to blow off steam, and whether that's been, I mean we've met multiple times, haven't we, at people's houses, we've gone out for drinks after work, which has been great. Even like when we met up for your birthday and been out for other people's birthdays and did things. That just kind of got a lot better, and I think throughout the journey as more PhD students came as well and this cohort started building, it then became nicer to go on campus together and get even more of these opportunities to blow off some steam. So, I think that community is a big part of it. A big part of what's improved our well-being.

I think the improvements in tech that we've had, so opportunities to work from home have been a bit of a blessing and a curse in many ways, I think seeing you and the work you've done, some of the transcriptions and things like it's-- You've got that technology that's been amazing for you and allowed you to do some really good work,

but just talking through what you were saying about spending hours transcribing stuff and just staring at the computer screen, it's not good for anyone to be doing that really. So, I think you've had some benefits, but also, it's been quite tough for you in some ways because of that, and there is now that expectation that it's doable and you should do it.

It's been nice-- I think you and I are quite similar, and I think we've both been quite honest with each other, which has been nice, but obviously that only comes with time and being comfortable. I don't know if you have found this, but I know from my point of view I found it quite difficult to talk to other friends about stresses I was having because they just don't understand what I do, and I can imagine that's quite similar with you. I think you've even said something like that to me at some point. So, I've definitely benefited from having that with you.

I think as well, something just from watching you. Something I've tried to implement-- We've both got very different views on research and very different backgrounds, and so what I've learnt from you in terms of qualitative research that has helped me understand philosophy in general, but also good research practise and meaning behind things as well, not just showing people numbers and expecting them to believe that. But also, I think you've had a very good relationship with your supervisory team and I know that kind of got a little bit messy when some left and stuff and it got a bit tough for you. But you were very, very honest with them from the start and actually you built a very good relationship with them, and it seemed like you were doing very, very good work collectively as a group, and that was something that I was always quite impressed with.

I think there are situations where you've come to me where something's happened or someone has said something to you in the supervisory meeting and you've literally



gone to me, “What do you think of this?” And you’ve just put it on me, just to get my opinion on it, just to see if like you’re right in the way you’re thinking about it, which is quite nice and I don’t know if we necessarily always agree on it, but it’s important to get that external perspective sometimes. I know I’ve done that loads with you where you’ve given me a perspective on stuff that’s going on with me.

I’d never really come across the word well-being until just before I went for this PhD and that was because our research group moved into the Well-Being Research Centre and I had no idea what that word meant. Now, within our research centre is a lot of healthcare. So, I always associated well-being with someone’s physical health. So, I thought if you were exercising every week, you were eating well and you were medically in a decent state then you had good well-being. I didn’t really think of it from a mental point of view. I think it was more hearing from you and some of the other people working in your team in psychology and stuff that kind of gave me this psychological perspective of well-being, which is absolutely what I think of now, more than anything when it comes to well-being.

Well-being for me is a state. I see it as a state of someone’s comfortability. Whether that be in what they’re doing or just living. I think to me it’s well-being. It’s not good being. It’s not bad being. It’s like this nice comfortable middle ground. Like how are they finding whatever’s happening around them, whatever is stimulating them and whatever they’re doing, whatever they’re responsible for. Whether that’s right, I don’t know, but I can see how that is influenced by things that I’ve spoken about already, like the healthcare, like the mental state and things like that. So maybe it is a balance. I think that kind of nice region I was talking about, maybe it is a balance. Now, that in some ways is quite nice for me to think about because it means even if I have some down days or bad times, I can offset it with good times, and that’s quite nice to think about, but I think not

everyone can do that balance and that is well-being to me. I think as well when people are trying to draw on that balance when they're thinking about that balance, it's so much easier to remember the bad times than the good times... When somebody says, "how is your well-being?" I immediately think of the negative. I immediately do, but that's not what they're asking.

#### **8.4.4 Fellow PhD Student: Elysa's Reflections on my PhD Journey and Well-Being**

I always felt like, I mean maybe this is just like how you carry yourself, but even from the beginning, I felt like you were really clued up. It was almost like you were already an expert in some regards like you sort of knew where to go, you knew what you were doing. I obviously turned to you for support, especially with some like qualitative stuff, cause for me it was all brand new like I'd never had any experience doing anything like that before. So, I felt like I was also learning by having conversations, interactions with other people who were doing qualitative research and learning a bit more about that. I mean, I know, and I think with your background in psychology, it seems like you do things in a very like structured way that seems to be very set standards and very kind of set ways of doing qualitative stuff, because you seem to know exactly where to look and where to go. So, I think like I always saw you as this person, that was really capable, really knowledgeable, like really, I don't-- just on it, like I felt like you sort of embedded yourself. You like sort of always seemed like, I don't know. Things were going really smoothly. Maybe even if they weren't, but it seemed like you were always sort of cracking on like you collected so much data. You've, you know, got so many outputs and publications and none of it seems externally as a struggle like I know your internal experience might have been very different to that, but at least from an external perspective, it very much seemed like everything was smooth sailing. Everything was just flowing. It was almost like effortless work. Not effortless, but as in like it just flowed

right? It just seemed like things were clicking and like, yes, it's not that it wasn't hard, but it didn't seem like you were struggling. Do you know what I mean? So, I think that was always my perspective.

But what's weird? Reflecting on my perceptions of you is as much as I always felt like you came in as an expert. I think if I do look at you now, I very much see you as someone who's already like an academic. But like I know this is like a training programme and genuinely I do think you've evolved; I do think I see now like a true expertise. Like I think when you came into it you came into it with some knowledge, but I think like now and like seeing you and seeing how you talk and seeing, sort of-- You know, even the way you've done the reflection. You're really like-- you're not doing things for the sake of a tick box. You're really sort of like embedded in it, in the process and like sort of doing it, to do it how you think is right and proper, and to do justice for everything, and I think that's really commendable. I feel like I really get that from you.

I mean I am honestly shocked but also not because I understand the [HE] climate of like trying to find jobs, but I also understand how you've been so successful so far in terms of your progress and interviews and how-- You know, you've had people really interested in you even without having your PhD yet. I just think once you get that tick box, I can't see how you wouldn't secure something [job]. Just because you do come across like you've got 10 years of experience already. Like I don't see a difference between you and some of the other, you know, academics I've spoken to and have worked with. So, I think like that's obviously a really key strength for you. Do you know what I mean? So yes, I feel like that's my maybe reflection of like you and how you carry yourself and how you hold yourself and maybe how you've evolved in terms of your expertise and practise.

But I guess like on a personal level and like shared experience level like I mean you already know I've put you in my acknowledgement like I think starting a PhD during a pandemic is something that hopefully will never happen again. I can't even put into words how weird it was and almost how it still felt normal, but also like I feel like we all just kind of accepted that that's just how it was. I felt it meant that we did lean on each other more because we didn't have any other connection to anyone or the university, and I feel like that as much as it's not like we see each other every day. Like I do feel there's a bond there that I hope is lifelong. I do see that I would maybe come to you for both personal and professional conversations in the future and I think that's basically from that shared experience, which isn't just about-- You know, like, it's not just about having done the PhD or the pandemic or anything else, but it is just this like context, this time, and place, and whether if we'd all started now, if we would have had the same bond, I don't know. But I do think that I know it helped me because we could talk about it and it meant that as we were going through, especially with teaching, there was someone that understood and you could offload to, that was maybe a helpful thing.

Obviously, we've all had very different experiences in our PhDs and our PhDs are all wildly different and we're all from very different disciplines. But somehow, we still are able to have supportive conversations with each other... I feel like we've been able to offer advice and support. So, like yes, I'm not a psychologist, but I do feel like we've had conversations that have helped you reflect, or I feel like even though you don't have a background in diabetes, but we've had conversations that have helped me like reflect on maybe some of the methods and how I've like approached something or how I've written something or like looking for a reference, you know. So, I just think, like, we've all kind of done it differently, but I think it's the invaluable personal connection to make you feel a little bit less alone, because I think the PhD can be super isolating and I think it has

been. But I do think it's also having each other in that sense which has also been something that's, I guess, like invaluable... For me it was more about the community feel of it like, yes, it's social, but for me it was more about feeling that sense of community and bonding... We agreed on a lot of things and our beliefs and morals seem to align and our personalities seem to kind of go well together... So, I feel like for me it was both being able to accept who I am and just really be myself authentically and like, unapologetically. I feel like maybe part of that is also the culture within the research environment, but also I think it was because we just seem to have this like bond, whether it's like trauma bonding from starting a PhD and in a pandemic on top of obviously everything else or whether it was just because we just click because we sort of aligned on a lot of things... like our personalities.

#### **8.4.5 A Summary of my Family and Friends' Reflections**

A lot of what my family and friends have said coincide with findings from the programme of research. For example, both Laura and my dad spoke of how wider life interactions and events shaped my well-being during the scholarship which similarly occurred for coaches during the football season (see Chapters 3, 4, 5 and 6). Simple things such as, both my car and ensuite shower having water leaks that took some time to fix led to work-life conflictions which challenged well-being. The impact wider life implications have on well-being can be seen in chapter 4.4.4 where José's dog died and impeded his well-being and subsequent performance at work. My Dad also alluded to how I should "step away from things a bit quicker" when I become overwhelmed and frustrated which relates to how coaches in the thesis would imply the need to 'switch off' and dissociate from the role when they experienced similar feelings (see Chapters 3.4.2, 4.4.1, 5.4.1 and 6.4.3).

Laura illuminated how in the first stages of the PhD I became consumed by it due to my eagerness to learn. Coaches demonstrated similar behaviours throughout the

football season where they would become consumed by the role and ‘need to win’ mentality (see Chapters 3.4.2.1, 4.4.1, 4.4.2 and 6.4.4). This consumption as highlighted by Laura seemed to fuel me, which similarly occurred for the coaches, but also it can become obsessive and sometimes detrimental for well-being (Yukhymenko-Lescroart & Sharma, 2022). It was interesting to see that Laura had recognised that I had engaged in reflective practices throughout the thesis which seemed to come naturally to me. I would reflect most when I had finished an online call with participants or my supervisors because I felt that it helped me to process conversations and new information which in turn stabilised well-being. Laura’s account appears to capture the temporality of my well-being as she depicted it like a rollercoaster with momentum building and great heights which then also came with lows. As I may have alluded to previously, I have struggled in the latter stages of the PhD. It has felt relentless at times, which taking a moment to reflect resonates with the coaches’ footballing seasons. They are challenging, but even more so in the latter stages due to the pressure to finish well. I have felt that pressure, but it’s mainly coming from myself internally. Chapter 4.4.1 highlighted how coaches can place high expectations on themselves that fuels contextual pressure, in turn thwarting well-being due to increased perceived stress (Baldock et al., 2021). Laura noticed that at times I have isolated myself, especially within the latter stages of the PhD. My social interactions greatly declined, and I barely left the house. I would say my well-being was at an all time low. I struggled the most when I returned to work after Christmas 2023. My motivation had plummeted, and Laura was probably right that being engrossed in the data analysis for so long contributed to such feelings. Towards the end I began to see the benefits of varying my routine which helped with my well-being (see Chapter 5.4.1).

Will and Elysa both commented on how starting our PhD during the pandemic was a challenge that we had to overcome and one which shaped our well-being

experiences. This captures how time-based instances (e.g., cohort effects) like *when* in history an individual interacts with their surrounding systems matters (Disanti & Erickson, 2021), such as starting a PhD during a pandemic will have a significant influence on the PhD journey and related well-being experiences. Similarly, coaches who were ex-players that transitioned into coaching decades ago will be from a certain cohort of players that were exposed to different values and beliefs around well-being compared to modern day players that may transition into coaching (see Chapter 3). Will and Elysa commented on our shared lived experiences of the PhD journey and suggested that social support was pertinent for managing well-being. They both stated that working towards a PhD can be lonely and isolating but having someone to lean on and speak with helped our well-being reciprocally. Similarly, during the programme of research, coaches have alluded to how coaching in football can be a lonely and isolating profession and how some turn to family and friends for support (see Chapters 3.4.2, 4.4.1 and 7.3.5). What stood out for Will and Elysa was having a PhD community to lean on when things were challenging their well-being, which is something that football coaches may need and possibly benefit from as they can promote safe and supportive environments where coaches can collectively learn and help each other to cope (Baldock et al., 2021; Cropley et al., 2016). All in all, the PhD journey has been challenging. Consequently, it has made me appreciate my well-being more and signified the importance of being self-aware regarding when it may need to be better managed.

