**Cardiff School of Sport**

**DISSERTATION ASSESSMENT PROFORMA:**

**Empirical**

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A Conceptual Framework of Personal Stressors

(Dissertation submitted under the discipline of Psychology)

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CARDIFF METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY
A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF PERSONAL STRESSORS
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Abstract

Rationale
Stress is a fundamental part of all competitive sport (Hardy et al., 1997). As suggested by Dugdale, Eklund, and Gordon (2002), athletes must effectively cope with a variety of stressors in order to perform optimally; these include performance, organisational and personal stressors (Mellalieu, Neil, Hanton, & Fletcher, 2009). Previous research has delved into the concepts of performance and organisational stressors but personal stressors are yet to be the sole focus of any study to date. The purpose of this study was to explore this notion of personal stress and identify an initial model of personal stressors.

Methods
Six participants (three male, three female) from a variety skill levels and sports completed diaries and took part in interviews over a three week period in order to obtain information about any stressful experiences that the participants had encountered.

Results
Deductive content analysis allowed for the development of a framework of personal stressors consisting of seven general dimensions: significant others, occupational demands, financial demands, imbalance of different life aspects, technology issues, negative aspects of social events and a miscellaneous category.

Conclusion
Due to the contemporary nature of this study, a number of implications, strengths, and limitations were presented. Suggestions were made concerning future research to extend this line of inquiry and the importance of investigation into personal stress was highlighted.
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION
1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Anecdotal Evidence

“Frustratingly in the individual event, I failed to reach the final because my new dives were not sharp enough…at the back of my mind, I was always thinking about Dad. I knew he was fighting the biggest battle of his life”


This anecdotal quote from British Olympic diver Tom Daley is a clear example of how events that are not directly-related to the competition could be present and have a negative influence on performance during competition. The quote refers to the FINA World Series in Beijing, where Daley competed shortly after his father was diagnosed with brain cancer. It is apparent from this quote that personal stress affected Tom Daley significantly in a debilitative manor during competition.

In contrast to the above quote is the story of footballer Billy Sharp who lost his baby a mere two days after he was born. Less than 72 hours after the death of his baby, Sharp played for Doncaster Rovers in a Championship match against Middlesbrough where, after just 14 minutes he scored an incredible goal.

"I played against Middlesbrough because the longer I'd have left it, the harder it would have been"..."I was feeling sorry for myself, I wanted to change that and the one thing that could do that was football"

- Billy Sharp (2012).
This story provides evidence that stress can also have facilitative effects on performance when it is present during competition. The opposing natures of these outcomes confirm that research into the area of personal stress is vital as the consequences can be substantial and have either facilitative or debilitative effects on performance. Anshel (2003) suggested that it is not possible to eradicate stress; however it is possible to recognise coping strategies that could aid the performer. In order for practitioners to control the effects caused by stress, it is crucial to initially identify the stressors that athletes encounter.

1.2 Rationale

Hardy, Jones, and Gould (1996) stated that the capacity to cope with intense stress is a fundamental part of all competitive sport (e.g., Gould, Eklund, & Jackson 1992a, 1992b, 1993; Jones & Hardy, 1990a; Orlick & Partington, 1988; Patmore, 1986; Scanlan, Ravizza, & Stein, 1989). Dugdale et al. (2002) supported that these key performance studies indicated that athletes must effectively cope with a variety of stressors in order to perform optimally. It was also suggested that every type of stressor should be considered when devising and implementing coping strategies (Mellalieu et al., 2009).

The terms initially adopted to distinguish between types of stress included ‘non-competition stress’ and ‘competition stress’. While initially these terms may perhaps seem intuitively logical, it was argued by Fletcher and Hanton (2003) that they were too vague to sufficiently contribute to theory and
practice. Fletcher and Hanton (2003) went on to propose the three categories of competitive, organisational, and personal stress to differentiate between the types of stress experienced by athletes. Thus far, the majority of stress research has focused merely on stress directly-related to the competitive event and more recent studies have also begun to incorporate organisational stress (e.g., Hanton, Fletcher, & Coughlan, 2005; Woodman & Hardy, 2001a).

Extensive research has been carried out focused on the foundations from where stress originates and coping strategies that could be employed in a bid to manage the effects (e.g., Fletcher, Hanton, & Mellalieu, 2006; Hanton & Jones 1999a, 1999b; Hanton et al., 2005; Hardy et al., 1996; Woodman & Hardy, 2001a). It may be a surprise that in spite of multiple calls for the consideration of every stressor and the large amount of research into the area (Mellalieu et al., 2009; Dugdale et al., 2002), to date, sport research in stress has only systematically studied performance and organisational stress. Personal stress is yet to be the soul focus of any study. This provided a compelling argument that research should be conducted with the aim of investigating personal demands that performers’ encounter.

1.3 Aim

The aim of this dissertation was to provide a critical overview of existing studies in the stress literature in order to provide an understanding of the concept and sell the rationale for the study to the reader. This study delved into the concept of stress and aimed to extend current literature by identifying an initial framework of personal stressors faced by athletes that may [or may not] enter their thoughts and even affect performance during competition.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW
The purpose of this chapter was to critically evaluate existing stress literature in a logical and coherent manor. The first paragraph aimed to clarify a number of terms associated with the stress literature. Once a brief understanding of terms was provided, the chapter delved into the sport literature focused on performance and organisational stress due to the absence of studies based on personal stress, critiquing existing research while building an argument for the current study. Personal stressors that have been acknowledged during previous studies within sport were identified and clustered into a paragraph. Occupational literature was then utilised in a bid to support the importance of investigating personal stress, before a concluding paragraph gathered the numerous arguments identified and provided the complete rationale for the study.

2.1 Definition of Terms
Due to the implications of stress on performance the study of stress continues to be of heuristic value to sport psychologists. Therefore, a multitude of research has been conducted based on the experience of stress in sport. Previous research has aimed to uncover the stressors encountered by athletes (Noblet & Gifford, 2002; Scanlan et al., 1991), gain an insight into the emotional responses caused by stress (Dugdale et al., 2002; Campbell & Jones, 2002b) and, identify stress management coping strategies (Park, 2000; Holt & Hogg, 2002; Dugdale et al., 2002; Thelwell, Weston, & Greenlees, 2007). Despite this multitude of research, a large proportion of knowledge has been hindered by ambiguity regarding the definition of the term ‘stress’.

As stated by Fletcher at al. (2006), the large majority of reviews of stress (and anxiety) begin by emphasising awareness to the complications and uncertainty surrounding the conceptualisation and operationalisation of stress-related terms (Jones & Hardy, 1990; Hardy et al., 1996; Woodman & Hardy, 2001b). This study was no different. Stress has been differentially defined as an environmental stimulus, an individuals’ response, or the result of an interaction between the person and environment. Thanks to the
development of knowledge in this subject, it is now understood that stress is a transaction between environmental demands and the resources that the athlete perceives available to them (Fletcher & Hanton, 2003b).

