Cardiff School of Sport

DISSERTATION ASSESSMENT PROFORMA:
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‘The fluctuation of Fear of Failure, and coping in men’s collegiate football’

Dissertation submitted under the discipline of
Sports Psychology
by
Alex Dockree

ST10001396
‘The Fluctuation of Fear of Failure, and Coping in Men’s Collegiate Football’
Certificate of student

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Abstract

The study examined the fluctuation of Fear of Failure and coping responses among 15 male football players (aged 18-23). Upon completion of the Performance-Failure-Appraisal-Inventory, the three participants who displayed the highest levels of Fear of Failure were identified and interviewed over a six-week period. They highlighted that there were situational factors which caused and prevented Fear of Failure which affected their well-being, interpersonal behaviour, and sporting performance. They employed predominantly Avoidance-Focussed, and Emotion-Focussed coping strategies in response to their Fear of Failure. Findings enhance understanding of the fluctuation of Fear of Failure in sport, and contribute to both research and applied practice.

Keywords: Fluctuation, Fear, Failure, Coping

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION
1.1 The Psychology of Sport

According to Cox (1994), Sports psychology represents a discipline that applies the principles of psychology within a sporting setting. Due to an increase in modern times of the importance placed upon sport, there has been a subsequent increase in the popularity of Sports psychology, increasing research interest into a number of psychological variables (Evans, Mitchell and Jones 2006). Through demands such as defeats, injuries, and performance slumps, sport represents a situation that produces stressors many athletes can perceive as threatening, challenging, and harmful. Athletes who do not possess effective coping strategies to deal with such situations are likely to experience implications relating to performance level, negative affect, and in severe cases, can lead to drop out (Madden, 1995). Sports psychologists work to prepare athletes by manipulating the strategies they use to cope with the stresses and anxieties they experience in these sporting situations (Jones, 1995).

1.2 Fear of Failure

“The greatest mistake you can make in life is to continually be afraid you will make one.”  Elbert Hubbard

The process of performing within a performance setting is naturally accompanied by experiences of success and failure. Taking into consideration the probability of experiencing failure in a competitive situation, it is essential that athletes are able to cope effectively with the demands they experience in order for them to pursue a successful sporting experience (Holt and Dunn, 2004). Fears relating to failure have been associated with aversive interpersonal and performance consequences (Sagar, Lavallee and Spray, 2009; Sagar, Busch, & Jowett, 2010). It is therefore essential that efforts are made to establish strategies which can work to buffer, or prevent the effects Fear of Failure has upon sports performers.
1.3 The Present Study

Despite an increase in openness of Fear of Failure experiences in sport within the media (i.e., ‘England are suffering from a Fear of Failure’ “England’s Fear of Failure”, 2012), Fear of Failure as a phenomenon stills remains under-studied in the sporting domain (Sagar, Lavallee, & Spray, 2007; Sagar et al., 2009; Sagar et al., 2010). The present study, exploratory in nature, examined the fluctuation of Fear of Failure over a six-week period, amongst a University sample, seeking to provide further theoretical clarity and new findings about Fear of Failure in sport. The research examined perceptions of failure, cause and effect of Fear of Failure, coping responses to Fear of Failure, and cause and effect of absences of Fear of Failure. The study contributes to the knowledge of the Sport’s Psychology Consultant (SPC), coaches, and others who work with football players and other athletes. Firstly however, previous literature surrounding Fear of Failure and other applicable concepts will be reviewed.
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE
2.1 Introduction

This review will critique the research around the concept of ‘fear of failure’. First, a summary of the definitions surrounding fear and perceptions of failure will be provided, before advancing into the conceptualisation of a multi-dimensional model of fear of failure. Studies specifically focused on fear of failure will then be critiqued, outlining findings and identifying possible limitations, leading to the rationale and purpose for study.

2.2 Fear

Fear can be defined as a subjective emotion that can lead to triggers causing physiological changes (Gray, 1987). Accordingly, Cashmore (2002) summarised fear as an emotion associated with an actual impending danger, characterized by subjective feelings of discomfort and arousal. Research has shown that patterns of fear exist from early childhood through to adulthood, and are considered as an adaptive aspect of development that acts to warn one of threat or danger, motivating escape or avoidance behaviours (Barlow, 2002; Field & Lawson, 2003).

Three main fears have been outlined, particularly within young children and adolescents; performance anxiety, social anxiety and school phobias (King, Gullone, & Ollendick, 1998). In addition, extreme fears (categorized as phobias) exist that have been said to impact severely upon an individual’s functioning in a number of life domains (King et al., 1998). In comparison, normative and non-pathological fears (again common in children and adolescents) are said to have a less severe impact on individuals, but do, however, have an influence on comfort levels and reactions to people and situations within an environment (Schaefer, Watkins, & Burnham, 2003). Individual’s that make an association between a particular stimulus and threat will trigger a fear response, a response often resulting in avoidance (Barlow, 2002; Field & Lawson, 2003). Hayes, Strosahl, Wilson, Bissett and Pistorello (2004) referred to avoidance behaviours as ‘experiential avoidance’, described as a process where an individual attempts to avoid or control internal experiences.
2.3 Perceptions of Failure

According to Scanlan (1984) many children attribute winning as a standard for success, and therefore, the thought of losing becomes threatening and consequently causes a fear of failure. This notion of failure is supported by other literature noting that concerns over the outcome of performance can be seen as one of the most predominant sources of worry for individual’s performing in an evaluative setting (e.g. competition) (Martens, Vealey, & Burton, 1990). In contrast, McAuley (1985) suggested that individuals view success and failure not just in terms of the outcome (win-loss), but also in terms of personal accomplishment (personal goals). The more contemporary recognises how an individual’s perception of failure is said to be determined by how well their basic needs (i.e., competence, relatedness and autonomy) are met. Basic Needs Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000) consists of three psychological needs, categorised as: competence, relatedness, and autonomy. Competence refers to an individual's perception of their ability to act effectively within a certain environment. Relatedness is viewed as the need to feel close and connected to valued others. And Autonomy, as the need to experience activities as self-endorsed. All three represent how individuals can perceive success and failure in terms of how well these needs are met, as opposed to simply the standard of performance alone (Conroy, Poczwardowski & Henschen, 2001).