# Chapter 9: Epilogue

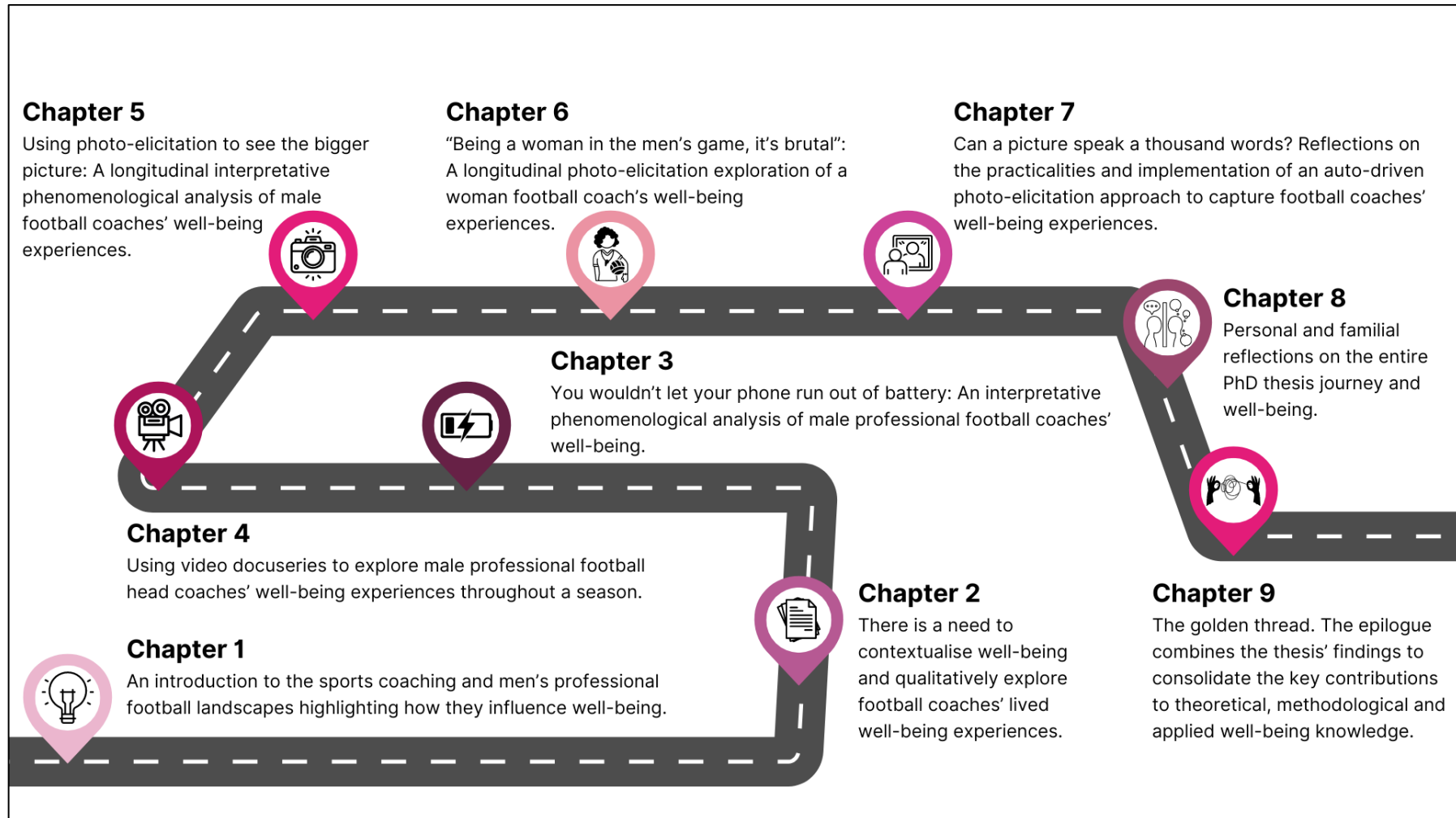


## **9.1 Chapter Abstract**

The final chapter of this thesis acts as a general discussion which highlights how the programme of research (see [Figure 9.1](#)) has added to existing knowledge and contributed to enhancing well-being understanding, such as how it is made sense of and experienced. Firstly, contributions to well-being theory and research will be discussed with a focus on how well-being is comprehended in footballing contexts and theoretical advancements made by the programme of research. Then advances in methodological approaches to explore well-being will be addressed, outlining how interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), docuseries data, photo-elicitation, and a longitudinal design progressed knowledge. Finally, strengths of the programme of research and areas for future research development will be offered, followed by the thesis conclusion.

**Figure 9.1**

*A roadmap of the programme of research*



## 9.2 Contributions to Well-Being Theory and Research

At the start of the thesis, discussions around how well-being has traditionally been conceptualised were offered (see Chapter 2.2). It was acknowledged that well-being has been critiqued regarding its definition (Dodge et al., 2012), conceptualisation (Mead et al., 2021), terminology (VanderWeele & Lomas, 2022), and measurement (Ryff et al., 2020). The predominant and traditional conceptualisation of well-being is that it comprises of hedonic and eudaimonic components (Diener, 1984; Keyes, 1998; Ryan & Deci, 2001; Ryff, 1989). Hedonia in the sense that an individual will pursue pleasure, positive emotions and life satisfaction (Diener et al., 2018). Whereas eudaimonia captures positive human functioning, meaning an individual will seek to personally grow, foster positive relationships, and pursue excellence (Ryan et al., 2008; Ryff, 1989). However, as the review of literature noted (see Chapter 2), progression has been made regarding how well-being is conceptualised.

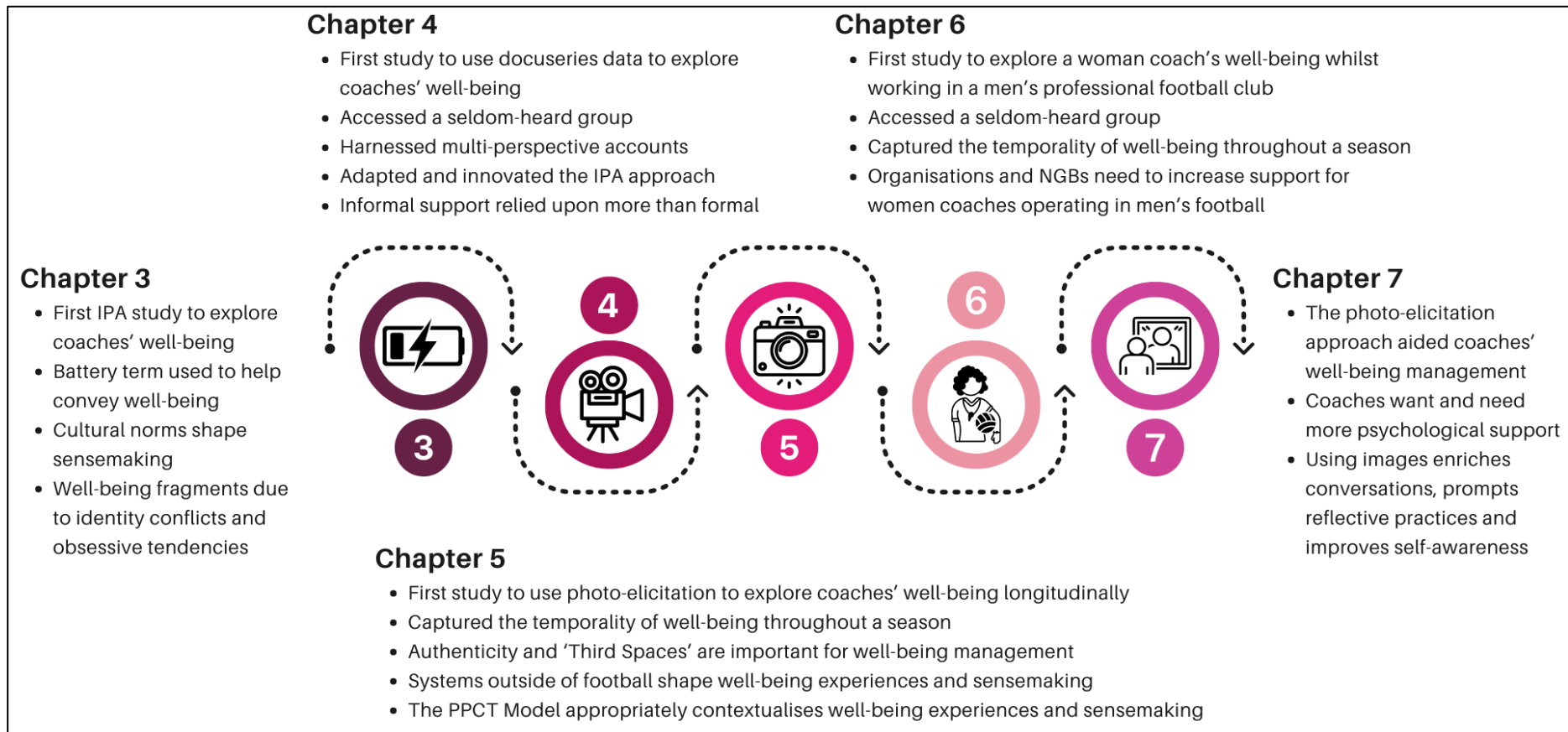
Multidimensional approaches which combine hedonic and eudaimonic aspects are now more widely accepted in the research domain (Ryan & Deci, 2001; Ryff, 1989; Ryff & Keyes, 1995; Seligman, 2011, 2018). Furthermore, greater contextual understanding of well-being has been called for (Hamling et al., 2020; Holst, 2022; Simova et al., 2024; Trainor & Bundon, 2023) as an individual's interactions with their environment over time greatly influence well-being states. This has led to the acknowledgement that well-being cannot be discussed separate from *being* in the world as human beings are inextricably connected to their environment and contextual circumstances which in turn shape well-being experiences and sensemaking (Galvin & Todres, 2011; Holst, 2022; Sarvimäki, 2011; Seamon, 2018; Todres & Galvin, 2010).

Yet, traditional and predominant theoretical approaches to exploring well-being (e.g., hedonia and eudaimonia) do not account for contextuality (Cresswell et al., 2019;

Donaldson et al., 2022; Taris & Schaufeli, 2018), such as the culture a person is subsumed within, the multi-layered systems or environments a person engages with, and the temporality of events and thoughts experienced. Thus, the following sections will outline how the thesis has contributed much needed ecologically guided research and knowledge (Purcell et al., 2022; Schinke et al., 2024) to address such concerns within the context of professional football clubs. Figure 9.2 provides a snapshot of some core theoretical and methodological contributions to knowledge and research this programme of empirical work has achieved.

**Figure 9.2**

*A Snapshot of contributions to well-being research and knowledge from empirical work*

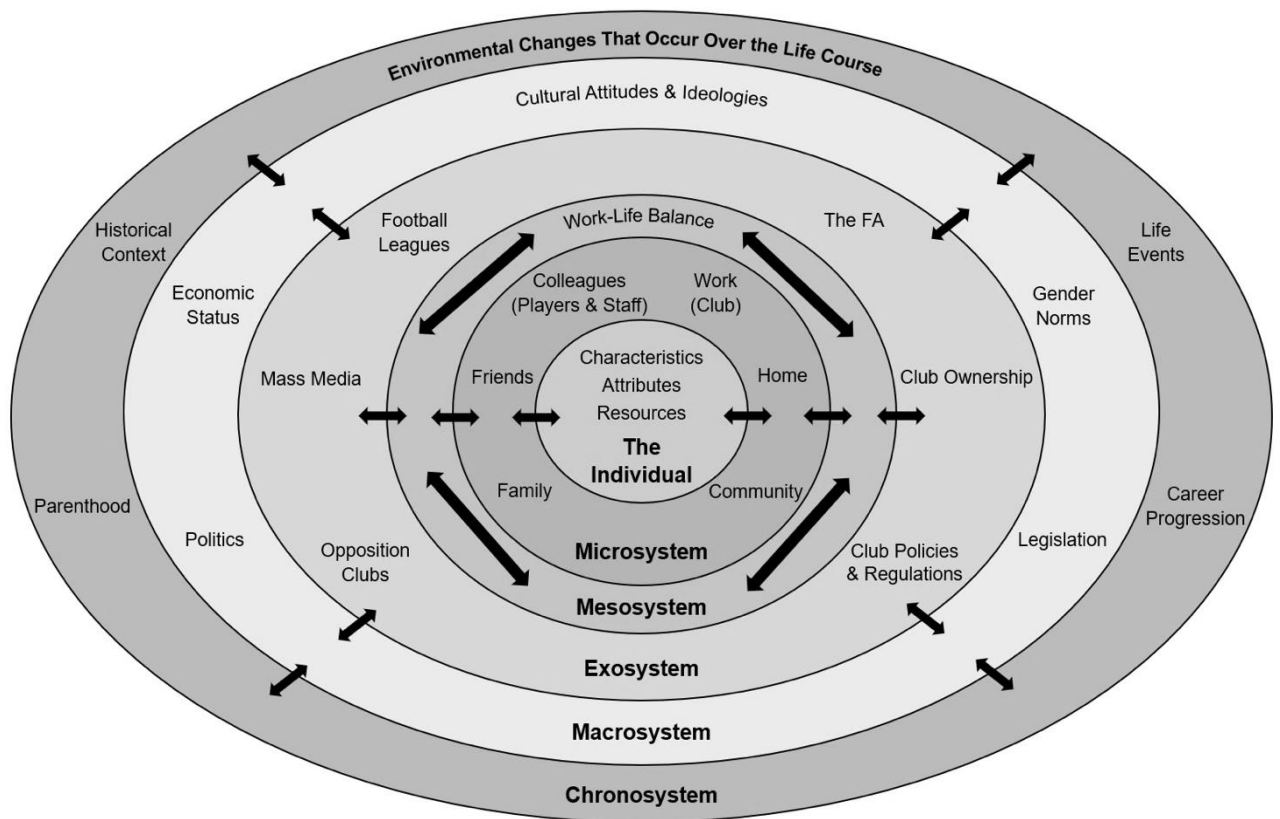


### 9.2.1 Progression in Well-Being Comprehension and Theoretical Advancements

A greater contextual understanding of well-being has been advocated (Hamling et al., 2020; Holst, 2022; Simova et al., 2024; Trainor & Bundon, 2023) and the thesis has contributed to this call. The programme of research has demonstrated how ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 2000; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006) can complement existing well-being theory (e.g., hedonia and eudaimonia) and enrich comprehension. Specifically, bioecological theory which informs the PPCT model (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006) can help contextualise existing theoretical models and frameworks of well-being, facilitating the application of them across varying systems while accounting for temporal influences (see Chapters 3, 4, 5 and 6). For instance, methodologies guided by ecological theory are in the discovery mode rather than the mode of verification (Rosa & Tudge, 2013) and the primary intent of bioecological theory is not to claim answers but to offer a framework to advance the discovery of processes and conditions that delineate the scope and limits of human development (Bronfenbrenner, 2005), which in this context is how a person develops an understanding of well-being. Therefore, the PPCT model can illuminate how proximal processes, personal characteristics, the context, and time shape well-being experiences and sensemaking. An adapted version of the bioecological PPCT model (Bone, 2015; Bronfenbrenner, 2005) is presented to capture how football coaches' well-being can be shaped by such socio-contextual interactions (see [Figure 9.3](#)). This also reiterates the importance of *being* in the term well-being and how well-being cannot be discussed without consideration to humans finding themselves well according to spatial, temporal and interpersonal coordinates in their lives (Holst, 2022).