Anshel (2003) suggested that stress is one of the most misunderstood concepts in sport psychology as it is assumed to be unwelcome and detrimental; however, this may not always be the case. This belief is a common limitation throughout a number of previous studies. The blame for this misconception could lie within the initial definition of stress proposed by Lazarus and Folkman (1984) as it focuses primarily on the negative features of stress. They suggested that stress is a relationship between a person and the environment that he/she perceives as ‘taxing or exceeding his/her resources and endangering his/her well-being’ (p. 19). However, Schafer (1996) suggested that stress is not always harmful but can also be helpful and even be required in order to provide energy to achieve paramount performance. In agreement with Schafer (1996), Jick and Payne (1980) proposed that the outcome of the stressor is dependent on the perception of ability to cope with the situation in question. ‘Stress’ in sport, was therefore more recently defined by Fletcher and Hanton (2003b) as an ongoing transaction between environmental demands and the resources that the individual perceives are available to them. This definition was formed from modern theory that does not view stress as a factor that resides in an individual or the environment, but rather is a relationship between the two (Cooper, Dewe, & O’Driscoll, 2001; Lazarus, 1966, 1999). This has caused researchers in sport to implement a more transactional perspective, this is a positive revolution as it is more likely to produce results that explain how stressors affect performance. This suggested that studies carried out prior to the evolution of this transactional conceptualisation are imprecise. A further improvement in this study compared to previous transactional research is the longitudinal process that this study adopted in a bid to eliminate the limitation of memory decay.
As recognised by Hardy et al. (1996) and Gould, Greenleaf, and Krane (2002), stress literature has been deeply impaired as the clarity of the term ‘stress’ has been further confounded due to the incorrect use of terms including stress, anxiety, arousal and strain interchangeably (e.g., Gould, Petlichkoff, & Weinberg, 1984; Landers, Wang, & Courtet, 1985). It was not until the 90s that researchers in the field of sport psychology identified that these four terms are not synonymous and a clear distinction was made. Arousal was defined by Gould and Krane (1992) as a general physiological and psychological activation that can vary on a continuum from deep sleep to intense excitement. ‘Anxiety’ refers to a negative emotional state in response to a stimulus [stressor(s)] associated with feelings of worry or apprehension (Weinberg & Gould, 1995; Jones & Hanton, 2001; Jones, 1995). It was suggested that ‘strain’ is also a response and is only experienced when the individual perceives that he/she is unable to cope with the stressor (Jick & Payne, 1980; Lazarus, 1966). ‘Stress’ was described by Jarvis (2006) as a broader term used to define the process whereby an individual encounters a stressful experience, appraises whether they have the tools to cope with the situation and then responds with a number of psychological and physiological changes. In accordance with Lazarus’ (1990, 1991) conceptualisation of stress, the term is not used to describe particular constructs, but rather to represent the overall process including stressors, appraisals, strain/anxiety and coping responses.

Fletcher et al. (2006) suggested that previous researchers’ misconception of demands has caused important implications within sport psychology stress literature. More specifically, a number of previous investigators recorded the performers’ cognitive and emotional responses as stressors rather than consequences of the stress process. Hanton, Neil, and Mellalieu (2008) supported this statement and provided numerous examples of studies in which this error existed: ‘Treated unfairly by the coach’ (Anshel & Sutarso, 2007), ‘negative thoughts’ (Dugdale et al., 2002), and ‘anxious about defending because we are anxious to protect the goal’ (Holt & Hogg, 2002). These quotes have been incorrectly labelled as stressors when in actual fact they are responses. Special care must be taken when executing this type of
analysis as these inaccurate statements may cause ambiguity regarding the understanding of the stress process as the actual stressors could be disregarded (Mellalieu et al., 2009).

2.2 Categorisation of Stressors

A large proportion of stress literature has focused on stress directly induced by the competition; this has included pre-competition stress (Feltz, Lirgg, & Albrecht, 1992; Gould & Weinberg, 1985; Kroll, 1980), stress during competition (Jones & Hardy, 1990; Madden, Kirkby, McDonald, Summers, Brown, & King, 1995) and post-competition stress (Pargman, 1986). Competitive stress has been described as being associated primarily and directly with competitive performance (Mellalieu, Hanton, & Fletcher, 2006; adapted from Fletcher et al., 2006). However, as proposed by Noblet and Gifford (2002) ‘the competitive aspect is only a fraction of the overall sporting experience’ (p. 2) and the entire sporting experience must be considered when developing stress management strategies. This suggests that performance, organisational and personal aspects of the process should be considered and investigated.

While Neil et al. (2007) emphasised the importance of distinguishing between performance and organisational stressors, this study aimed to highlight the importance of considering performance, organisational AND personal stressors. The reason proposed by Neil et al. (2007) for this categorisation was due to the differences in the cognitive processes that underpin the athletes' responses. A range of possible cognitive processes would suggest that differing coping strategies should be utilised in a bid to avoid and/or lessen any ill effects caused. Despite this claim, a number of researchers failed to distinguish the origin of the stressors (Fletcher et al., 2006; Woodman & Hardy, 2001a). Stressors directly-related to the sporting event such as pressure to perform well should be classified as performance stressors, and demands related to the organisation such as facilities and time management should be deemed as organisational stressors. In particular importance to this particular study, Fletcher and Hanton (2003b) argued that issues not normally directly-related to the sport organisation (e.g. family)
should not be considered organisational stressors (cf. Fletcher & Hanton, 2003b; Woodman & Hardy, 2001a). This type of stressor should be defined as a personal stressor. Hanton et al. (2008) emphasised this suggestion of categorisation, explaining that there is a diverse range of emotions that a sportsperson may experience which are caused by a variety of stressors and will ultimately cause diverse action tendencies. It is essential that this identification process is accurate to ensure that practitioners are best-equipped to suggest coping strategies in a bid to manage the effects of the stressors and facilitate optimal performance. This suggested that knowledge of every type of stressor is essential.

Only recently have stress-related studies in sport started to consider organisational related demands. Results derived from the study of Holt and Hogg (2002) identified that stressors originated from demands linked with competitive performance (e.g. ‘pace of the game’), while others were associated to the sport organisation (e.g. ‘coach-player interactions’) (c.f. Hanton et al., 2005). This caused Holt and Hogg (2002) to propose that stress was not exclusively related to performance but also to organisational demands. Fletcher and Hanton (2003b; Fletcher et al., 2006) defined organisational stress as an ongoing transaction between an individual and the environmental demands linked primarily with the organisation within which they are operating. Their rationale argued that the reason behind this distinction was related to three main areas: the precise origins and nature of the stimuli encountered, the variation in the psychological processes underlying the responses to the demands in question, and the appropriate exercise of interventions to control each type of stressor (Hanton et al., 2005; Jones, 2002; Woodman & Hardy, 2001a). Since this suggestion, a relatively small number of studies have conceptually distinguished between both performance based and organisational stressors (e.g., Hanton et al., 2005; McKay, Niven, Lavallee, & White, 2008; Thelwell, Weston, & Greenlees, 2008). Despite all three studies exploring stressors experienced by elite participants, findings were not totally consistent. Hanton et al. (2005) found that organisational stressors were experienced and recalled more than performance stressors. However, using track athletes and coaches
respectively, McKay et al. (2008) and Thelwell et al. (2008) discovered that their participants recalled similar numbers of each type of stressor. Both sets of results, although slightly contradictory, provide evidence to suggest that literature prior to the acknowledgement of organisational stressors was largely limited. This supports the call for research into personal stressors as they could also be encountered by athletes; however, due to the current absence of research focused on this subject, we are not yet aware of what personal demands athletes experience or what effect they have, if any at all.

Despite the above research being beneficial to the existing literature as it extends the body of knowledge regarding the categorisation of types of stress, it is restricted, like much of the stress literature, to athletes currently competing in elite sport. The reason behind this focus on elite performers could lie with the suggestion of Scanlan et al. (1991) that an elite performers’ lengthy and strenuous quest for excellence is likely to cause appraisals of stress. As stated by Hanton et al. (2005), increasing evidence exists supporting that organisational stress is an important issue in elite sport. However, Scanlan et al. (1991) also asserted that with rare exception all athletes will experience stress during their sporting careers suggesting that non-elite athletes also experience stress. Despite this, research focused on non-elite performers is scarce. As a result of this non-elite sample neglect, the aims in the study of Mellalieu et al. (2009) were to primarily examine the competition stressors experienced by a mixture of elite and non-elite athletes [6 elite, 6 non-elite], and secondly to compare the stressors identified by each group. Results demonstrated that a similar quantity of performance and organisational stressors were encountered by elite and non-elite performers, with some demands being common and others unique to each group. Mellalieu et al. (2009) suggested that these observations highlight that all stressors should be considered when designing and implementing interventions in a bid to manage competition stress and therefore research must not continue to ignore non-elite performers. These findings also confirm that research into non-elite athletes is just as significant as elite performers.
An additional limitation to existing research is the inability to generalise findings to the wider population. A number of previous studies have included focuses on specific forms of stress or sport-specific stress. These papers have included stress experienced by female football players (Holt & Hogg, 2002), stress in elite figure skaters (Scanlan et al., 1991; Gould, Jackson, & Finch, 1993), stress in Australian footballers (Noblet & Gifford, 2002), stress and coping strategies in international adolescent golfers (Nicholls, Holt, Polman, & James, 2005) and organisational stressors (Fletcher & Hanton, 2003). As identified by Neil, Mellalieu, and Hanton (2009), it is important to recognise that these previous studies have focused upon a limited number of sports (e.g., football, figure skating, golf). It is vital therefore to consider the demands experienced by athletes from wider range of sports in order to increase the efficacy of the stressors identified. As stated by Thatcher and Day (2008), most of the studies have resulted in identifying lists of potential stressors which are specific to the population investigated. Schwarzer and Taubert (2002) explained that this was due to the stimulus-based approach, which emphasises that the perspective is on the characteristics of the stressor and not the individual. This limits knowledge as it does not consider that different individuals may appraise the same event in a completely different way. An example of this exists in the work of Scanlan et al. (1991) who reported that fewer than half of their sample recorded any one given stressor (c.f. Thatcher & Day, 2008). Individuals perceive situations so differently to one another, events that some athletes reported as a stressor, others reported as being pleasurable.