**Figure 9.3**

*A bioecological PPCT representation of socio-contextual systems that shape well-being in a football context (adapted from Bone, 2015)*



Chapters 3 and 4 illuminated the contextualised nature of well-being as it captured the reciprocal relationships between coaches and their environments. For instance, within chapter 3 well-being comprehension was explored, whereby coaches conveyed well-being as energy and compared it to a battery (see Chapter 3.4.1). Within these accounts it depicted the importance of proximal processes in determining well-being experiences and sensemaking. For instance, findings demonstrate how the individual (i.e., coach) and those in their environment (e.g., colleagues) can influence well-being bi-directionally, which displays the interpersonal nature of well-being. Simpson et al. (2023) advocated to shift individualised outlooks of well-being towards more of an interpersonal perspective, which the present programme of research has accounted for. Bioecological theory (Bronfenbrenner, 2005) acknowledges and assumes that a coach's well-being will equally

be shaped by their player's well-being and vice versa. This illuminates the contagion like elements of well-being and how it can supersede 'intrapersonality'. Furthermore, Schinke et al., (2024) postulates that multi-level social processes and interpersonal relationships influence mental health and well-being of sport personnel. Schinke et al. (2024, p. 3) goes on to define well-being as:

A dynamic state or experience of quality of life in one or more of life's many domains, such as physical, psychological, spiritual, emotional, interpersonal, social, familial, cultural, financial, occupational/professional, recreational, intellectual, existential, and environmental.

The contemporary definition provided by Schinke et al. (2024), which was published at the very end of this programme of research, captures the ecological nature of well-being and in turn complements the applied PPCT model (Bronfenbrenner, 2005) and the thesis' overall findings. For example, existential and cultural domains and how they shape well-being experiences and sensemaking were addressed throughout the thesis (see Chapters 3, 4, 5 and 6). Chapter 3 captured how cultural proximal processes greatly influenced coaches' well-being ideology, whereby prolonged and sustained engagement/interactions in men's football's masculine culture over time (e.g., throughout playing and coaching careers) shaped sensemaking. Specifically, the necessity to "toughen up, not show sort of any vulnerability or weakness" (Connor, see Chapter 3.4.1.2), which in this example was instilled from Connor's early playing career experiences. This demonstrates how the chronosystem (e.g., time; Bronfenbrenner, 2005) is an important element to consider when exploring well-being sensemaking and related experiences because prior experiences (or reciprocal interactions) develop and inform present well-being comprehension.



Existentially, coaches demonstrated identity conflicts (see Chapter 3.4.2.1) which shaped well-being experiences and sensemaking. For example, the PPCT model accounted for personal characteristics like a coach's experience (e.g., years in the game), their context (e.g., employed or unemployed), and the dynamic proximal processes of these over time (Bronfenbrenner, 2005) and how they reciprocally influenced a coach's identity and well-being (see Chapter 3.4.2.1). When coaches became overtly engrossed in the coaching role and their identity was structured around football, their well-being would become fragmented if dismissed (i.e., fired) by the club and/or when the footballing side of life was challenging. However, if they were in a stable footballing position and/or the footballing aspects were going well, their well-being would thrive. For instance, some coaches existentially questioned purpose in life and became emotionally unstable when they were dismissed (see Chapters 3.4.2.1 and 4.4.1) meaning their well-being became impeded (i.e., a lack of eudaimonia and hedonia). Thus, the programme of research demonstrates how the PPCT model (Bronfenbrenner, 2005) can help contextualise existing theories of well-being, such as hedonia and eudaimonia by accounting for personal characteristics, ecological systems, and the reciprocal interaction between them over time. The PPCT (Bronfenbrenner, 2005) model helps enrich well-being comprehension within a given context, which for the purpose of this thesis was men's professional football clubs.

Familial interactions and the interpersonal nature of well-being was once more demonstrated within chapters 4, 5 and 6. Chapter 4 utilised docuseries data and multi-perspective accounts to illuminate the reciprocal interactions between a coach's and their family's well-being. For instance, in chapters 4.4.2 and 4.4.5 coaches' wives, sons and friends communicated the ecology of well-being as they implied how mesosystem interactions could shape related well-being experiences. Specifically, how the media and

fans communicate with coaches can influence familial well-being, which in turn can influence coaches' well-being. Chapter 5 longitudinally enlightened the familial influence on well-being and how sustained periods away from loved ones can fragment a coach's well-being, whereas sustained familial interactions can buffer against impeded well-being and potential ill-being symptoms (e.g., burnout; see Chapters 5.4.3.1 and 5.4.3.2). These findings highlight the benefits of developing a more well-rounded coach and/or individual identity and the importance of sustained familial interactions during a footballing season. However, this is challenging given professional football coaching and management demands unrelenting commitment (Newman & Rumbold, 2024) and prolonged periods away from homelife due to extended periods of work-related travel (Roderick, 2012). Thus, football organisations and national governing bodies (NGBs) need to direct their attention to how coaches' identities and familial interactions can be better supported throughout footballing seasons for well-being gains. For instance, coaches are performers who can significantly influence their athletes (e.g., relationships and performances) and the sporting environment (e.g., culture and psychological support), illustrating the importance of strategies to support their well-being because if it is compromised there may well be a 'spill over' effect on athletes' well-being (Bissett et al., 2020; Didymus et al., 2018). This highlights how if coaches are not functioning efficiently, the environment most likely will not function effectively. Therefore, organisations and NGBs should take note as not only can performance gains be lost due to such influences, but athlete and other sporting personnel's well-being may also become impeded as a result leading to organisational dysfunction. In sum, although performance and athlete well-being losses are rationalised from not supporting coaches' well-being, it should be acknowledged that organisations and NGBs have a duty of care to support coaches as ultimately, they are human beings with welfare rights (Kavanagh et al., 2021; Wagstaff, 2019).

### **9.3 Advances in Methodological Approaches to Explore Well-being**

The programme of research has advanced qualitative methodological approaches to explore coaches' well-being in a variety of ways. For instance, when exploring football coaches' well-being the thesis is the first to employ a multi-modal approach which utilised IPA and photo-elicitation. Additionally, it is the first to employ a LIPA multi-modal design over the course of a competitive season in football and to the author's knowledge within any sports coaching domain. The use of video docuseries to access a seldom heard group in elite level professional football coaches and explore their well-being experiences has never been done before. This led to the adaptation of the IPA approach and how it can be applied to such data. Moreover, implementing a combined IPA and bioecological approach contextualised coaches' well-being whilst operating in men's football and highlights how rich narratives and lived experiences can be obtained. Such methodological advancements illustrate the progression in and contribution of knowledge to IPA and sports coaching research from the programme of research. The following sections will discuss these methodological advancements and contributions in more depth.

#### **9.3.1 A Combined IPA and Bioecological Approach**

A novel contribution of the programme of research was the combination of IPA and bioecological theory. The reason being is that IPA centres itself around lived experiences and contextualises participant claims within tangible (e.g., physical) and intangible (e.g., cultural) environments to make sense of the relationship between 'person' and 'world' (Larkin & Thompson, 2012). Bioecological theory endeavours to illuminate socio-contextual interactions and enrich one's understanding of how they reciprocally shape development, sensemaking and related experiences (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). Bioecological theory is not to provide answers (Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Rosa & Tudge,

2013), likewise IPA is inductive in nature and findings are grounded in the narratives of the participants (Smith et al., 2022). Therefore, IPA and bioecological theory equally aim to tease out latent interpretations and deepen understanding of phenomena development (Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Rosa & Tudge, 2013; Smith et al., 2022).

Bioecological theory (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006) strengthens IPA's contextualist efforts by utilising ecological systems (e.g., set of nested contextual environments/domains) to better understand the multifaceted nature of one's environment. Furthermore, bioecological theory accounts for time (e.g., temporality) and how past, present and future interactions and/or ruminations shape lived experiences. In combination, specificity can be achieved whereby the context can be better understood. For instance, IPA would ask the author to acknowledge the general context (e.g., cultural or situational settings) of the participant and to inform interpretations from this. Whereas bioecological theory surpasses the generic and breaks the context into micro, meso, exo, macro and chrono 'systems' and by doing so can capture more of a holistic account for one's dynamic context. Specifically, bioecological theory would account for interactions within one's most proximal (e.g., immediate) and distal (e.g., distant) environments over time (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006) enriching the contextualised and temporal nature of well-being. This approach surpasses generalisations and breaks down an individual's context to look more closely at the interacting features that shape well-being comprehension and experiences which may otherwise have gone unnoticed. For example, coaches drawing upon past playing experiences (e.g., chronosystem) to inform present well-being understanding and how sustained sport specific cultural exposure (e.g., macrosystem) has formulated these perspectives (see Chapter 3.4.1.2). This enhances the IPA approach as human lived experiences occur and unfold temporally (Farr & Nizza, 2019) meaning the PPCT model is well placed to enlighten such temporal (e.g., past,

present and future) occurrences. As of writing, Jonathan Smith the founder of IPA, has a paper in press whereby he advocates for temporal progression in IPA, and he attempts to advance the IPA approach for exploring temporal aspects of personal experiences relating to health and well-being (Smith, in press). Within this paper Smith (in press) draws upon the qualitative longitudinal research of Neale (2021) who in turn utilises Bronfenbrenner's (2005) ecological theory when addressing context and time. The present programme of work has already explored retrospective (e.g., past ruminations), present (e.g., within the moment), and prospective (e.g., future anticipations) contemplations regarding well-being by employing Bronfenbrenner's (2005) PPCT model (e.g., an ecologically informed temporal approach) prior to Smith's (in press) contemporary advocations. This once more illustrates the progressive nature of the current body of work and how it aligns with the contemporary thinking of IPA's founder.

In sum, all of the ecological systems can be seen throughout the thesis, such as club relationships (e.g., microsystem), club conflict (e.g., colleagues fighting amongst one another; mesosystem), opposition (e.g., exosystem), cultural norms in football (e.g., macrosystem), and transitional events like parenthood or club takeovers (e.g., chronosystem) which reciprocally shape well-being experiences and sensemaking (see Chapters 3, 4, 5 and 6). Thus, how coaches come to experience and make sense of well-being is due to the reciprocal interactions they have within and in between their multi-layered socio-contextual environments. This demonstrates how IPA research can and should become more attuned to the multi-faceted nature of contexts whereby proximal (e.g., immediate contact) and distal (e.g., infrequent contact) environments and the tangible (e.g., people and places) and intangible (e.g., culture and beliefs) features associated with them should be explored equally over time.

### **9.3.2 Using Docuseries and an Adapted IPA Approach**

Chapter 4 progressed the application of IPA by adapting it to explore video docuseries data, which to the author's knowledge is the first piece of work to do so. This approach was inspired by Lee and McFerren (2015) who applied IPA to video data in music therapy. There were six stages to the approach; (i) Understanding the moment; (ii) Understanding the whole; (iii) Deciding a scope of analysis; (iv) Describing what and interpreting how; (v) Looking at other parts; and (vi) Integrating parts and whole (Lee & McFerren, 2015). This led to the adaptation and development of how IPA could be used and applied to docuseries data as a similar process was adopted (see Chapter 4.3.3). For example, contextual sensitivity was paramount and made possible due to the video data, as opposed to traditional audio recordings. This enabled the author to understand moments (e.g., present experiences) and the wider context (e.g., seasonal timepoints and events) which facilitated the scope of analysis.

Particular attention was given to the core focal point (e.g., coach) when they entered shot, spoke or was spoken about and what the current context was (e.g., stage of season, at home with family or in the workplace). Interpretations could then be made once this scope had been established which led to interesting outcomes, especially in relation to 'looking at other parts' (Lee & McFerren, 2015). For instance, when family, friends or colleagues were talking about the coach (e.g., other parts) it facilitated a multi-perspective IPA exploration (Smith et al., 2022) whereby alternative accounts could be combined with the coach's narratives and contextual circumstances (e.g., moments) to create a more holistic picture of lived experiences (e.g., wider context). Specifically, chapter 4.4.3 illuminated how Diego Simeone found it hard to make friends in football, most likely because he had to maintain a tough masculine identity. His tough masculine identity within the football domain was named Cholo. This was made apparent thanks to utilising

narrative accounts from his family and friends and led to establishing how Diego utilised two differing identities to navigate the footballing context and manage his well-being. According to Diego's friend and ex-player, Sebastian, there is Diego for everyday life and Cholo for football, which enabled Diego to manage his well-being when in and out of the football context. Cholo can easily conform to football's cultural norms, whereas Diego can let his guard down when at home to display vulnerability with family, like his wife, Carla. Therefore, it can be seen how from Diego stating it is hard to make friends (e.g., a moment) and combined with his friends and families accounts (e.g., parts) it illuminated a more enriched and interpretive narrative (e.g., wider context) that would have otherwise been absent.

Documentary data can illuminate the complex lives, stories, and experiences of sportspeople (Poulton & Roderick, 2008) which is why docuseries are well-suited to exploring professional football coaches' well-being experiences. Documentaries and docuseries have narrative power and can tell compelling stories which make the audience feel and empathise (McDonald, 2007). As Sparkes and Stewart (2016, p. 89) convey:

A story is not a clear window through which the viewer can see the world it describes. Rather, any story is more like a window through which sketches of a phenomenon can be seen.

Sparkes and Stewart (2016) go on to argue that the sketch is not perfect but is well worth looking at. For example, it is argued that unmediated authenticity and truth can also be general problems for interview-based studies and qualitative research (Sparkes & Stewart, 2016), hence no qualitative data can truly claim objective 'truth'. Therefore, using IPA to explore docuseries data both enabled the exploration of phenomena (e.g., well-being experiences) via differing perspectives and provided access to a hard-to-reach

and/or seldom heard group (Smith et al., 2023). For example, it could be argued that professional football coaches are represented well in the research domain. Yet qualitative explorations of their well-being and mental health are sparse, which in this context would arguably make them a seldom heard group. This is possibly due to the engrained masculine culture within men's football which encourages the suppression of voice and does not afford the opportunities to display signs of vulnerability (Manley et al., 2016).

Both hard-to-reach and seldom heard are applicable to the very elite managers and coaches operating across the highest leagues in world football (e.g., England's Premier League and Spain's La Liga). Thus, docuseries such as Amazon Prime's All or Nothing provided access to the likes of Pep Guardiola and José Mourinho which otherwise the author would not have been able to access or analyse. This is particularly important because elite level first team coaches operating at the highest levels in professional football (e.g., EPL and La Liga) are not often represented in the research domain; especially whilst actively working and competing. For example, their voices or experiences regarding well-being are finite, often captured by brief journalistic media interviews (Shearer, 2022; Steinberg, 2023) where they will be more than likely made to navigate micropolitics and suppress true feelings (File, 2018). Therefore, obtaining and interpreting contextualised insights into related well-being experiences addresses a pertinent research gap within the football coaching well-being research domain.

Chapter 4 has greatly enhanced the IPA approach and demonstrated that it can be adapted and applied to novel forms of data which is ready to hand (e.g., publicly accessible video docuseries). This approach surpasses singular auditory accounts and harnesses multiple perspectives with added richness through visual content (e.g., seeing displays of emotion or lived experiences in wider contexts such as homelife). IPA places emphasis on person-in-context (Larkin et al., 2006) and this chapter demonstrates how



such can be achieved and enriched using video documentary data whereby ‘moments’ and ‘wider’ life contexts can be explored to create a more complete sketch or picture of experience (Lee & McFerren, 2015; Sparkes & Stewart, 2016).

### **9.3.3 Employing a Qualitative Longitudinal IPA of Football Coaches’ Well-Being**

There were calls to longitudinally explore sports coaches’ well-being (Norris et al., 2017; Potts et al., 2021a) and particularly within men’s professional football (Baldock et al., 2021, 2022) to better capture its dynamic nature. However, research has often employed proxy indicators of well-being (e.g., life satisfaction, affect, and psychological distress) or explored and measured related topics (e.g., stress, coping, and burnout) which do not necessarily provide a sufficient or complete and accurate representation of well-being (Giles et al., 2020).

Chapters 5 and 6 both longitudinally explored how coaches experienced and made sense of well-being grounding interpretations within the coaches’ narratives. The LIPA approach facilitates the exploration of phenomena (e.g., well-being) over time from the perspectives of the participants and empowers them to make sense of related lived experiences (Smith et al., 2022). The focal point of the programme of research was to specifically explore how coaches experience and make sense of well-being, there was no pursuit of related constructs, but acknowledgement would be given to them if coaches’ accounts aligned. For example, chapter 5.4.1.2 discusses identity and associated theories like Goffman’s (1971) impression management and dramaturgy but only because coaches’ well-being sensemaking appeared grounded in such approaches. Likewise, chapter 6.4.3 addresses Oldenburg’s (1999) work on third places and its relation to well-being as coaches conveyed how having a third space away from work-life demands was beneficial for well-being. Furthermore, within chapter 3.4.2.2 masculinity and cultural norms are discussed because coaches identified how traditional cultural ideologies shaped

sensemaking and related well-being experiences within men's football. Consequently, the thesis gave a platform for coaches to openly voice narratives around well-being and what they felt mattered within the specific context of men's football. This complements and progresses the work of Baldock et al. (2021, 2022) who examined coaches' stressors and related well/ill-being experiences as the present programme of research qualitatively explores coaches' lived experiences of well-being and how they make sense of it.

The longitudinal approaches of chapters 5 and 6 captured the temporality of well-being and how in the context of men's football, well-being seems to align with seasonal demands (Baldock et al., 2022; see Chapters 5.4 and 6.4). For example, regarding well-being temporalism, Hersch (2023) argues that well-being has momentary and periodic elements. Hersch (2023) goes on to state that relationships between moments, the order they occur, the narrative and shape of one's life and other features that go beyond the moment influence well-being. This is demonstrated within chapter 5.4.2.2 when Connor displayed how his well-being was influenced by a transitional event (e.g., club takeover). Specifically, relationships between moments (e.g., timepoints) over a period (e.g., season) led to impeded well-being. As time progressed throughout the study it could be seen that Connor's well-being gradually became compromised as the takeover affected club stability, his relationships with colleagues and familial interactions, which captures how the accumulation of moments, in combination with his wider life narrative impeded well-being.

Similarly, for Tom in chapter 5.4.1.2 the temporality of his well-being was captured by the LIPA approach as momentary changes led to a greater periodic change in his well-being state (Hersch, 2023). Tom becoming a father for the first time and transitioning into a new senior job role (e.g., Head of coaching) at his club captures the ecological nature of well-being, as an accumulation of experiences, in differing domains,

overtime shaped his well-being (Schinke et al., 2024). Hersch (2023) postulates that the narrative of one's life (relationship between moments) affects how well one's life goes because if something is narratable, there is some story that can be told about it. Thus, lives are not just grouped moments but also stories, and better or worse stories can result in lives with thriving or thwarted well-being (Hersch, 2023). Therefore, Tom's life narrative (the relationship between moments) of becoming a father and transitioning into a new job formulated his well-being experiences. This highlights how a LIPA approach can be used to advance well-being knowledge because it not only captures the temporality of well-being (e.g., fluctuations in states of well-being over time), but it can weave timepoints together to create compelling narrative stories. Thus, if research is stating that multiple domains shape well-being (Schinke et al., 2024), an effective way that can be captured is through a LIPA approach which harnesses lived experiential accounts over sustained periods, such as months and years (Smith et al., 2022).

Chapters 5 and 6 advanced IPA research because the multi-modal longitudinal approaches captured the complex intertwining nature of 'fixed' clock time and 'fluid' experiential time, and how exploring both can achieve a more holistic understanding of social processes and phenomena (e.g., well-being; Neale, 2021). For instance, Neale (2021) argues that longitudinal work is traditionally viewed and implemented in a prospective manner as it often follows people forward through time, but he also claims that attention should be attributed to the retrospective gaze (e.g., looking back). Smith (in press) builds upon Neale's (2021) insights and states that time can be captured in IPA work via an experiential timeline of past, present and future. Here a person at any present moment can look backwards and generate a past as experientially understood and can look forward and imagine possible futures (Smith, in press). The present programme of research has demonstrated this throughout (see Chapters 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7) whereby

participants have made sense of their present well-being due to past (i.e., retrospective) experiences and future (i.e., prospective) anticipations. This was in part made possible by adopting Bronfenbrenner's (2005) PPCT model of *human development* to capture contextual change over time. Interestingly, Smith (in press) states his new taxonomy of IPA and personal experience over time follows an elemental model of *human development* and that emphasis and recognition should be afforded to how *humans develop* and subsequently change across the life course. Thus, it could be argued that the present thesis has pioneered the use of human development theory (e.g. the PPCT model) in IPA research to capture the temporality of lived experiences regarding well-being. Particularly as the programme of research adopted human development theory as a theoretical lens to enrich sensemaking three and a half years ago which has led to enriched interpretations of past, present and future narratives regarding well-being.

#### **9.3.4 Utilising an Auto-Driven Photo-Elicitation Approach to Explore Well-Being**

Contemporary well-being and mental health research have promoted the worth and endorsed the use of employing socio-ecological assessments to holistically explore key sporting stakeholders' well-being related lived experiences (Frost et al., 2024 Purcell et al., 2022; Schinke et al., 2024). For instance, whilst this programme of research has been conducted, and more pertinently, after the completion of chapters 6 and 7 which utilised an auto-driven photo-elicitation approach, Schinke et al. (2024) advocated the use of a photo-elicitation approach to understand one's well-being status more holistically. This is because ecological approaches can offer insight into the various challenges sports personnel negotiate each day (Schinke et al., 2024). Chapters 6 and 7 are the first to explore football coaches' well-being lived experiences, as well as the temporality of their well-being across a season using a photo-elicitation approach. Smith et al. (2022)

encourage the use of multi-modal IPA approaches to explore lived experiences and this programme of research has done so.

Traditionally, photo-elicitation entails the researcher selecting an array of images and using them as prompts within an interview to stimulate discussion (Bates et al., 2017; Harper, 2002). However, this approach has its limitations, for instance there may still be an imbalance of power whereby the researcher dominates the structure and narrative of the interview, and the chosen images of the researcher may not be relevant to the participants and therefore yield irrelevant or little information (Harper, 2002; Kyololo et al., 2023). Whereas an auto-driven photo-elicitation approach empowers participants to source their own images and places them at the heart of the interview process as they discuss and dictate their own pertinent images (Glaw et al., 2017; Romera Iruela, 2023). Methodologically the use of an auto-driven photo-elicitation approach has extended IPA research due to facilitating the process of illuminating tacit and latent experiences, those which are often taken for granted or seen as background phenomena (Morrey et al., 2022; Pain, 2012). This was demonstrated multiple times within the programme of research, for example chapter 6.4.1, via the use of images illuminated how Angie's authentic identity and 'womanness' needed to *shine through* to facilitate her well-being, something which she had not previously considered. The use of an auto-driven photo-elicitation approach has advanced IPA research by demonstrating how the sensemaking process can be made collaborative (e.g., participant and researcher interpretations converge to widen horizons of understanding; Gadamer, 2013) and more enjoyable for participants due to its active (e.g., cognitively stimulating) and empowering (e.g., participants encouraged to lead) approach to research (Bates et al., 2017; Burton et al., 2017).

## **9.4 Applied Implications**

The programme of research offers a selection of applied implications that are relevant for researchers aiming to explore coaches' well-being and for applied practitioners (e.g., sport psychologists) who aim to support sport personnel well-being.

### **9.4.1 Photo-Elicitation as a Potential Intervention for Well-Being Management**

As addressed in chapter 7 the photo-elicitation data collection approach began to inadvertently act as a well-being management tool for the coaches, demonstrating intervention like outcomes which led to increased self-awareness (see Chapters 5.4.1.1, 5.4.1.2, 5.4.3.1, 5.4.3.2) and behaviour change (see Chapters 5.4.3.1 and 7.3.3). A rationale for this is because the photo-elicitation approach instigated the coaches to engage in reflective practices, as they were prompted to think about their well-being and what was shaping it at differing timepoints throughout a season. Reflective practice within coaching has been known to enhance learning, practice and critical thinking (Cropley et al., 2012; Knowles et al., 2001; Knowles et al., 2006). Hägglund et al. (2022) reported that coaches who engaged in a mindful self-reflection intervention perceived their self-awareness and self-compassion to improve which subsequently aided well-being. Therefore, the present programme of research demonstrates and adds to the research field how an auto-driven photo-elicitation approach can improve coaches' self-awareness and well-being practices/behaviours.

Using the thesis' findings as a basis, applied practitioners, such as sport psychologists could also benefit from using visual stimuli within practice, especially when working with clients. For example, chapter 7 illuminates how using images within interviews can yield greater depth and detail, especially highlighting tacit and latent experiences. Therefore, it is recommended that sport psychologists adopt a similar approach when working with clients by asking them to supply images which best capture

the topic of discussion. In doing so, clients are empowered and prompted to actively reflect which could lead to a more conducive interview process and context.

#### **9.4.2 Identifying and Utilising Third Spaces to Manage Well-Being**

A pertinent finding of the thesis was that coaches yearned for a third space (see Chapters 5.4.1.1 and 6.4.3), somewhere they could be their authentic self and dissociate from work and homelife demands which buffered against impeded well-being. These findings were adapted from the work of Oldenburg (1999) who coined the idea of ‘third places’. For instance, Oldenburg (1999) identified our home as the ‘first’ place of dwelling and our workplace as the ‘second’. However, these environments often reinforce social hierarchies and restrictive identities that can hinder well-being. For example, football organizations (i.e., workplaces) are known for power imbalances and the promotion of hegemonic masculine beliefs and norms (Champ et al., 2020). Consequently, Oldenburg (1999) advocated for ‘third places’, which he described as public spaces where individuals can detach from home and work life to enhance well-being. Key characteristics of third places include the absence of formal or social obligations and hierarchies, a communal and conversational atmosphere, and the creation of a sense of homeliness and relaxation (Oldenburg, 1999). People often enter third places for self-care, to escape the pressures of life, and relax in a way that is usually not possible when working to fulfil the social obligations of home and work (Fly & Boucquey, 2023).

Within chapter 5 a selection of coaches identified the need for a ‘third space’, opposed to place, to improve well-being and viewed this space as somewhere other than work or home within the microsystem where they felt able to have ‘me’ (personal) time. Coaches addressed how ‘third spaces’ could either be social or individual, which differs from Oldenburg’s (1999) original emphasis on socialisation, but similarly the spaces were sought after for the ability to rest and disassociate from work and home-life, to ultimately

improve well-being and general functioning. This was further demonstrated within chapter 6 whereby Angie sought out a third space in the form of the gym. This space (e.g., a gym) is often associated with physical well-being gains but resulted in psychological gains as it was a space where she had perceived control and could engage in self-care. Additionally, Tom demonstrated how social third spaces can be draining for well-being (see Chapter 5.4.1.1) which is why some coaches like Pete sought out spaces like the car journey to and from work for respite. Ultimately, organisations should work with sport coaches, amongst other sport personnel, to help identify and cultivate spaces that enable time for oneself, rest, and are therapeutic.