Previous research with a focus on performance and organisational stressors has made it possible to understand the cognitive appraisals experienced by the individuals and most importantly, researchers have more recently focused on the prescription of coping strategies in order to manage the effects (e.g., Dugdale et al., 2002; Giacobbi, Foore, & Weinberg, 2004; Holt & Hogg, 2002; Nicholls, Holt, & Polman, 2005; Thelwell et al., 2007). Identifying stressors encountered by performers is a precursor to investigating resultant appraisals and suggesting coping strategies to manage the effects caused by the demand(s). A prime example of this is the two-part study of
Campbell and Jones (2002a, 2002b). While the first study (2002a) identified sources of stress experienced by elite male wheelchair basketball players, the sequel (2002b) investigated the cognitive appraisals caused as a result of these stressors. Fletcher and Hanton (2003) suggested that in order to cope with stress, athletes will often consult with a sport psychologist on a wide range of stressors from a variety of sources, including performance, organisational and personal stressors. As there is an absence of research identifying personal stressors, it is impossible for practitioners to provide reliable coping strategies for their clients. It is known that personal stressors are encountered by athletes as a number of different types of personal stressors have been recorded by participants in previous studies in sport.

2.3 Personal Stressors
Over the past twenty years or so, studies have discovered a wide range of sources of stress experienced by sport performers. As summarised by Fletcher et al. (2006), findings have included demands associated with competitive performance (e.g., opponents), the sports organisation within which the performer was operating (e.g., finances), and personal “nonsporting” life events (see table 1). However, despite this proposed range of focuses and results; surprisingly, no studies to the authors’ knowledge, have systematically and explicitly assessed the personal stressors experienced by sport performers. Although personal stressors may not have been an explicit focus of research attention, a number of stressors of a personal nature have emerged in previous sport stress studies. The focus of these studies included sources of stress experienced by elite figure skaters (Scanlan et al., 1991; Gould et al., 1993), elite male basketball players (Campbell & Jones, 2002a), professional aussie footballers (Noblet & Gifford, 2002) and female first-year university swimmers (Giacobbi, Lynn, Wetherington, Jenkins, Bodendorf, & Langley, 2004). Personal stressors that emerged from these studies included demands related to the work/non-work interface, personal struggles, traumatic experiences, relationship issues, and academics.
Despite the dismissal of personal stressors by researchers thus far in the field of sport, this type of stressor has been acknowledged by researchers that have studied occupational stressors.

Table 1: Personal stressors that have been acknowledged by previous studies.

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2.4 Occupational Research

Stress is a growing concern in contemporary society. Cox & Cox (1993) stated that an individual’s activities, or ways of spending time, can be divided into two categories; namely those which are work and those which are non-work related. It was proposed by Warr (1987) that both work and non-work domains of life contribute significantly to the stress process. Successfully combining work and non-work can be a major issue for many employees, and can sometimes create serious conflicts between the two domains. These
categories can be compared to the categories utilised throughout sport literature. Non-work stressors refer to any demands that are not directly-related to the workplace, similarly to the way personal stressors in sport literature are not directly-related to the competitive event. Equally, work stressors can be related to performance and organisational stressors.

According to Edwards, Guppy, & Cockerton (2007), non-work stressors, despite being unrelated to the workplace, have a strong influence on workplace behaviours. If non-work and work stressors correspond with personal demands and competition demands respectively, this provides support for the suggestion that personal stressors could influence performance during competition. Van Dyne, Jehn, & Cummings (2002) and Friend (1982) uncovered similar findings in their suggestion that workplace stressors predicted improved performance levels. However, Friend (1982) also found that increased levels of non-work stressors influenced job performance negatively. Controversially, the study of Edwards et al. (2007) produced reversed results, with a negative correlation between work stressors and performance and a positive causal relationship between non-work stressors and job performance. Farr & Ford (1990) provided reasoning for this positive correlation between non-work stress and performance explaining that stressors unrelated to the work environment can facilitate performance at work through directing attention. This suggests that non-work stressors, and therefore personal stressors have a strong influence upon workplace and competition behaviours respectively.

As stated by Hart (1999), occupational stress theories can no longer afford to ignore the non-work aspects of employees lives as a growing body of evidence proves that work and non-work domains tend to spill over into one another rather than the two being isolated aspects of life (Adams, King, & King, 1996; Frone, Russell, & Cooper, 1992; Williams & Alliger, 1994; Lambert, 1990). If non-work stressors and personal stressors are related, this statement suggests that theorists and researchers in the sporting field can no longer ignore the implications of personal stressors.
2.5 Purpose of the Study

Of particular concern to the present study is the lack of research into personal stressors in sport. Irrespective of the emphasis on the importance of the categorisation of stressors, no study has investigated personal stress in isolation within sport psychology. Logically, sources of stress must initially be identified as without this recognition practitioners are unable to suggest coping strategies to manage the effects. Unlike previous research, this study will focus primarily on personal stressors experienced by the participants in a bid to create the first ever conceptual framework of personal stressors. It was hypothesised that some personal stressors that emerge in the results of this study may repeat findings from previous studies in sport that have focused on stress (Scanlan et al., 1991; Gould et al., 1993; Campbell & Jones, 2002a; Noblet & Gifford, 2002; Giacobbi, Lynn et al., 2004) implying that sources of stress derived may include personal relationship issues, family disturbances, sport-work/education imbalance, financial worries and traumatic experiences. Despite the focus of this study being personal stressors, it was also hypothesised that organisational and performance stressors would naturally emerge through conversation.
CHAPTER 3: METHODS
3.0 METHODS

This chapter aimed to provide a detailed account of the processes adopted to carry out the study and provide justification as to why certain methods were utilised as opposed to alternatives. The chapter addressed multiple areas of the process including the participants investigated, the instrumentation used, the procedure and data analysis methods adopted and finally the reliability of the work.

3.1 Participants

Prior to investigation, participants were provided with participant information forms (see appendix A). Written informed consent (see appendix B) was attained from six participants (age range in years: 12, mean: 23.5, SD: 4.59). The sample consisted of three elite (age range in years: 12, mean: 24.33, SD: 6.66) and three non-elite (age range in years: 5, mean: 22.67, SD: 2.52) performers and an equal number of males and females (three of each). For the purpose of this study, an elite performer was defined as an individual representing their country and non-elite was defined as a performer currently competing without international honours. Similarly to the study of Mellalieu et al. (2009), and under the influence of Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Patton (2002), the participants were chosen with the intent of providing ‘information rich’ cases in the sense that they were perceived to experience personal demands regularly. As it is the first study of its kind, a heterogeneous sample of different skill levels was tested in order to produce general findings. These decisions were influenced by the suggestion of Mahoney and Mayers (1989) that despite age and skill level, stress was thought to be a common appraisal experienced. A variety of sports was also chosen to ensure that a range of organisations were examined (see table 2).
Table 2: Demographical information of participants.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Sport Type</th>
<th>Playing Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Team</td>
<td>Non-elite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Non-elite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Elite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Team</td>
<td>Elite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Team</td>
<td>Non-elite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Elite</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.2 Instrumentation
In line with the research of Nicholls, Holt, Polman, & Bloomfield (2006), and Didymus and Fletcher (2012), diaries were utilised and undertaken by all participants every day over a three week period. An example of a diary question is “Have you experienced any demands today?”. Post-diary analysis each week, an interview guide was developed with the aim of exploring the demands that the participants recorded, paying particular attention to any personal demands. The diaries took a micro approach discussing each day while the interviews looked back over the previous week. The diaries in effect acted as an in-vivo type assessment in order to minimise the main limitation of a wholly-reliant retrospective study that is memory decay. The diaries also provided an alternative means of portraying information in the event that the participants felt uncomfortable during the interview process due to the personal nature of the study. A qualitative method was utilised through the use of semi-structured interviews to ensure the interviewee had the freedom to provide in-depth, detailed answers from their own views (Creswell, 1998). The importance of answering truthfully in order to gain reliable results was reinforced multiple times and the participants were encouraged to ‘pass’ any questions that they did not feel they could provide an honest answer to.
3.3 Procedures

In any new area of inquiry, initial studies are defined as exploratory. Despite this study being the first of its kind to the author's knowledge, it holds both inductive and deductive properties as information has also been derived from previous studies. All participants were contacted by word of mouth for the initial invitation to participate and it was emphasised to each individual that their identity would remain anonymous throughout the investigation. Participant numbers were allocated to each individual to ensure anonymity was maintained and only the researcher and supervisor had access to the completed diaries, tables, recordings and transcripts. The participants were made aware that the findings would be represented as a whole in the results chapter of the paper and selected quotes may be taken from the interviews to illustrate specifically important information. Each individual was made aware that they were free to withdraw from the study at any time and that they were in full control of the depth of any information they chose to provide. The individuals' rights as a voluntary participant were made clear from the offset. The participants were required to complete three consecutive weeks of diaries (see appendix C). After the completion of the diary process every week, each participant was interviewed with the aim of exploring the stressors they had reported in their diary. Participants were also made aware that the interview process built on the information recorded in the diaries. Each individual was given the opportunity to select the location where the interview took place in a bid for optimum comfort and confidence. The interviews were face-to-face on a one-to-one basis and lasted between 7 and 27 minutes. Previous studies that investigated sources of stress incorporated focus groups as part of the data collection process (Giacobbi, Lynn et al., 2004; Noblet & Gifford, 2002), however due to the personal nature of this study this method was deemed inappropriate. The first interview with each participant included an introductory phase in order to relax the interviewee and enable the interviewer to build rapport with the athlete. This opening phase of the interview was based on the interview sequence devised by Noblet and Gifford (2002). The participants were also made aware that each interview was tape-recorded prior to the event.


3.4 Data Analysis

The diaries were analysed and recorded demands were arranged in table format following the completion of each week (see appendix D). The table included information regarding the type of stressor experienced on each day and the key information was noted to provide an insight into the experience. Questions were devised regarding the information derived from the diaries and were noted in the final column of the table. This process allowed for a semi-structured interview to take place and ensured that the interviewer addressed each demand noted in a logical order. The recordings of the interviews were transcribed and yielded 149 pages of text (Font: Times New Roman, Size: 12, Spacing: 1.5). The researcher then read and re-read all 18 transcripts to become completely familiar with each participant. The transcripts were initially analysed within-case and all stressors recorded by each participant were listed. Special care was taken when analysing the transcripts and identifying the demands to ensure that emotional responses to demands were not mistaken for sources of stress as in the study of Dugdale et al. (2002). The approach then turned to cross-case analysis and the responses derived from the transcripts were grouped based on common factors and developed into raw-data themes. The raw-data themes from all six participants were categorised into themes, sub-themes and where possible, higher-order themes. This method of analysis is evident in a number of previous research papers exploring sources of stress (Scanlan et al., 1991; Gould et al., 1993; James & Collins, 1997; Noblet & Gifford, 2002).

3.5 Trustworthiness

Firstly, in order to increase the efficiency of the study, the first interview was arranged for and conducted two days prior to the arrangement of any other interviews. It was designed in this way to act as a pilot study in order to ensure the interview flowed logically and it was clear what each question was asking. The criteria checklist for trustworthiness modified from Lincoln and Guba (1985) was utilised in a bid to ensure that the study was as reliable as possible. Credibility was achieved through the use of continual interviews over a three week period as it ensured that engagement with each participant was prolonged and observation was persistent. Multiple member checks were
conducted during the data collection and analysis processes. Primarily, the tables that were used to collect information from the diaries were completed and given to each participant in order to confirm that the information had been perceived by the researcher in an accurate way before the interviews took place. The secondary member checking involved each participant being sent a copy of their transcripts in order to verify the authenticity of the work. Triangulation and peer debriefing was a technique that naturally occurred due to the supervisor’s contribution to the study. As multiple methods were utilised for the collection of data (diaries and interviews), the dependability of the study was increased. Thick descriptive quotes were also provided in a bid to make the study transferable. The participants were reminded numerous times of the importance of being honest in their answers. The author was fully aware that it was vital to be consistent when carrying out the interviews and when analysing the transcripts. Standardised probes were used to address each question and each participant in a bid for consistency throughout the interview process and therefore increase reliability.
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS & DISCUSSION
4.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter interpreted the major themes derived from the data analysis, discussed the relationship to previous research, and provided practical implications, limitations and future research directions. The results displayed represent the participants’ collated responses (i.e., the cross case analysis). Although the primary aim of this study was to create a framework of personal stressors, due to the inductive nature of the analysis process, a number of performance and organisational stressors also emerged in the results. A sum of 63 distinct raw-data themes was derived in total; the majority of 40 were personal stressors, 16 performance stressors, and 7 organisational. The performance and organisational stressors that emerged from the data were acknowledged before particular attention was paid to the personal stressors that materialised. Hierarchical trees were presented in order to illustrate the findings in a clear and concise manner. Despite the fact that these trees displayed the entirety of demands that emerged; they cannot portray the true complex nature of the demands, (Woodman & Hardy, 2001) therefore, in a bid to prevent this loss of information, a selection of “thick descriptive” quotes was also reported throughout this chapter (cf. McKenna & Mutrie, 2003).

4.1 Performance Stressors

Performance stressors summarised all the demands directly-related to the competitive performance (see figure 1). All participants stated that they experienced performance stressors during the three weeks of data collection. The 16 raw-data themes were abstracted into six sub-themes including injury, lack of preparation, pressure of evaluative others, poor performance, negative outcome of team selection, and the demanding nature of the competition.
Injury (n=4) accounted for reoccurring injuries, inability to train due to injury, being dropped as a result of injury, a hospital/physiotherapist appointment, and playing on an injury. Injury was experienced by male and female, individual and team competitors, elite and non-elite, suggesting that injury is a common demand for all types of athletes. Coincidently, two out of the four participants in this study were lucky enough to not experience any type of injury that they perceived as stressful. The following quote emphasised the frustration that injury can cause.

“Umm, I was just really pissed off to be honest… it just feels like it’s one thing after another, um, for the first time really it has given me proper self-doubt as to whether I should continue and it’s just hard work being in pain most days”.

Figure 1: Performance Stressors
'Injury' is a common stressor that has surfaced in multiple previous studies (e.g., Gould et al., 1993; Noblet & Gifford, 2002; Mellalieu et al., 2009) and was the demand identified as the ‘most stressful’ in the study of Dugdale et al. (2002). Therefore it was no surprise that it emerged as the most cited performance stressor here also. Another participant that encountered an injury demand disclosed:

“I have what’s called ankle compression syndrome and/or shin splints... when the centre is really cold and I’ve over trained I get a lot of pains so I can’t jump as high, I can’t complete my routine at a height that I’d want, or do a skill that I want”.

This quote illustrated that the performer perceived injury as a stressor as it acted as a barrier to practice. It is assumed that a lack of practice would have a detrimental effect on performance. This links to training and preparation.