#### **9.4.3 Football Organisations and National Governing Bodies Have a Duty of Care**

Football organisations and national governing bodies (NGBs) need to direct their attention to how coaches' identities and familial interactions can be better supported throughout footballing seasons. The programme of research has highlighted how prolonged periods away from family can fragment well-being, whilst consistent familial interactions can facilitate well-being (see Chapters 5.4.3.1 and 5.4.3.2). Additionally, the thesis unveiled how coaches can become overtly engrossed within the football coaching role, to the extent it can formulate a large and dominant part of their identity (see Chapters 3.4.2.1, 4.4.1, 4.4.2, 5.4.1 and 6.4.4). The term duty of care has seen traction in recent years, particularly within the sport performance realm (Kavanagh et al., 2021). This is because sport organisations are increasingly being held accountable for their role in developing cultures that promote a duty of care and how they support their personnel's well-being (Frost et al., 2024; Kavanagh et al., 2021; Wagstaff, 2019). Yet, within men's professional football organisations the environment is often volatile and unrelenting (Baldock et al., 2021; Higham et al., 2021; Newman & Rumbold, 2024), whereby the average coach will spend prolonged periods away from homelife due to sustained periods



of work-related travel (Roderick, 2012). Thus, football organisations and NGBs would benefit from assessing the structure and demands of competitive men's footballing seasons as they cultivate obsessive tendencies and necessitate prolonged periods away from family.

There appears to be a requisite for change as the football coaching profession is becoming more unsustainable, demonstrated by elite level coaches voicing their well-being struggles to the media (BBC Sport, 2023; Higham et al., 2024; Liverpool FC, 2024). This is of concern given elite level coaches have access to far more support (e.g., an employed sport psychologist) than those operating at the lower levels of the football pyramid (e.g., EFL's League One and Two) due to the vast differences in club revenue. This, however, not only highlights a requirement to assess the structure of football seasons, but also how coaches are currently being supported, if at all, by their respective organisations and NGBs. Chapters 3.4.2.2 and 7.2.5 illustrated how trade unions like the League Managers' Association (LMA) are perceived to be insufficiently supporting coaches, with similar findings also indicating a lack of support from clubs. Whereas, little mention, if any was given to the FA, which could imply a complete lack of involvement or support for coaches' well-being on the ground level (e.g., on a day-to-day basis). Kenttä et al. (2024) argued that future work should hold sporting organisations accountable regarding the support they provide for coaches as they have a duty of care. In sum, the current programme of research has argued that football organisations, NGBs, and footballing trade unions need to critically appraise their current support structures as the present programme of research indicates that coaches perceive current provision to be ineffective and/or lacking.

#### **9.4.4 Bespoke Support for Women Coaches Operating in Men's Football**

Chapter 6 is one of a kind as it is the first to longitudinally explore a woman coach's well-being experiences whilst working in a men's professional football club context. By conducting this research, it captured the challenges faced by the woman coach and illuminates the possible challenges faced by other women coaching and operating within this highly competitive masculine domain (Borrueco et al., 2023; Fielding-Lloyd & Meân, 2011, 2016). Angie's account within chapter 6 reiterates the need for professional football to reconsider its 24-hour, 7-days-a-week working culture where misguided views around resilience ultimately end in potential maltreatment, to the detriment of individuals' mental health and well-being (Newman & Rumbold, 2024). Angie felt compelled to work excessively and unsustainably to advance in men's football, hence organizations (e.g., clubs) and NGBs, such as the FA need to recognize the harmful effects of workaholic tendencies on well-being, including broader life implications and identity conflicts for both men and women. This awareness is particularly crucial for women in coaching roles, who often feel marginalized and not respected to the same extent as their male counterparts, which exacerbates intense working cultures (Gorman & Kmec, 2007). This issue is part of the broader equality and diversity challenges in football, where the sport publicly promotes equality, yet the underlying culture remains resistant (see Chapter 6.4). Therefore, women coaches, organizations and NGBs would benefit from mutual reflection and open communication about how ecological systems (Bronfenbrenner, 2005), such as work-life balance and cultural norms, influence well-being experiences and sensemaking to enhance support systems.

#### **9.4.5 The Development of a Potential Educational Well-Being Resource**

Reflecting upon the sum of the thesis's findings and based on the terminology and language used by the coaches (e.g., battery, charged and drained) regarding how they tried

to convey well-being (see Chapters 3 and 5), organisations and NGBs could benefit from using resources which adopt such layperson language and terminology to make well-being more accessible for football coaches and others operating within sports. Kenttä et al. (2024) advocate future work to develop coach educational resources. Thus, a possible analogous and educational approach could be to represent coaches' well-being as a mobile phone (see [Figure 9.4](#)). The analogous approach of comparing well-being to a mobile phone, captures both the physical and psychological energy coaches discussed and the ecological nature of well-being whereby reciprocal interactions within and between environments and people shape well-being experiences and sensemaking. This could be a user-friendly way of portraying well-being for coaches and possibly sports personnel more generally as it utilises terminology a layperson would understand. The approach to use analogies when conveying research is not uncommon and can be seen when UK Coaching (2021) adapted the work of Stodter and Cushion (2017) by representing the coaching learning process via a coffee filter analogy. This approach communicated scientific work more easily to a wider audience, arguably having greater applied impact.

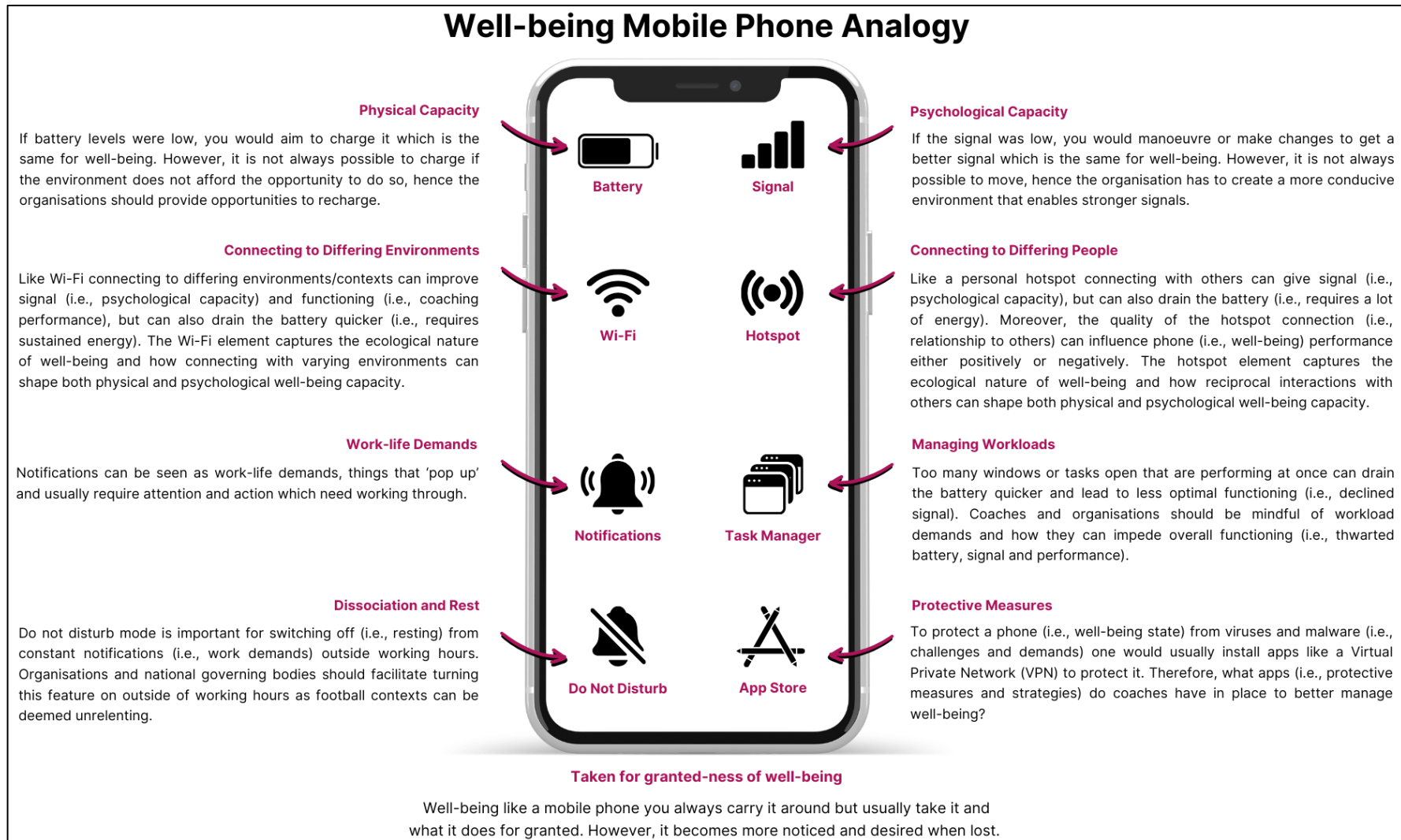
Outlining the mobile phone analogy, psychological and physical well-being capacity can be conveyed using a mobile's signal and battery levels. For instance, burnout research has demonstrated that well-being is impeded when chronic mental and physical fatigue is experienced but thrives when managed appropriately (Hassmén et al., 2019; Olusoga & Kenttä, 2017). Likewise, well-being is impeded when an individual's mental health is challenged but can thrive when maintained effectively (Lomas et al., 2023). The battery and signal can fluctuate between different increments and levels which captures the dynamic nature of how well-being and subsequent mental health operate on a continua whereby high and low functioning is achieved (Schinke et al., 2024). For instance, a mobile phone with low battery and/or signal will lead to languishing, whereas high battery

and/or signal can initiate thriving outcomes. Connecting to Wi-Fi and hotspots captures the ecological and interpersonal nature of well-being where interactions within and between environments and relationships shape well-being outcomes (Purcell et al., 2022; Schinke et al., 2024). Wi-Fi is specifically related to differing microsystems an individual may interact with and how the quality of the Wi-Fi (e.g., microsystem) will influence mobile phone (i.e., well-being) functioning. For instance, a coach can traverse from workplace, to home, to social spaces which each will have differing Wi-Fi quality that influences functioning.

‘Hotspotting’ refers to the relationships an individual encounters and interacts with, and like Wi-Fi, the quality and strength of the hotspot (i.e., relationship with others) influences functioning. For example, research has shown that social support can buffer well-being but when it is absent or insufficient can lead to less optimal functioning (Norris et al., 2020, 2022). Therefore, hotspots depict the interpersonal aspects of well-being and its contagion and transactional aspects. For either Wi-Fi or hotspots, if the quality and strength of the connections is weak or unstable the mobile phone (i.e., well-being) will be impeded and function ineffectively. However, when connections within an individual’s ecological system are strong and stable over prolonged periods, well-being will in turn be more stable.

**Figure 9.4**

*Well-being mobile phone analogy educational resource*



The next four educational components relate to workloads and rest, with emphasis on protective measures and self-care. For example, notifications can be viewed as work-life demands that appear over time which require attention and action. The more notifications (i.e., demands) the quicker the phone's battery will drain and signal strained. The task manager component captures when the notifications turn into active workload and how having too many tasks active at once can drain battery and strain phone (i.e., well-being) functioning. Do not disturb depicts the dissociative and rest element whereby outside of working hours it is important to reduce notifications (e.g., demands) so that effective rest and 'recharge' can take place. The app store communicates how one can procure and curate protective measures and strategies, while also engaging in stimulating activities. For example, downloading applications (i.e., strategies) such as a Virtual Private Network (VPN) can lead to better phone functioning. The same for when an individual obtains and actions strategies such as mindfulness and reflection which have led to improved well-being states (Hägglund et al., 2022). Via an app store an individual can also engage in stimulating apps (i.e., strategies) that exude pleasure, the same can be said for an individual who engages in personal hobbies or activities to aid well-being, such as physical activity, going to the gym and/or engaging in other sports (Eccles et al., 2023; Lundqvist, 2011; see Chapters 5.4.1.1 and 6.4.3). Finally, the taken for granted element alludes to how well-being often goes unnoticed until it is influenced in some meaningful manner (Seamon, 2018). For instance, human beings frequently display a lived obliviousness to their everyday lives, and well-being can go unnoticed until it is either impeded or facilitated (Seamon, 2018). This is captured within the mobile phone analogy as when one's phone is not functioning correctly it can lead to instability or when it is lost it becomes highly sought after and perceptible.

In sum, the mobile phone analogy may be able to effectively communicate and check in with coaches' well-being. Specifically, the layperson terminology and language presented could be used when detecting potential well-being states. For example, an applied practitioner could use certain aspects for communicative and subjective measurement purposes within intake interviews (see Chapters 3.6 and 5.5). The battery component could be presented to a coach where the practitioner asks them to rate their physical capacity of well-being from 0-100%. Equally, the signal bars could be presented in a similar way for coaches to communicate their psychological capacity (e.g., operating at two bars out of four). Combined with Motivational Interviewing (MI) principles (Miller & Rollnick, 2009) this could initiate deep and meaningful conversations, such as enabling an applied practitioner to ask their client "Why have you chosen 60% battery and not 80%?", "What is the difference between 60% and 80%?", and "How would you get to 80%?", which might elicit richer client responses, especially when resistance is present. This approach is inspired by Michael's account in chapter 5.4.2.1 as he and the author mutually used his supplied treadmill image as an analogous prompt throughout the research study. Insightful discussions were initiated by him and the author using treadmill terminology, such as "has the speed increased?", "are you currently on a decline or incline?", "I've turned the speed down", and "[I]'ll go uphill", which led to richer interpretations.

Wi-Fi and hotspots can be presented to gauge environmental and relational qualities to see if the current context is conducive for well-being. More specifically, Wi-Fi could be used as a prompt for the coach to identify the environments that facilitate their well-being the most, which in turn may facilitate discussions that lead them to identify why. Likewise, the hotspot element can be used as a prompt to identify the most beneficial an/or detrimental relationships and follow the same line of enquiry. The do not disturb

and app store elements can be presented to coaches to highlight when/if they rest and what (if any) protective strategies they engage with. This could lead to increased self-awareness around the various ways well-being could be better managed as a plethora of ‘apps’ (i.e., strategies) could be made aware of to the coaches. There is flexibility in how this analogous resource can be applied and there is also scope for future research to progress and develop it further, such as exploring the emotions of coaches by presenting an array of ‘emoji’ icons that usually appear on a phone’s keyboard.

#### **9.4.6 Integrating Acceptance Commitment Therapy and Motivational Interviewing Principles to Support Well-Being**

Throughout the thesis there have been instances where coaches have intentionally or unintentionally engaged in or demonstrated a desire for Acceptance-Commitment-Therapy (ACT) practices like Mindfulness-Acceptance-Commitment (MAC; Gardner & Moore, 2004, 2006) strategies to manage well-being (see Chapters 3.4.1, 3.4.2, 4.4.4, 5.4.2.1, 5.4.2.2, 5.4.2.3 and 6.4.1). For example, coaches such as Will demonstrated ACT principles like cognitive defusion and acceptance when he was discussing his perspective on matchday results and how they can shape well-being if one becomes overly engrossed and dependent on them (see Chapter 3.4.1). Similarly, Pete intentionally pursued activities that he valued to better manage his well-being (Olusoga & Yousuf, 2019), which was also informed from his awareness of the past (e.g., familial ill health encounters) whereby he was able to cognitively defuse the attached negative emotions to engage in committed actions that were value-congruent in the present moment (Gervis & Goldman, 2020; see Chapter 5.4.2.1). Whereas Diego Simeone and Mikel Arteta demonstrated behaviours, such as obsessive ruminations that would have benefitted from adopting more of a MAC approach to be more present (see Chapter 4.4.1). Likewise, Max addressed the challenges of being present when he asserted being present in body but not in mind due to the



relentless nature of working in professional football (see Chapter 3.4.2). Many more examples occur throughout the programme of research but given these exemplar narratives and lived experiences, coaches would benefit from engaging in cognitive behavioural therapies (CBT), such as MAC approaches.

There has been advocacy for more mindfulness-based approaches to enhance sports coaches' well-being and sustainability in the profession (Hägglund et al., 2019; Wagstaff et al., 2019), with findings corroborating the benefits (Hägglund et al., 2022). For instance, Hägglund et al. (2022) reported that after an 8-week SMS-intervention (i.e., text messages) coaches perceived themselves to be more self-aware and have a better understanding of vulnerability and self-compassion which in turn facilitated well-being. However, as Connor demonstrated in chapter 5.4.2.2 pure reliance on MAC approaches with limited organisational support may be insufficient as he ended up leaving his coaching role at the end of the season due to the amount of instability he experienced. Connor's situation illuminates how even with an appropriate mindfulness approach and skillset (i.e., Four A Model) it may not be enough to manage well-being within football in isolation. Thus, sport psychology practitioners could work with coaches and educate them on MAC approaches to mitigate well-being challenges, but organisations have a duty of care to provide additional and more purposeful well-being support (e.g., tailored and individualised strategies). Given the thesis' findings corroborate the relentless and volatile nature of men's football, until organisational change occurs (e.g., better support systems are in place), coaches would benefit from becoming more open, aware and engaged in what they do (Wagstaff et al., 2019) so that they could better manage their well-being and be the first line of defence.

The Motivational Interviewing (MI) method and its principles (Miller & Rollnick, 2009) would also aid coaches in becoming more open and aware. Specifically, the MI

method is grounded in humanism (Rogers, 1959) and endeavours to build strong client-practitioner relationships. MI promotes emphatic listening (Miller & Rose, 2009) which is informed by the therapeutic conditions of empathy, congruence, and positive regard (Rogers, 1959) to create an atmosphere of safety and acceptance, so clients feel free to explore and express feelings in a non-judgemental manner. MI naturally adopts a supportive and empathic counselling style which ‘rolls with resistance’ and aims to resolve ambivalence by eliciting participants own motivations for change (Hettema et al., 2005). Thus, applied practitioners could combine MI and MAC principles when working with a coach to improve their self-awareness of well-being and openness to discuss related experiences.

It is acknowledged that ACT and MI have distinct philosophical bases (e.g., humanism and functional contextualism) and approaches but despite such differences they are complementary and could yield fruitful outcomes via ‘cross-fertilization’ (Bricker & Tollison, 2011). Specifically, MI’s focus on language *content* could aid an applied practitioner (e.g., sport psychologist) and client (e.g., coach) to identify opportunities for behaviour change via speech, while ACT’s emphasis on language *process* could help undermine speech that inhibits positive change (Bricker & Tollison, 2011). Beneficial outcomes, such as improving treatment/intervention motivation have been witnessed in clinical research when combining MI and ACT principles (Thurstone et al., 2017; Yildiz & Aylaz, 2021). This highlights the potential for future sports coaching work to combine such therapeutic approaches when supporting coaches and their well-being.

### **9.5 Strengths of the Programme of Research**

A core strength of this work is that it attends to Norris et al.’s (2017) request of exploring what well-being means to coaches. The programme of research has extensively explored

in a qualitative manner how football coaches experience and makes sense of well-being within their given contexts. This has led to the outcome that well-being is ecological in nature and contextual sensitivity is paramount for understanding how the construct is experienced and comprehended. For example, coaches highlighted how well-being was made sense of via past experiences, present circumstances, and future anticipations (see Chapters 3.4.1.2, 5.4.2 and 6.4.2). Football coaches' well-being cannot be discussed separately from their wider life as they are also husbands, wives, fathers, mothers, sons, and daughters, whereby well-being can traverse and permeate between systems that some may perceive as isolated, such as football club and home-life (see Chapters 3.4.2.1, 4.4.3, 4.4.4, 5.4.3.1, 5.4.3.2, 6.4.3 and 6.4.4).

Other strengths of the thesis relate to the methodological contributions of how well-being can be explored qualitatively, as to the author's knowledge, this programme of work is the first to, (i) Illuminate football coaches' lived experiences of well-being using an IPA approach; (ii) Utilise docuseries (video documentary) data as a novel way to explore a seldom heard group's (e.g., First team head coaches across two of the most prestigious men's leagues in world football) well-being experiences; (iii) Explore the temporal nature of well-being using a combined longitudinal IPA and photo-elicitation approach across an entire football season; (iv) Capture well-being experiences and narratives of a woman football coach working in a men's football club context; and (v) Demonstrate how an auto-driven photo-elicitation approach promotes reflective practices, can increase self-awareness, and act as a potential well-being management tool.

Traditionally, within the wider research field well-being has been explored from a positivist lens which has also been the case within the sports coaching research domain (Norris et al., 2017; Potts et al., 2021a). This has created a dearth of qualitative exploration regarding what well-being meant to coaches and how it is experienced (Norris et al.,

2017). This thesis addresses pertinent research gaps in well-being and sports coaching fields as it adds highly sought after qualitative phenomenological explorations of well-being and related lived experiences (Galvin & Todres, 2011; Holst, 2022; Kiefer, 2008; Sarvimäki, 2006; Todres & Galvin, 2010; see Chapters 3, 4, 5 and 6).

The programme of research has surpassed traditional qualitative methods to help advance understanding and sensemaking of well-being within the context of football. For instance, utilising video docuseries as a window through which well-being could be explored (Sparkes & Stewart, 2016) offered nuanced insights that traditional approaches (e.g., interviews) would not yield. The use of documentary data facilitated the illumination of elite level coaches' complex lives, stories, and experiences (Poulton & Roderick, 2008), harnessed multi-perspective accounts (Larkin et al., 2019), and bridged the gap towards more of an ethnographic understanding (Nichols, 2017) of a seldom heard group (Smith et al., 2023) in elite level, first team coaches operating at the highest competitive levels (e.g., EPL and LaLiga). Specifically, Nichols (2017) states that documentary data can closely capture reality and can be described as the “creative treatment of actuality” (p.5). However, there may be arguments that a limitation of documentary data is that it cannot capture objective reality, but as Sparkes and Stewart (2016) assert:

“With regard to the problems of unmediated authenticity and ‘truth’... it needs to be recognised that these are ‘problems’ for any interview-based study and qualitative research in general.”

This is reaffirmed by Power et al. (2012) who states that any expectation for novel data such as autobiographies and documentary data can or should represent an objective ‘truth’ is an ideal that no qualitative data can truly claim. Such data provides access to

lived experiences and stories where Maclure (2009) argues the storyteller “knows who she is, says what she means, and means what she says” (p. 104). Thus, in this regard the researcher’s task “is to access and uncover these meanings from the inner life of the person via the clear window of language” (Grant et al., 2013, p. 7). Chapter 4 achieved this via an adapted IPA approach as interpretations remained grounded within the participants language and narratives portrayed.

Another strength of the thesis is that the auto-driven photo-elicitation approach (Romera Iruela, 2023), employed in chapters 5 and 6 yielded plentiful rich data that may not have been possible via traditional interviews. For instance, men’s professional football is subsumed within an authoritarian and subservient culture (Manely et al., 2016; Parker, 1996; 2006) whereby aggression, violence, and masculinity are replete (Kelly & Waddington, 2006; Parker, 2001) and emotions, well-being issues and help-seeking behaviours are habitually suppressed (Manley et al., 2016). The masculine culture within men’s football presents significant challenges not only for men but also for the scarce women coaches pioneering in this environment (Norman & Rankin-Wright, 2018). For example, in male-dominated sports such as football, women’s participation remains contentious (Fielding-Lloyd & Meân, 2011), which may be partially attributed to the prevalence of male-centric discourses (Fielding-Lloyd & Meân, 2016). In addition, football organisations are often viewed as total institutions (Goffman, 1959) which are closed social systems shaped by sociocultural norms that can cultivate narrow identities and hegemonic beliefs amongst personnel (Champ et al., 2020). Thus, the men’s professional game is a challenging landscape to not only navigate but gain access to as a researcher. To counteract such masculine cultural norms so that a perceived sensitive topic like well-being could be effectively explored, an auto-driven photo-elicitation approach was employed. This approach was specifically implemented as it can empower

participants, prompt emotive expressive behaviours, and harness a phenomenological sense of experiences (Berg & Lune, 2017; Evans-Agnew & Rosemberg, 2016; Harper, 1986; Kunimoto, 2004). Such empowerment and expression of emotion can be seen in chapter 7.3.2 whereby John (first team head coach) admitted to never talking so openly and that using images empowered him to reflect and speak openly. This not only demonstrates that the auto-driven photo-elicitation approach effectively yielded data, but also has applied implications. Tasking coaches to source images that best captured their well-being and discussing them had therapeutic and cathartic outcomes (see Chapter 7).

Another strength of this programme of research relates to the number of thesis chapters which have been disseminated to academic, applied practitioner and general population audiences via either peer reviewed journals, research conferences or website news media. For example, chapters 3 and 4 have been published in high quality quartile one ranked journals such as *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health* and *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, and chapter 6 is currently under review in the *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*. In addition, a plethora of thesis chapters have been communicated via a multitude of national and international research conferences demonstrating the research impact of this work. Chapters 3 and 4 were also communicated in an accessible manner for wider audiences via a web article the author wrote for *The Conversation* titled “Jürgen Klopp’s decision to leave Liverpool may herald a new era for well-being in football”. This article (at the time of writing) has a total of 14,534 reads in countries such as the UK, USA, Australia, South Africa, and Indonesia, indicating the impact and reach of this programme of research beyond academia.

## **9.6 Areas for Future Research Development**

To build upon the foundational findings of chapters 3 and 4, chapters 5 and 6 acknowledged the temporality of well-being and the necessity to explore well-being over

time. Here the thesis employed a combined auto-driven photo-elicitation approach and LIPA of coaches' well-being across a football season to capture possible changes and/or fluctuations over time. This approach harnessed a plethora of tacit and latent experiences that shape well-being comprehension and sensemaking, such as, but not limited to identity conflicts, seasonal demands and life transitions (see Chapters 5 and 6). Such findings promote the opportunity for future sport-related research to explore well-being ecologically as socio-contextual systems within and outside of sport can equally shape well-being experiences. For example, future research could aim to explore whether there are differences between coaches who were and were not previously players, as it may elucidate whether past playing experience significantly contributes towards well-being comprehension (see Chapter 3). Similarly, future research could also explore whether previous significant life events like caring for others (e.g., those with chronic illnesses) leads to greater self-care and self-compassion when in the coaching domain (see Chapter 5).