Lack of preparation (n=3) encompassed not getting enough sleep the night prior to the match, illness, lateness, and not getting enough time to rest. One participant stated:

“I had a bad cold and chesty cough... I was a bit annoyed because I had a race coming up on the Saturday so obviously I was a bit frustrated that I didn’t get the preparation that I wanted in”

Due to illness, the participant was unable to complete the scheduled training session. This was deemed as stressful due to an upcoming competition. As a result of the illness and subsequent lack of preparation the week prior to the event, the participant did not compete. Illness is a factor of preparation that is uncontrollable and spontaneous. Another participant admitted:
“because I didn’t go bed until about 2 because we were out being children playing games in the street... that was hard because I couldn’t sleep at all and I had to get up at 8, um, in order to be in Swansea for 10”.

This was deemed as unprofessional behaviour and it was assumed that an elite performer would not act in this way. However, it was suggested by Hanton et al. (2005) that perceptions of preparedness can be a source of stress for elite performers and Mellalieu et al. (2009) supported that both elite and non-elite performers both place importance on sufficient preparation. Similarly to the current study, preparation was a major theme to emerge from the work of Campbell and Jones (2002a) and was one of the most cited themes to surface from the study of Mellalieu et al. (2009).

Pressure of evaluative others (n=3) contained worries regarding criticism and the observation of performance. This theme was derived from a number of diverse quotes including:

“As the game started the first team turned up to watch... I was just constantly thinking about what the people on the side-line were thinking of how I was playing”,

“I was really nervous for her [Amanda Parker - reserve Olympian] coming because I obviously idolise her and even though I'm 20 years of age I get quite embarrassed in front of people that are celebrities”.

‘Evaluative others’ also materialised as a general stress dimension in the study of Giacobbi, Foore et al. (2004) and similarly Mellalieu et al. (2009) reported ‘spectator/ significant other evaluation’ as a performance demand. The identified themes from both studies covered the stressor also identified by the current sample of being watched by someone of high calibre. The two following quotes represent the effect that the quotes above had on performance, respectively.
“I played alright so I reacted well to the stress of having people watching”.

“At first I was really nervous and I was like, as my coach would say, Bambi on ice on the trampoline, because someone of a high status was watching me”.

In line with the suggestion of Shafer (1996), these quotes provide anecdotal evidence to suggest that stress can have positive or negative effects on performance, respectively. The final quote regarding evaluative others could be argued to be a personal stressor as it referred to their coaching ability rather than sports performance. Two incidents of this kind were mentioned by the participant; both are illustrated by the direct quotes below.

“I thought that she would come in being a level two and take over the class... I thought she’d scrutinise my coaching really and I just got a bit stressed about that”.

“She [a parent] was telling me that my attitude was disgusting because I was discriminating against her child because she couldn’t speak Welsh”.

Poor performance (n=2) incorporated losing in a competition and conceding goals. Unlike previous studies (Noblet & Gifford, 2002; James & Collins, 1997), the demand did not refer to the performance of the individual but to the performance of others'. This caused ambiguity regarding categorisation as they could also be classified as personal stressors. The participants addressed the poor performances of the Welsh rugby team, the first team of the club the participant belonged to, and the performance of Lewis Hamilton in the Grand Prix.
Negative outcome of team selection (n=2) consisted of being dropped to the second team and another player starting over you. This was experienced by non-elite performers who played a team sport only. One participant stated:

“I don’t know why I’ve been dropped and I’ve been dropped for the last three weeks with no explanation… I’ve just been left out for no reason”.

These results suggest that ‘team selection’ is a more evident stressor in non-elite athletes than elite athletes. It has however previously been suggested by a number of researchers including Campbell and Jones (2002a), Dugdale et al. (2002) and Nicholls et al. (2006) that elite athletes also experience stress from team selection.

Demanding nature of the competition (n=1) represented playing against difficult opposition. While the first quote referred to a competition that the individual personally competed in, the second referred to the English rugby team.

“it was first against second in the table. So it was um, there was a lot riding on it”.

“England hadn’t won in a while and they were playing against the World Champions… even though they were winning for most of the game I always felt like they were never safe”.

This is an additional stressor that caused ambiguity and could be argued to fall under the category of personal stressors as it does not refer to the performance of the individual. Despite that only one of the participants in the current study mentioned the nature of competition; this stressor also emerged in the studies of James and Collins (1997) and Scanlan et al. (1991). While the importance and difficulty of competition were acknowledged in the current study, previous results included the additional themes of ‘level of competition’ and ‘closeness of competition’.
4.2 Organisational Stressors

Organisational stressors covered any demands that were not performance based but were directly-related to the organisation in which the performer was operating (see figure 2). The seven raw-data themes that fell under the category of organisational stressors were structured into four sub-themes; namely, poor training session, negative athlete-coach relationship, worries about team cohesion and lack of organisation. Only four out of the six participants recorded that they faced any organisational stressors during the three weeks of data collection, and only two of the six recorded any similar stressors that could be placed under the same sub-theme. This was surprising as the findings from the study of Hanton et al. (2005) indicated that athletes experience and recall more organisational demands than performance demands. This could be due to the fact that the current study did not focus merely on competition stress but investigated any and every demand that the participants faced within the three weeks of analysis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RAW DATA THEMES</th>
<th>SUB-THEMES</th>
<th>GLOBAL DIMENSION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Poor organisation of training</td>
<td>Poor training session 1/6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training cut short</td>
<td>Negative athlete-coach relationship 2/6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict with captain-coach</td>
<td>Worries about team cohesion 1/6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No support from coach</td>
<td>Lack of organisation 2/6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Segregated from the team</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missed the team bus</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Error at Welsh presentation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2: Organisational Stressors
Poor training session (n=1) referred to being unhappy with a session and having training cut short. The individual expressed their frustration through the following quote:

“You’ve got the first team doing exactly the same drills as the development squad and I think that’s totally outrageous because the level of difference between the firsts and the players in the development squad. She doesn’t want to concentrate on the firsts and she’s just concentrating on the development and it’s just so stressful every week”.

An identical demand was recorded by Hanton et al. (2005) through the theme ‘training environment’ and raw-data theme ‘poor organisation of training’. This stressor could also link to preparation. As one participant stated:

“we’re half way through the season now and once we’ve practiced short corners”.

Negative athlete-coach relationship (n=2) was derived from the two raw-data themes of conflict with captain-coach and not receiving support from the coach. It was the same participant that mentioned poor training session that also recorded the coach-athlete relationship as a demand; this could indicate that the two encounters may be relational. Another participant revealed:

“circuits isn’t too demanding but um, at the end of it I felt very dizzy and um, not well… and he didn’t give me any support… it just appeared quite selfish from the fact that I think his main focus was to get me out running on the Saturday”.

An identical demand also emerged in the study of Hanton and Fletcher (2003) through the theme ‘non-supportive coach’. It was stated that any conflict between a coach and an athlete is likely to be a major source of stress in elite performers as the role of the coach is highly significant to the athletes’ career.
Worries about team cohesion (n=1) represented being segregated from the team. Specifically, the participant perceived having to carry out a longer warm up when practicing a new training plan in order to retain the volume of running from the old training regime. The participant explained the reason this was deemed a stressful experience:

“because you have to do it away from the group and then join the group again and you don’t want to appear to be different or segregate yourself but I felt I had to do it in secret so I didn’t say “oh I’m going to do my own warm-up” I just thought I’d do a longer warm up then meet up with the group”.

This demand relates to a stressor from study of Mellalieu et al. (2009) of wanting to be accepted by fellow competitors.

Lack of organisation (n=2) included wanting to go and support the team but missing the bus and an error at a Welsh trampolining presentation which led to the participant not receiving their Welsh feathers as they had anticipated. The following quote explained the situation in the participant’s words.

“I was getting dressed up really excited to go. My parents were coming; we spent quite a lot of money on it to go, new dress, new hair, whatever. Um, and then I got there, went to receive my feathers and supposedly they claimed that I wasn’t on the list, even though I phoned to check that I was on the guest list, I was actually on the list at the door, I was on the dinner list on a board next to the door and they knew that I was coming because of the invite and we’d paid our money.”

The individual described the way they was feeling at the time as “absolutely livid” and stated that the experience has had a negative effect on their attitude towards competing for their country.
“It makes me feel like “why should I even bother competing for my country again? They need me more than I need them”.