To progress the findings of chapters 5 and 6, future research should aim to explore the impact of pregnancy and parenthood on well-being. For instance, Boswell and Cavallerio (2022) report that the challenges faced by parenthood, and specifically motherhood in combination with pregnancy, have only been partially explored. Findings indicate that both men and women coaches tend to be impacted by parenthood, but women more so due to pregnancy which often causes them to withdraw from sport for a prolonged period (Boswell & Cavallerio, 2022). Therefore, future research could investigate such critical life events among coaches using a LIPA (Farr & Nizza, 2019) approach to track the temporal fluctuations of well-being during lived experiences of pregnancy and transitions into parenthood. Examining how pregnancy influences the well-being of women sports personnel would help elucidate the significant challenges they encounter

compared to their male counterparts in the sporting field (Boswell & Cavallerio, 2022). Moreover, exploring how transitions into parenthood during sporting careers could illuminate the complexity of managing new identities (e.g., becoming a mother or father) and its subsequent influence on well-being. Specifically within football, future research would also benefit from exploring workplace cultures and policies as to whether maternity/paternity leave are supported both officially and unofficially and how this may shape experiences of well-being for coaches and other sporting personnel (e.g., players). This is pertinent given contemporary news reports of the taboo subject in relation to players not wanting to lose their starting positions (Hodges, 2024; James & Hay, 2021) and research illuminating the challenges faced during maternity for women coaches (Martin & Bowes, 2024).

Chapter 7 offered applied implications in the form of a possible well-being management tool. Specifically, the auto-driven photo-elicitation approach as it inadvertently demonstrated intervention like properties. This was due to coaches engaging in reflective practices which in turn led to a perceived increase in self-awareness, behavioural changes, and better well-being management (see Chapters 5, 6 and 7). Future research could aim to purposefully implement an auto-driven photo-elicitation approach as a well-being intervention and measure its impact on well-being. This could be in the form of a longitudinal mixed methods approach whereby subjective and objective well-being outcomes are measured over a prolonged period. Employing a mixed methods approach could better capture a more holistic picture of whether visual stimuli can actively support well-being states.

Although the present programme of research is the first to use docuseries data as a platform to explore football coaches' well-being experiences, a potential limitation is that the docuseries were edited and constructed by someone other than the author and



were not produced to specifically convey well-being experiences. Consequently, to progress the adapted IPA and docuseries findings, future work could conduct a thorough film analysis on how such edited and stylised stories portray coaching experiences. Another avenue for future research could be to explore how obsessive tendencies, which are often instilled by the relentless culture of professional football, influence coaches' well-being experiences and sensemaking. This could be achieved by ethnographical research which would add further additional layers (e.g., contextualisation) to how coaches experience and make sense of well-being in their context.

### **9.7 Thesis Conclusion**

In summary, the thesis has contributed to and achieved its principal research aim of exploring how professional coaches experience and make sense of well-being within football contexts. The programme of research has effectively used IPA and its theoretical underpinnings (e.g., phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography) to unearth coaches well-being and related lived experiences (see Chapters, 3, 4, 5 and 6). The body of work has also explored and represented a variety of lived experiences from seldom heard groups (Smith et al., 2023), such as elite level football coaches operating at the highest competitive levels and a woman coach working in a men's professional football club (see Chapters 4 and 6). The thesis has made important contributions to how well-being is experienced and made sense of temporally by exploring well-being states longitudinally across a competitive football season (see Chapters 5 and 6). Additionally, the thesis has implemented an array of innovative and novel methodological approaches which have not been conducted before in the space of coaches' well-being, specifically within a football coaching population. For instance, the programme of work has used IPA, adapted IPA on docuseries data, LIPA, and multi-modal LIPA where it was combined with auto-driven photo-elicitation. The auto-driven photo-elicitation approach yielded a plethora of

tacit and latent experiences that shape well-being comprehension and sensemaking, such as, but not limited to identity conflicts, seasonal demands and life transitions (see Chapters 5 and 6).

The programme of research also progresses the ecological and socio-contextual movement in well-being research (Mead et al., 2021; Purcell et al., 2022; Schinke et al., 2024; Walton et al., 2023) by implementing a bioecological theoretical lens (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Specifically, the PPCT model (Bronfenbrenner, 2005) as it accounts for personal characteristics (e.g., age, gender and coaching experience), context (e.g., interrelating socio-contextual environments), and the dynamic proximal processes (e.g., reciprocal interactions) of them over time. This holistic ecological approach situates person-context interactions at the centre of research acknowledging the multiple settings (e.g., competition and training), levels (e.g., micro to chrono) and domains (e.g., sport and non-sport) an individual interacts with (Purcell et al., 2022; Schinke et al., 2024). Overall, this thesis has added much needed research regarding how well-being is experienced and made sense of and how it is contextualised within men's football via a multitude of innovative qualitative approaches which have not been previously utilised in this given context.

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# Appendices

## Appendix 1: *Ethical Approval for Chapter 3*

### **Coaches sense-making and experiences of wellbeing within professional football: A phenomenological exploration.**

**Ethics Review ID:** ER35981952

**Workflow Status:** Application Approved

**Type of Ethics Review Template:** Very low risk human participants studies

#### **Primary Researcher / Principal Investigator**

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Andrew Higham  
(Health and Wellbeing)

#### **Converis Project Application:**

**Q1. Is this project ii) Doctoral research**

#### **Director of Studies**

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Joseph Stone  
(Health and Wellbeing)

#### **Supervisory Team**

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James Newman  
James Rumbold  
(Sport and Human Performance),(Sport and Human Performance)

## **Appendix 2: Participant Information Sheet**

### **PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET**

#### **TITLE OF RESEARCH STUDY:**

Coaches sense-making and experiences of well-being within professional football: A phenomenological exploration.

- 1. Legal basis for research studies:** The University undertakes research as part of its function for the community under its legal status. Data protection allows us to use personal data for research with appropriate safeguards in place under the legal basis of public tasks that are in the public interest. A full statement of your rights can be found at: <https://www.shu.ac.uk/about-this-website/privacy-policy/privacy-notice-for-research>. However, all University research is reviewed to ensure that participants are treated appropriately and their rights respected. This study was approved by UREC with Converis number ER35981952. Further information at <https://www.shu.ac.uk/research/ethics-integrity-and-practice>
- 2. Opening statement:** You are invited to take part in a study that aims to interview coaches on the topic of well-being within professional football. The purpose of the study is to explore how coaches understand and experience well-being within professional football. We hope that this research will add to the field of sport coach well-being and ultimately help future clubs, coaches, and researchers to improve well-being practice in the sport.
- 3. Why have you asked me to take part?** We have asked you to take part as we feel that your contributions would be invaluable. In addition, you fit the inclusion criteria for this study, which is to be an English speaking coach who has worked in professional football for a minimum of one year.
- 4. Do I have to take part?** Participation in this study is completely voluntary, you may decide if you wish to take part. A copy of the information provided here is yours to keep, along with the consent form if you do decide to take part. It should be noted that you can still decide to withdraw personally at any time until data analysis (one week post interview) without giving a reason, or you can decide not to answer a particular question at any point during the study.
- 5. What will I be required to do?** All that is required of you is to take part in an interview with the researcher. This will be conducted via an online video call at an agreed date and time. Upon consenting to participate you will be provided with details of the interview discussion topic, to give you an opportunity to reflect. Then at the start of the interview we would ask for your consent that the discussion can be recorded for transcription purposes.

6. **Where will this take place?** The study is flexible in nature. Therefore, it can be conducted in a location of your choice via online video call. For example, you may wish to take part in the interview within the comfort of your own home, which can be possible via online video calling.
7. **How often will I have to take part, and for how long?** You would be asked to take part in one interview. An interview of this nature usually lasts approximately between one and two hours.
8. **No form of deception is involved within this study.**
9. **Are there any possible risks or disadvantaged in taking part?** We do not foresee any potential risks or disadvantages of taking part in this study. However, in the unlikely circumstance of feeling any emotional distress from participating in the study, please seek support from your local GP or suitable wider services, such as the Samaritans (116 123 (UK) or [jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org)). However, it must be noted that if such feelings are experienced, they usually subside after completion of participation in the study.
10. **What are the possible benefits of taking part?** There is a selection of benefits to taking part in this study. You may find taking part a useful reflection tool that helps you become more aware of your own well-being. You will also contribute to the sport well-being research field. This in turn may help improve well-being practice in the football and coaching domain, potentially improving coach and club functioning from follow up research studies. Finally, due to the individual nature of this research your personal experiences and accounts will be heard and shared (anonymously), which may relate with many other coaching staff in your field. As a result, this may encourage other coaching staff to discuss their well-being and build an open network to develop ways to support each other's well-being within football.
11. **When will I have the opportunity to discuss my participation?** Once you have read the participant information sheet, you are more than welcome to contact the lead researcher to discuss your participation within the study.
12. **Will anyone be able to connect me with what is recorded and reported?** Your participation in this study is confidential and no information about your participation or individual results will be shared beyond the researcher and supervisors. Once we receive your contact information a coding system will be implemented, whereby you will be assigned an ID number. This will anonymise any information that may lead to the disclosure of your participation. Furthermore, pseudonyms will be used in place of your name and any others you mention within the transcript.
13. **Who will be responsible for all of the information when this study is over?** I the researcher will be responsible for the secure storage of the collected data.

14. **Who will have access to it?** Any information collected will only be available to the researcher and their supervisors. Unless requested to be inspected by the institution's ethics board.
15. **What will happen to the information when this study is over?** Data will be stored/archived for ten years after the project is complete. However, if project data is downloaded at any point, the ten-year period is reset from the download date. Once this time period has elapsed, all electronic files will be deleted.
16. **How will you use what you find out?** The data may be used by the researcher or the supervisors to form the basis of a publication such as a journal article, report or research conference presentation. There will be nothing in the published materials that will allow any individual participant to be identified.
17. **How long is the whole study likely to last?** In sum, you will be asked to take part in one interview (approx. between one and two hours). As a result, your participation will approximately last two hours in total. We anticipate that all data will be analysed by February 2022.
18. **How can I find out about the results of the study?** If you would like to know the results of the current study, please email the lead researcher and they will be more than happy to share the results once the PhD thesis has been completed and submitted to Sheffield Hallam University.

**If you have any other questions/queries regarding the study, please contact the lead researcher via the information provided at the end of this document.**

**Details of who to contact if you have any concerns or if adverse effects occur after the study are given below.**

Once more, there are no clear, apparent risks to taking part within the study. However, if you did at all suffer from any distress, then please seek support from your local GP or suitable wider services, such as the Samaritans (116 123 (UK) or [jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org)).

**Researcher/ Research Team Details:**

**Lead Researcher:** Andrew Higham

Email: [andrew.higham@shu.ac.uk](mailto:andrew.higham@shu.ac.uk)

**Supervisor:** Dr James Rumbold

Email: [j.rumbold@shu.ac.uk](mailto:j.rumbold@shu.ac.uk)

**Director of studies:** Dr Joseph Stone

Email: [joseph.stone@shu.ac.uk](mailto:joseph.stone@shu.ac.uk)

**Supervisor:** Dr James Newman

Email: [j.newman@shu.ac.uk](mailto:j.newman@shu.ac.uk)

**You should contact the Data Protection Officer if:**

- you have a query about how your data is used by the University
- you would like to report a data security breach (e.g., if you think your personal data has been lost or disclosed inappropriately)
- you would like to complain about how the University has used your personal data

[DPO@shu.ac.uk](mailto:DPO@shu.ac.uk)

**You should contact the Head of Research Ethics if:**

- you have concerns with how the research was undertaken or how you were treated

[ethicssupport@shu.ac.uk](mailto:ethicssupport@shu.ac.uk)

Postal address: Sheffield Hallam University, Howard Street, Sheffield S1 1WBT

**Appendix 3: Exemplar Informed Consent Form**

**PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM**

**TITLE OF RESEARCH STUDY:** Coaches sense-making and experiences of well-being within professional football: A phenomenological exploration.

*Please answer the following questions by ticking the response that applies*

- |  | <b>YES</b>               | <b>NO</b>                |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. I have read the Information Sheet for this study and have had details of the study explained to me.   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. My questions about the study have been answered to my satisfaction and I understand that I may ask further questions at any point.  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. I understand that I am free to withdraw from the study within the time limits outlined in the Information Sheet, without giving a reason for my withdrawal or to decline to answer any particular questions in the study without any consequences to my future treatment by the researcher. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. I agree to provide information to the researchers under the conditions of confidentiality set out in the Information Sheet.   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. I wish to participate in the study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6. I consent to the information collected for the purposes of this research study, once anonymised (so that I cannot be identified), to be used for any other research purposes.   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 7. I understand that only the audio of the recorded videos will be used for transcription and data analysis purposes.  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

**Participant's Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Participant's Name (Printed):** \_\_\_\_\_

**Contact details:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Researcher's Name (Printed):** \_\_\_\_\_

**Researcher's Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Researcher's contact details:**

Andrew Higham

Academy of Sport and Physical Activity, Sheffield Hallam University, Chestnut Court, Collegiate Crescent, Sheffield, S10 2BP, UK.

[Andrew.Higham@shu.ac.uk](mailto:Andrew.Higham@shu.ac.uk)



## Appendix 4: Exemplar Interview Guide

### IPA Interview Guide

**Title: Coaches sense-making and experiences of well-being within professional football: A phenomenological exploration.**

**Aim: To explore how coaches make sense of and experience well-being within a professional football environment.**

**Numbers** = Key question areas

**Letters** = Exemplar prompts if needed to encourage more in-depth discussion. See below:

- a. Can you describe what you mean when you say 'XXX'?
- b. Can you give me an example of XXX?

**Start of Interview:** Greet, then discuss policies and procedures e.g., ethics.

**Background info questions:** Age, years coaching, current role, qual, etc.

1. Talk to me about your experience as a coach within professional football.
  - a. What was it like being a coach working in professional football?
2. As a coach working in professional football, in your eyes/own opinion what is well-being?
  - a. How have **you PERSONALLY** experienced well-being within your role?
  - b. How do you make sense of / understand well-being?
  - c. Are you aware of when you experience well-being within your role?
  - d. Are you aware of when your experience Ill-being within your role?
3. How does it make you feel working/coaching in football?
  - a. How does working/coaching in professional football affect your well-being? OR What is it like for your well-being working/coaching in professional football?
  - b. If at all, what emotions do you experience?