While poorly planned travel arrangements was a demand that similarly emerged in the study of Fletcher, Hanton, Mellalieu, and Neil (2010), the latter encounter mentioned was a new demand that came to light during this study.

4.3 Personal Stressors
As personal stressors were the primary focus of the research question, additional attention was shown to this particular area of results. Personal stressors encapsulated any demands that were not directly-related to the sporting environment in any way (see figure 3). Due to the emergence of a large number of personal stressors (41), 10 sub-themes were devised and, where possible, organised into higher-order themes; which were subsequently structured into a logical framework. This included seven general dimensions including significant others, financial demands, imbalance of different life aspects, technology, social events, and a miscellaneous category.
Figure 3: Personal Stressors
4.3.1 Significant Others

*Significant others* (n=5) emerged from the three sub-themes of partner problems, issues regarding family, and friend based stressors.

*Partner problems* emerged from four raw-data themes; these concerns included a partner potentially getting injured during a football match, seeing a partner upset or angry, conflict with a partner, and wanting to spend more time with a partner.

*Partner problems* (n=3) was a stressor mentioned by all the participants that were in a relationship at the time of investigation and the remaining one had newly ended their relationship with their partner. The three participants who did not encounter any stressors regarding partners were all single. The following quotes demonstrate examples of the two extremes from the current study.

“Me and And don’t get to spend much time together… I just wanted to spend another hour or two with him but I had to go back for a house meal”

“He was using language on the phone that he’d never… like he wouldn’t treat me like he was on the phone, he was quite rude and um, demanding of me on the phone”.

Similarly in the current study and in the study of Campbell and Jones (2002a) (see figure 4), raw-data themes ranged from not being able to see their partner to arguing with their partner.

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Figure 4: Relationship issues that emerged in the study of Campbell and Jones (2002a).
Friend based stressors (n=5) was the factor that stemmed from concerns over a friends’ hospital appointment, seeing a friend upset on a night out, conflict with friends over money, disadvantages of living in a student house with friends, and arguments between house mates causing a bad atmosphere. The majority of quotes that fell under this theme referred to arguments. This type of stressor was cited frequently throughout the transcripts and an example is provided through the following quote.

“At the moment the whole dynamics of the house, there’s five of us in the house, are completely off, like compared to last year when we were really close... There’s people falling out all the time... loads of arguments... everybody bitching about each other”.

While arguments were mentioned frequently during the course of analysis, concerns about friends were also derived from the transcripts. One participant mentioned being worried about a friend’s hospital appointment as a stressor because:

“she wouldn’t elaborate on why she was in the hospital, she just said that she wanted to keep it to herself and that is was nothing serious for me to worry about”.

Issues regarding family (n=3) materialised from three raw-data themes; namely, a family member having an illness, an argument with a family member, and identically to the findings of Noblet and Gifford (2002), being unable to spend time with family members. As illustrated by the quote below, one participant in the current study perceived being unable to spend time with her niece as stressful.

“I want to spend as much time with her as I can. And I only get to see her once a fortnight if that... it’s basically to do with my schedule with uni, work, coaching training”.

36
A similar stressor emerged in the study of Campbell and Jones (2002a) through the raw-data theme of ‘time for family, basketball, and work’. Additionally, four of the 32 professional football players in the study of Noblet and Gifford (2002) recorded missing family and friends as a demand. The above quote also links to balancing different aspects of life, which is acknowledged later in the text.

4.3.2 Occupational Stressors

Occupational stressors (n=6) included two lower categories: education demands and job demands.

Education demands (n=5) included meeting university assignment deadlines, irritating lectures, struggling to find relevant literature, and attempting to complete academic work in a busy library. One participant stated:

“My dissertation tutor set like deadlines of when certain sections of my dissertation have got to be in. So this month, November, its umm, three of those sections have got to be in so she was expecting them to be in within those three weeks and I was over due on one so it was just building on top of me”.

Another demand related to the dissertation process came from a different participant who revealed their frustration with their dissertation supervisor through the next quote:

“We’re entitled to 15 minutes with our tutor per week and so far this year there’s been eight weeks I think… I’ve only received 15 minutes with him which is ridiculous so far. And every time I’ve tried to contact him he just doesn’t reply so I feel like massively under pressure to produce a bit of work of good quality without any guidance or help”.

This supported the suggestion of Giacobbi, Lynn et al. (2004) that ‘academics’ can be regarded as a demand to athletes. One of the participants declared that ‘academics was a continual challenge throughout the school year’ (p. 8). As the majority of the participants from the current study were university students (n=5),
this could explain the reason this demand was one of the major themes to materialise from this study.

*Job demands* (n=3) integrated lateness, broken equipment and a meeting with the managing director. The most frequently cited theme associated with job demands was being late for work. The following quote provides an example of this.

> “I set my alarm for half an hour earlier but slept through it. Um, and woke up in time to get there for 11. I got there at about 20 to, 20 to 11 when I was supposed to be in at half 10. So yeah but, um, I was a little bit stressed on the way and I was rushing”.

It was estimated by Jones, Huxtable, Hodgson, & Price (2003) that up to five million British employees felt largely stressed by their work, therefore it was no surprise that job demands was a stressor that emerged from the data. As stated by Adams *et al.* (1996), work and non-work domains are not isolated but in fact spill over into one another. This suggests that it is likely that athletes carry work stress with them into their respective sporting environments.

### 4.3.3 Financial Demands

Financial demands (n=3) was the higher-order theme utilised to group the sub-themes of bills, cost of injury, and money struggles.

*Bills* (n=3) represented the raw-data themes of having to pay utility bills, housemates not paying bills on time, and cost associated with owning a car. The quotes below illustrate the variety of bills that caused stress to the participants in question.

> “I have mortgage on my own which is obviously very tough and obviously all the bills that comes with it”,

> “money always seems to be very tight in my life… I was kind of putting extra pressure on myself to make sure I got the best [car insurance] deal I could possibly get”
“other things that cropped up on the MOT. Stuff about emissions and things that I don’t really understand… I just haven’t got the money to cover what needed to be fixed, or what he said needed to be fixed”.

Cost of injury (n=1) covered the stressors of having to pay for treatment and missing out on wages from sport due to injury. Factors included paying for treatment and wages being docked due to inability to play. This was mentioned by the only individual from our sample that was semi-professional and paid to play. As demonstrated by the quote below, this links to injury.

“If you’re not in the squad you don’t get paid the following week...
This injury again has cost me a weeks’ worth of wages from football which doesn’t help my financial problems”.

As stated by Fletcher et al. (2010), contrary to the majority of sportspeople, top-level athletes often compete as a means of earning an income therefore it was no surprise that this demand stemmed from an elite athlete.

Money struggles (n=3) included lack of finances, the loss of a bank card and spending too much money. The personal experiences of the individuals were portrayed through the following quotes.

“Mainly money, finance at the moment, I’m really, really struggling with it… when it comes to things like getting a coffee I have to think things like “oh, should I be spending a pound?” and that’s just a bit ridiculous when it’s a quid”.

“Working out how much I’ve got left for the month… It’s going to be very difficult”.

This supports findings from a number of previous studies. ‘Financial stress’ was a theme that emerged from the study of Gould et al. (1993). One participant stated:
“Worrying about finances, about the money. How could my family pay for all this? That was a constant worry for me” (p. 140-141).

Similarly to the current study and to the study of Gould et al. (1993), ‘lack of finance’ was a theme that also materialised from the study of Campbell and Jones (2002a).

4.3.4 Imbalance of Different Life Aspects

*Imbalance of different life aspects* (n=4) was the fourth higher-order theme that surfaced from the results. The central issues in this category included an imbalance between occupation/education and social life, and sport-social life imbalance.

*Occupation-social imbalance* (n=3) referred to being hungover in lectures, unable to do university work as a result of being hungover, and rushing to get ready to go out after work. The quote below illustrated the frustrations associated with this demand.

“I was hungover I wasn’t contributing as much as I normally would so I’ll get a lower mark... I enjoy myself too much and should probably focus a little bit more on education but I, I would like to balance it more”.

*Sport-social imbalance* (n=2) clustered being unable to go out due to sport commitments and struggling to complete a training session due to having a hangover. One athlete confessed:

“I didn’t learn from last week, that I can’t drink and train at the same time”.