- c. How are you aware of those emotions?
4. How do the 'particular ways' of working in professional football influence your well-being?
  - a. Can you provide a personal example?
5. What, if at all, contributes towards or facilitates your well-being within your role in football?
  - a. What, if at all, hinders or challenges your well-being within your role in football?
6. Talk to me about your work environment and your well-being.
  - a. Relationships/social?
  - b. How is your wellbeing in relation to work / life balance?
  - c. How is the experience different home vs work?
7. In your opinion, at what time points is your well-being most affected?

**Conclusion Q:** Is there anything else you would like to add about how you make sense of and experience well-being within football?

**Finally:** debrief, thank you, etc.

## **Appendix 5: Ethical Approval for Chapter 4**

### **Fragmentation of self and well-being: A phenomenological exploration of professional football coaches' video documentaries**

**Ethics Review ID:** ER44874238

**Workflow Status:** Application Approved

**Type of Ethics Review Template:** No human participants, human tissue or personal data

#### **Primary Researcher / Principal Investigator**

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Andrew Higham  
(Sport and Human Performance)

**Converis Project Application:**

**Q1. Is this project ii) Doctoral research**

#### **Director of Studies**

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Joseph Stone  
(Health and Wellbeing)

#### **Supervisory Team**

---

James Newman  
James Rumbold  
(Sport and Human Performance),(Sport and Human Performance)

**Appendix 6: Ethical Approval for Chapters 5, 6 and 7**

**A phenomenological exploration of professional football coaches' well-being over the course of a competitive season**

**Ethics Review ID:** ER44690456

**Workflow Status:** Approved with Advisory Comments

**Type of Ethics Review Template:** Very low risk human participants studies

**Primary Researcher / Principal Investigator**

---

Andrew Higham  
(Health and Wellbeing)

**Converis Project Application:**

**Q1. Is this project ii) Doctoral research**

**Director of Studies**

---

Joseph Stone  
(Health and Wellbeing)

**Supervisory Team**

---

James Newman  
James Rumbold  
(Sport and Human Performance),(Sport and Human Performance)

## **Appendix 7: Participant Information Sheet**

### **PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET**

**TITLE OF RESEARCH STUDY:** A phenomenological exploration of professional football coaches' well-being over the course of a competitive season.

- 1. Legal basis for research studies:** The University undertakes research as part of its function for the community under its legal status. Data protection allows us to use personal data for research with appropriate safeguards in place under the legal basis of public tasks that are in the public interest. A full statement of your rights can be found at: <https://www.shu.ac.uk/about-this-website/privacy-policy/privacy-notice-for-research>. However, all University research is reviewed to ensure that participants are treated appropriately and their rights respected. This study was approved by UREC with Converis number ER44690456. Further information at <https://www.shu.ac.uk/research/ethics-integrity-and-practice>
- 2. Opening statement:** You are invited to take part in a study that aims to interview coaches on the topic of well-being within professional football over the course of a season. The purpose of the study is to explore and understand how coaches make sense of and experience well-being within professional football over time. We hope that this research will add to the field of sport coach well-being and ultimately help future clubs, coaches, and researchers improve well-being practice in the sport.
- 3. Why have you asked me to take part?** We have asked you to take part as we feel that your contributions would be invaluable. In addition, you fit the inclusion criteria for this study, which is to be an English speaking coach who is currently employed at a professional football club.
- 4. Do I have to take part?** Participation in this study is completely voluntary, you may decide if you wish to take part. A copy of the information provided here is yours to keep, along with the consent form if you do decide to take part. It should be noted that you can still decide to withdraw personally at any time until data analysis (one week post interview) without giving a reason, or you can decide not to answer a particular question at any point during the study.
- 5. What will I be required to do?** All that is required of you is to take part in four interviews with the researcher over the course of your footballing season (e.g., interviews approx. two months apart from each other) and bring a minimum of two images that represent your well-being around the time of each interview. Where possible the interview will be conducted via an online video call at an agreed date and time. Please speak with the lead researcher if you wish to discuss any alternative approaches (e.g., in person meeting). Upon consenting to participate we will then aim to establish a suitable interview format, date, and time. Regarding the photos, these should be taken by yourself (e.g., via a smart phone) or sourced from copyright free websites (e.g., Unsplash.com and Pixabay.com), and shared with the lead researcher via email at least 24hours prior to each interview.

6. **Where will this take place?** The study is flexible in nature. Therefore, it can be conducted in a location of your choice. For example, you may prefer to take part in the interview within the comfort of your own home, which can be possible via online video calling. Please speak with the lead researcher to arrange a suitable location if a face-to-face interview is requested. Regarding photos that represent your well-being around the time of each interview, if you plan on taking your own photos you have the freewill to take them where you would like in the UK public domain. However, if you plan on taking photos that are not on public land then you must obtain permission and consent from the relevant person(s). For example, if taking photos at your club please seek permission from the relevant personnel at the organisation.
7. **How often will I have to take part, and for how long?** You would be asked to take part in four interviews approximately two months between each. An interview of this nature approx. lasts one hour. In summary, participation in the study will approx. last 8 months, with active engagement only required for four interviews approx. one hour in length each. After the final interview you are no longer required to take part in the study.
8. **No form of deception is involved within this study.**
9. **Are there any possible risks or disadvantaged in taking part?** We do not foresee any potential risks or disadvantages of taking part in this study. However, in the unlikely circumstance of feeling any emotional distress from participating in the study, please seek support from your local GP or suitable wider services, such as the Samaritans (116 123 (UK) or [jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org)). However, it must be noted that if such feelings are experienced, they usually subside after completion of participation in the study. In addition, we advise that you try to avoid taking pictures with identifiable people in them or if you do you must acquire consent from those in the picture for it to be shared and used by us.
10. **What are the possible benefits of taking part?** There is a selection of benefits to taking part in this study. You may find taking part a useful reflection tool that helps you become more aware of your own well-being over time. You will also be contributing to the sport well-being research field. This in turn may help improve well-being practice in the football and coaching domain, potentially improving coach and club functioning from follow up research studies. Finally, due to the individual nature of this research your personal experiences and accounts will be heard and shared (anonymously), which may relate with many other coaching staff in your field. As a result, this may encourage other coaching staff to discuss their well-being and build an open network to develop ways to support each other's well-being within football.
11. **When will I have the opportunity to discuss my participation?** Once you have read the participant information sheet, you are more than welcome to contact the lead researcher to discuss your participation within the study.

12. **Will anyone be able to connect me with what is recorded and reported?** Your participation in this study is confidential and no information about your participation or individual results will be shared beyond the researcher and supervisors. Once we receive your contact information a coding system will be implemented, whereby you will be assigned an ID number. This will anonymise any information that may lead to the disclosure of your participation. Furthermore, pseudonyms will be used in place of your name and any others you mention within the transcript. Also, we recommend that you do not take photos with any identifiable person(s) in them. However, we would make every effort to anonymise images (e.g., blur identifiable features) where possible.
13. **Who will be responsible for all of the information when this study is over?** The researcher will be responsible for the secure storage of the collected data.
14. **Who will have access to it?** Any information collected will only be available to the researcher and their supervisors. Unless requested to be inspected by the institution's ethics board.
15. **What will happen to the information when this study is over?** Data will be stored/archived for ten years after the project is complete. However, if project data is downloaded at any point, the ten-year period is reset from the download date. Once this time period has elapsed, all electronic files will be deleted.
16. **How will you use what you find out?** The data may be used by the researcher or the supervisors to form the basis of a publication such as a journal article, report or research conference presentation. Whilst your personal information will remain anonymous, the interview transcript and photos/images may be made available to a scientific journal as part of publishing the broader research. There will be nothing in the published materials (which you have not supplied) that will allow any individual participant to be identified.
17. **How long is the whole study likely to last?** In sum, you will be asked to take part in four interviews (approx. one hour each) over the course of a football season (approx. 8 months) and bring two photographs that represent your well-being around the time of each interview. As a result, your active participation should be approx. four hours in total over the course of a season. We anticipate that all data will be analysed by September 2023.
18. **How can I find out about the results of the study?** If you would like to know the results of the current study, please email the lead researcher and they will be more than happy to share the results once the PhD thesis has been completed and submitted to Sheffield Hallam University.

**If you have any other questions/queries regarding the study, please contact the lead researcher via the information provided at the end of this document.**

**Details of who to contact if you have any concerns or if adverse effects occur after the study are given below.**

Once more, there are no clear, apparent risks to taking part within the study. However, if you did at all suffer from any distress, then please seek support from your local GP or suitable wider services, such as the Samaritans (116 123 (UK) or [jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org)).

**Researcher/ Research Team Details:**

**Lead Researcher:** Andrew Higham

Email: [andrew.higham@shu.ac.uk](mailto:andrew.higham@shu.ac.uk)

**Supervisor:** Dr James Rumbold

Email: [j.rumbold@shu.ac.uk](mailto:j.rumbold@shu.ac.uk)

**Director of studies:** Dr Joseph Stone

Email: [joseph.stone@shu.ac.uk](mailto:joseph.stone@shu.ac.uk)

**Supervisor:** Dr James Newman

Email: [j.newman@shu.ac.uk](mailto:j.newman@shu.ac.uk)

**You should contact the Data Protection Officer if:**

- you have a query about how your data is used by the University
- you would like to report a data security breach (e.g., if you think your personal data has been lost or disclosed inappropriately)
- you would like to complain about how the University has used your personal data

[DPO@shu.ac.uk](mailto:DPO@shu.ac.uk)

**You should contact the Head of Research Ethics (Dr Mayur Ranchordas) if:**

- you have concerns with how the research was undertaken or how you were treated

[M.Ranchordas@shu.ac.uk](mailto:M.Ranchordas@shu.ac.uk)

Postal address: Sheffield Hallam University, Howard Street, Sheffield S1 1WBT



**Appendix 8: Exemplar Informed Consent Form**

**PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM**

**TITLE OF RESEARCH STUDY:** A phenomenological exploration of professional football coaches' well-being over the course of a competitive season.

*Please answer the following questions by ticking the response that applies*

- |  | YES                      | NO                       |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. I have read the Information Sheet for this study and have had details of the study explained to me.   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. My questions about the study have been answered to my satisfaction and I understand that I may ask further questions at any point.  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. I understand that I am free to withdraw from the study within the time limits outlined in the Information Sheet, without giving a reason for my withdrawal or to decline to answer any particular questions in the study without any consequences to my future treatment by the researcher. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. I agree to provide information to the researchers under the conditions of confidentiality set out in the Information Sheet.   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. I wish to participate in the study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6. I consent to the information collected for the purposes of this research study, once anonymised (so that I cannot be identified), to be used for any other research purposes.   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 7. I understand that the video (if applicable) and audio of the interviews will be used for transcription and data analysis purposes.  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 8. I understand that I am responsible to acquire consent for any photographs taken which include identifiable features (e.g., people, names, etc.) that are not in the public domain and that the photographs taken will be used for data analysis purposes.                                   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

**Participant's Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Participant's Name (Printed):** \_\_\_\_\_

**Contact details:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Researcher's Name (Printed):** \_\_\_\_\_

**Researcher's Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Researcher's contact details:**

Andrew Higham

Academy of Sport and Physical Activity, Sheffield Hallam University, Chestnut Court, Collegiate Crescent, Sheffield, S10 2BP, UK.

[Andrew.Higham@shu.ac.uk](mailto:Andrew.Higham@shu.ac.uk)

## **Appendix 9: Photo-Elicitation Participant Guidance**

### Photo-Elicitation Guidance

For this study, we ask that you provide at least two photos/images that represent your coach well-being at the time of the interview.

The photos/images can be taken by yourself (e.g., via a smart phone and camera) or sourced from copyright free websites (e.g., Unsplash and Pixabay). Both copyright free sites work with a search bar where you can enter a specific term and it will output images relating to that term. Then simply choose which photo/image best represents your coach well-being and what you wish to discuss.

- Unsplash: <https://unsplash.com/>
- Pixabay: <https://pixabay.com/>

If you decide to take your own photos/images, you have the freedom to take them wherever you wish in the UK public domain. However, if the photos/images contain identifiable person(s) we suggest you seek verbal consent. If you decide to take photos/images that are not on public land, then you must obtain permission and consent from the relevant person(s). For example, if taking photos/images at your club please seek permission from the relevant personnel at the organisation.

If you are not based in the UK, we suggest that you refer to relevant international guidance.

We recommend where possible that you do not take photos/images with any identifiable person(s) in them. However, if this cannot be avoided, we once again suggest you seek verbal consent and we would make every effort to anonymise images (e.g., blur identifiable features) where possible.

Once you have sourced your photos/images can you please ensure that you share them with the lead researcher via email ([Andrew.higham@shu.ac.uk](mailto:Andrew.higham@shu.ac.uk)) at least 24hours prior to each interview.

### **Appendix 10: Interview Guide Exemplar Questions**

In line with Smith et al. (2022) the interview guide was flexible and began with questions that eased the participant into recalling a familiar descriptive account, such as ‘How are things currently with work and at this stage of the season?’. Afterwards, more investigative questions and prompts were introduced, some of which related to the participants chosen images, ‘Please discuss your chosen image, for instance what does it represent?’, and ‘Why did you select this image and how does it relate to your well-being?’. Other questions and prompts focused specifically on the participants’ well-being, ‘How does your current well-being make you feel?’, and ‘Are you content with your current well-being?’. Whereas, the final selection of questions related to the temporality of well-being, with ‘After what we have discussed today how do you plan on managing your well-being moving forward?’ and ‘Do you foresee your well-being changing anytime soon and why?’ appearing in the first interview, and questions such as ‘Here is a previous image you provided, how does your well-being differ now, if at all?’ conveyed in the subsequent interviews.