The quote below explains the predicament in the words of the individual.

“You want to train because you want to get good and then you miss out on certain things... It’s so difficult to try and balance”.
An identical demand also surfaced in the study of Scanlan et al. (1991). The theme ‘time demands’ was formed and this encompassed the raw-data theme of ‘having reduced social life due to training demands’. Despite that both of the time demands that emerged from the current study involved social life, an additional time demand of balancing occupation and training emerged in previous studies. The study of Gould et al. (1993) presented ‘balancing school and skating’ as a demand, while ‘balancing work and training’ emerged from the study of Campbell and Jones (2002a). As suggested by Morton and Tighe (2011), socialising and heavy drinking is an integral part of university culture therefore, the reason this demand emerged numerous times could be a result of the majority of the sample attending university.

4.3.5 Technology

Technology (n=2) was directly-related to losing a mobile phone, a broken laptop, and being unable to borrow a laptop from the university library. One participant described the demand they faced through the quote below.

“Switched my laptop on and there was an error message on the screen... so I tried um, just looking up a couple of different things that I could do to the computer to get it to work like running different scans on it so I tried that and none of that worked either”.

This also related to education demands as the participant explained:

“I knew I had lots of work and it just wasn’t a good time to be not having a laptop to be able to do my work”.

The one other participant that encountered a technological demand declared:

“I’ve lost my phone... it’s just a bit of a panic because it was a nice phone, a very expensive phone. Um, it’s got a lot of personal stuff on there like diary, calendar, you know, my plan of action for the
week, its all gone and obviously losing my phone it's just messed up my entire week”.

This demand is also associated with social life as the participant admitted that they were inebriated at the time of loss.

“It was alcohol related and err, I've lost my phone”.

It is likely that only two of the six participants mentioned any demands associated with technology as they are random uncontrollable events that the two participants in this study were unlucky enough to encounter during the three weeks of analysis.

4.3.6 Negative Aspects of Social Events

Negative aspects of social events (n=3) was the higher-order theme utilised to group struggling to get ready for a night out due to hair and make-up problems, not having enough money to return home after staying elsewhere after a night out, and the possibility of damage to the house as a result of a housemate holding a party. All participants who recorded this demand were university students. One participant admitted:

“I woke up in the morning and I realised that I didn’t enough money for a taxi home... I was stressing that I’d have to walk home in last night’s clothes”.

In the student specific study of Faulkner, Hendry, Roderique, & Thompson (2006), it was reported that one of the major consequences associated with excessive drinking was unplanned sexual activity. As previous studies have described binge drinking as a social ‘norm’ within university culture (Borari & Carey, 2006; Boyd, McCabe, & Morales, 2005), it was not surprising that an issue of this nature emerged in this study as the majority of the participants were students.
4.3.7 Miscellaneous

The *miscellaneous* \((n=2)\) category grouped raw-data themes that did not have any similar properties and were therefore impossible to group into sub-themes. These raw-data themes included going shopping, and almost running out of petrol half way through a journey. The miscellaneous dimension comprised of two raw-data themes that were difficult to classify into any other sub-theme. One third of the participants mentioned events that fell within this dimension. The two miscellaneous sources included going shopping and almost running out of petrol half way through a journey.

4.4 Implications

4.4.1 Conceptual Level

In putting these findings into perspective, this study contributes to the literature by developing the first conceptual framework of personal stressors in sport performers. It is apparent from the emergent data that sports performers experience a large number of personal stressors that have, as of yet, never been taken into account. A consistent limitation throughout all sport literature regarding the stress process is that personal stressors have not been considered. Although further analysis is required, the current study provides an initial point of investigation regarding personal stressors.

4.4.2 Applied Level

With regard to implications for professional practice, the results suggest that applied sport psychologists should be sensitive, not only to the performance and organisational demands that are encountered, but also to the personal stressors that athletes face. This refers to all sportspeople including male and female, elite and non-elite, that compete in team or individual sports. When it is considered that the results of this study demonstrate that personal stressors were experienced over two and a half times more than any other type of demand, it becomes evident that practitioners should look to modify the target of their stress management interventions accordingly.
In line with the suggestion of Mellalieu et al. (2009), it is essential that every type of stressor should be considered when preparing and executing coping strategies. This suggests that practitioners require the knowledge regarding personal stressors provided by this study in order to prescribe reliable interventions. It is imperative that coaches develop an understanding of personal stressors as they could ultimately affect performance. If coaches are unaware of the concept of personal stress and understand that it could influence performance then they are unlikely to demonstrate any empathy towards the individual. The abundance of personal stressors that materialised from the current results suggest that practitioners should aim to move towards a more person-centred model of delivery and recognise the individuals they are working with as individual people and not just athletes.

Practitioners will benefit from the findings of the current study as it provides the first framework of personal stressors. The stress and coping framework proposed by Lazarus and Folkman (1984) indicated that strain can be prevented and reduced through emotion-focused stress management interventions or through problem-focused stress management interventions. Emotion-focused interventions target undesirable thoughts and emotions aroused by stressors while problem-focused interventions seek to alleviate the stressors giving rise to strain. A precursor to diminishing any effects that these stressors could cause is initially to identify the stressors that athletes could encounter, as this study has begun to do.

4.5 Limitations/Strengths
Although the method of the current study was rigorous and trustworthy in the sense that memory decay was eradicated and engagement with each participant was prolonged, the micro approach of diaries and continual interviews also had drawbacks. The approach adopted restricted the results to demands that were faced only within the three weeks of analysis. The study would benefit if a macro approach was also utilised, for example, a final interview to conclude and discuss any personal stressors that the participants had experienced at any time in the past that was not directly-related to the sporting environment. This limitation could
explain why neither death nor traumatic experiences materialised in the results of this study as initially hypothesised.

While a strength of the study was the diversity of the participant sample, the limitations imposed by the chosen sample also warrant deliberation. Specifically, the small number of six participants limits the legitimacy of the findings and also makes it impossible to generalise to the wider population.

The results of this study have provided evidence to propose that the current terminology used to categorise stressors is not sufficiently specific. Confusion was caused during the data analysis process when attempting to categorise certain themes. A number of participants mentioned the performance of others as a stressful encounter. For example one participant stated:

“it was the last grand prix of the season, um, it was Lewis Hamilton’s’ last race so I wanted him to do well and it was, there was two people going for the title, um, and the race wasn’t going as I wanted it to”

This caused ambiguity as the quotes of this sort did not refer to their own performance making it unclear which global dimension they belonged to, whether it was performance or personal. Another factor that caused confusion was the demand that one participant recorded regarding the evaluation of their coaching ability. It is possible that individuals possess a variety of identities within the organisation as they may be involved in many different aspects of the sport including playing, coaching, managing, media reporting etc. This also caused ambiguity as it was not clear whether demands associated with an individual's coaching ability should be classified as a performance stressor or a personal stressor. For the benefit of this study these demands were categorised as performance stressors. However, these issues provide evidence to suggest that the terminology currently utilised requires revising to increase specificity and certainty.
4.6 Future Directions

It is evident from the above suggestions that research assessing the terminology utilised in the categorisation of stressors is required as the current definitions are not sufficiently specific.

As an initial qualitative study has now been conducted, a logical progression for future research would begin with a replication study investigating a larger participant sample in a bid to verify the reliability of the stressors that emerged from the current study. Once large cohort studies have confirmed a solid framework of personal stressors, quantitative research can be undertaken to assess intensities and frequencies of personal stressors.

Now that the generic concept of personal stressors has been examined, future research should aim to identify the stressors faced by athletes in specific sports and/or athletes of a specific ability. A number of previous studies have taken this approach while investigating competition stressors. Noblet and Gifford (2002) studied the sources of stress experienced by professional Australian footballers and Giacobbi, Lynn et al. (2004) investigated stress experienced by female first year university swimmers. Comparative studies could also be carried out similar to those of Mellalieu et al. (2009) and Anshel and Sutarso (2007) on elite and non-elite, or male and female athletes, respectively. In line with the research of Hanton et al. (2005), studies could compare the amount of different types of stressors encountered by athletes; for example, a comparative study of organisational (or performance) and personal stressors.

The most logical progression for the current study is to follow the map of the Cognitive Motivational Relational Theory of Emotions (CMR Theory; Lazarus, 2000). Now that personal stressors have been identified, research should aim to investigate the appraisals that those stressors cause. Following this, the perceived influence of personal stressors over performers’ ability to train and compete effectively could be investigated, and actual subsequent behaviours/performances will require analysis. Only after the completion of these initial steps can coping strategies be the focus of any study.
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION
5.0 CONCLUSION
The aim of this study was to uncover the personal demands that were faced by six athletes, male and female, from a range of skill levels and sports over a three week period through the utilisation of diaries and interviews. Analysis revealed that two and a half times the amount of personal demands (40) emerged from the data compared to performance demands (16), and personal demands were almost six-fold competitive demands (7). This is a strong starting point to support that personal stressors require extensive further investigation. A number of stressors that were hypothesised to emerge through this study were experienced by the participants. These factors included personal relationship issues and financial worries. Time demands were perceived as stressful to the sample; however it was imbalances between social life and occupation, and social life and sport that emerged here as opposed to work/education imbalance that was anticipated to materialise. The suggested cause of this was that the majority of the sample consisted of university students. Two out of the five hypothesised factors did not emerge in this study; these were traumatic experiences and death. The blame for this could lie with the micro approach adopted. Despite this limitation, additional personal stressors were uncovered through this investigation; for example, issues regarding technology. While this study has not uncovered every type of demand that a sportsperson could face, it is, to the author’s knowledge, the first framework of personal stressors to date.
REFERENCES
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Gould, D., Jackson, S., & Finch, L. (1993). Sources of stress in National Champion Figure Skaters. *Journal of Sport & Exercise Psychology. 15*: p134-159.


APPENDICES
APPENDIX A

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION FORM
Project Title: A conceptual framework of personal stressors.

This document provides a brief run through of:

1. The background and aim of the research,
2. My role as the researcher,
3. Your role as the participant,
4. Benefits of taking part,
5. How data will be collected, and
6. How the data/results will be used

The purpose of this document is to assist you in making an informed decision on whether you wish to participate in the study, and to promote transparency in the research process.

1) Background and aims of the research

There are factors in everyday life that can cause stress to an individual; these are called ‘demands’ or ‘stressors’. In some circumstances, these demands can affect on thoughts, feelings and even performance. Some performers may use the demand as a source of motivation and it could have beneficial effects on performance, as it allows them to excel. Alternatively, some performers could find this feeling distracting and therefore detrimental to performance. A large number of studies have been carried out regarding organisational and performance stressors/demands. This has enabled researchers to identify these demands and coping strategies that deal with these issues. As of yet, personal stressors have not been studied therefore I would like to carry out a research study identifying the personal demands athletes face. In simplest form, demands that athlete’s encounter associated with their personal life that may make them happy or may be considered a demand on them.
2) My role as the researcher
The study involves me (Kelly Thomas), the researcher, providing you with a pre-interview diary to fill in every day for three consecutive weeks. Using the information provided in the diaries, I will then devise a semi-structured interview to carry out with all six participants in a location of their choice. Interviews will be conducted at the end of each week of diary completion. It is my responsibility to ensure you are aware of all the details including the nature of the study and your rights as a participant. I will also ensure that your identity remains anonymous and all the information is kept strictly confidential.

3) Your role as a participant
Your role is to complete the diary process honestly and with sufficient detail. The pre-interview diary includes questions regarding your gender, age, primary sport, the level at which you compete, and questions regarding any demands you have faced during the day in question. During the interviews, it is your responsibility to answer the questions honestly in order for the study to be reliable. Here is an example of a question that may be asked: “What was it about the situation that made it stressful?” You will have the option to choose your own venue for the interview and you will not be forced to answer any questions that you do not feel comfortable with. You have the right to withdraw at any time during any part of the project.

4) Benefits of taking part
The information I hope to obtain during this study will allow an initial insight into personal demands that athletes experience that could affect their appraisals during training/competition. This will, in turn, during future research, allow for coping strategies to be suggested or devised to address these issues, and ultimately benefit the athlete and his/her performance. I will be more than happy to share the results with any of my participants.
5) How data will be collected
Initially, data will be extracted from the completed diaries and used to construct a semi structured interview guide. The interviews will be transcribed and all stressors recorded by each participant will be listed. The responses derived from the transcripts will be grouped based on common factors and developed into themes.

6) How the data/results will be used
In agreeing to become a voluntary participant, you will be allowing me to use your responses from the diaries and the interview transcripts to be included in a larger data set that includes information from the other participants. Your personal data will remain anonymous and will only be reported within the total sample of participants, never alone. Quotes will be taken from the interview transcripts and used to illustrate important points in the written discussion however your identity will remain anonymous throughout.

Your Rights
As a voluntary participant, you have the right to withdraw from the study at any time. Simply, you have full control of the part you play in the study, and full control over any information that you provide to be used in the results of the study.

Protection to Privacy
Concerted efforts will be given to ensure your anonymity in any written transcripts or documentation that informs the research or its findings. Any personal information about you will remain confidential according to the guidelines of the Data Protection Act (1998).

Contact
If you have any queries, or you wish to contact me for any reason, please do not hesitate to do so using the information printed below.

Kelly Thomas
Cardiff School of Sport
Cardiff Metropolitan University
CF23 6XD
E-mail: st10001718@outlook.cardiffmet.ac.uk
APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT FORM
Cardiff Metropolitan University
Informed Consent Form

CSS Reference Number:
Title of Project: "A conceptual framework of personal stressors"
Name of Researcher: Kelly Thomas

Participant to complete this section:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I confirm that I have read and fully understand the participant information sheet dated 2/11/12 for the study in question. I have had the opportunity to consider this information, ask questions, and have any queries answered satisfactorily.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am fully aware that my participation in the study is voluntary and I have the right to withdraw at any time without giving a reason. I understand that I am in full control of my contribution to the study and the information I provide.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I understand that if I do withdraw, my relationships with Cardiff Metropolitan University will not be affected nor will by legal rights.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I understand that the personal information I provide may be used for reporting purposes, but I will remain anonymous.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I agree to take part in this study on personal stressors in sport.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Name of Participant

Signature of Participant

Date

Name of Person Taking Consent

Signature of Person Taking Consent

Date
APPENDIX C

EXAMPLE DIARY (one day)
The purpose of this pre-interview diary is firstly to prepare the participant for the questions that will be asked during the interview process. As the main aim of the interview is to derive personal stressors (demands) that the participants have experienced, sensitive subjects are likely to arise. These pre-interview diaries will allow the interviewee to gain an insight into the types of questions that will be asked and ultimately, give the participants a chance to withdraw from the study if they do not feel comfortable addressing such personal information before the interview process begins. The secondary aim of this diary process is to gain an understanding of the participant prior to the interviews as this will aid in the preparation of probes and allow the interview to flow smoothly efficiently.

You will be required to fill complete these diaries every day for three consecutive weeks. It is essential that you reveal every demand you experienced throughout the week, however trivial it may seem. Please ensure that the information you provide is honest and truthful. Know that you have the right to withdraw from the study at any time and if you do not feel comfortable in answering any of the questions or do not feel that you have experienced any of the emotions mentioned please leave the question blank rather than provide information that is not reliable. At the end of each week, a semi-structured interview will be carried out in order to build on the demands that you mention here.
What have you done today?

Morning: ________________________________________________________________
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_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________

Afternoon: _______________________________________________________________
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_________________________________________________________________________

Evening: __________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________
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Have you experienced any demands or stressful experiences today?

Morning: ________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________

Afternoon: __________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________

Evening: __________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________
Explain why you perceived these situations as demanding or stressful.

Morning: ________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________

Afternoon: ____________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________

Evening: ______________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________

Describe how these demands or stressful experiences affected you.
______________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________
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______________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________

C-3
APPENDIX D

EXAMPLE TABLE
<table>
<thead>
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<th>STRESSOR</th>
<th>INFORMATION</th>
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<td>SUNDAY</td>
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