2.4 Conceptualising Fear of Failure

Early research by motivational theorists viewed Fear of Failure as a uni-dimensional construct, and described Fear of Failure as the motive to avoid failure because one perceives they will experience feelings of shame and embarrassment upon failure (Atkinson, 1964; McClelland, Atkinson, Clark and Lowell, 1958). Conceptualizing Fear of Failure as one dimensional disregard’s the possible effect of situational factors and takes the view that it is a personality trait which causes an individual to anticipate negative experiences within an achievement setting (Sagar, Lavallee and Spray, 2009, pg. 76). These early theorists suggested that there were two types of achievement orientation. The first involves how an individual looks to avoid failure within an achievement setting, and secondly, where the individual orientates towards
the achievement of success. These beliefs caused the early research to conceptualize the need to achieve and Fear of Failure as separate motive dispositions (Sagar et al., 2009, pg. 76).

More contemporary research has contradicted these early theories and has reconceptualised FF as a multidimensional construct. Studies such as Conroy, Poczwardowski, and Henschen (2001) and Conroy, Willow, and Metzler (2002) did support the early belief that FF is a personality trait, but defined it as a hierarchical and multidimensional concept; in which individual’s seek to avoid failure because of its association with aversive consequences. Conroy et al.’s (2002) research proposes that individuals will fear the consequences of failure if they perceive these consequences to be aversive; this would suggest that the concept of FF closely links to Lazarus’s (1999, 2000) research around threat. Lazarus (1999, 2000) states that an individual fearing the consequences of failure can be seen to be anticipating a threatening outcome, and will therefore experience feelings of fear and anxiety.

2.5 Cognitive-Motivational-Relational Theory of emotion and Fear of Failure

Lazarus’s cognitive-motivational-relational theory of emotion (1991, 1999) suggests that once an individual perceives that failure will cause relational changes (failure is seen as a threat); they must appraise how those perceived changes impact upon their ability to achieve their goals. This appraisal is recognised as the primary appraisal process and involves:

1. The individual determining whether their goals are affected by the perceived threat.

2. Which specific goals are in danger.

3. The importance of the achievement of these goals.

From this cognitive-motivational-relational perspective, FF in an achievement setting involves the appraisal of threat to the achievement of significant personal goals. Lazarus (1991, 1999) proposes that such appraisals cause the activation of schemas (cognitive beliefs) associated with the aversive consequences of failure, leading to
experiences of fear. This would therefore suggest that individuals with a certain personality trait will respond to Fear of Failure by experiencing fear and anxiety in evaluative situations (Young, Klosko, & Weishaar, 2003).

2.6 Contemporary research into Fear of Failure

Conroy, Willow, & Metzler (2002) used the cognitive-motivational-relational theory of emotion to shape their construction of a multi-dimensional measure based on FF. Conroy et al.’s (2002) study looked to build on his own research (e.g. Conroy, 2001) to create a shorter form of the performance failure appraisal inventory (PFAI), used to measure general levels of FF. The study used a sample of 440 male and female college students, who were instructed to complete the 41-item PFAI (Conroy, 2001), along with other measures such as the fear of success scale (Zuckerman & Allison, 1976), and the sport anxiety scale (Smith, Smoll, & Schutz, 1990).

Conroy et al.’s (2002) research helped significantly reduce some of the conceptual and methodological problems associated with the measurement of fear of failure. The investigation forced improvements in the factorial validity of the 41-item PFAI (Conroy, 2001) by recognising, and then removing items that were poor on both conceptual and empirical grounds, creating a 25-item short form version of the PFAI. This enabled applied practitioners to utilize the PFAI as a method of identifying clients who are most likely to be threatened by failure, as well as monitoring the effectiveness of any interventions they have implemented. Conroy and colleagues (2002) also identified five beliefs about the consequences of failure. These were:

1. Fear of experiencing shame and embarrassment.
2. Fear of devaluing one’s self estimate.
3. Fear of important others losing interest.
5. Fear of upsetting significant others.

Conroy & Elliot (2004) furthered research in this area through their study focused around fear of failure and achievement motivation. They used a sample of 356 (250 males, 106 females) undergraduate students to test the proposition derived from the
hierarchical model of achievement motivation (Elliot, & Church, 1997); that fear of failure antecedes achievement goals.

Conroy et al.’s (2004) findings resembled the hierarchical model of achievement motivation’s hypothesis, in terms of relationship patterns between FF and goals. They found that the five FF beliefs (Conroy et al., 2002) positively predicted both a mastery-avoidance and performance-avoidance goal orientation. Accordingly, Fear of Failure was found to increase the likelihood of an individual adopting avoidance goals, and could therefore conclude that Fear of Failure influences goal related behaviour. These findings support Elliot et al.’s (1997) theory that reducing levels of Fear of Failure can reduce dysfunctional achievement motivation (e.g. Avoidance).

Despite contributing to knowledge, Conroy et al.’s (2002, 2004) research adopted a quantitative approach. Despite being affective for comparisons and generalisations, quantitative data can lack depth, confining participants to a specific response, not always reflecting true thoughts and feelings.

Sagar et al. (2009) looked to address these limitations in their qualitative study examining the effects of Fear of Failure, and coping strategies in young elite athletes. Sagar et al. (2009) conducted interviews with questions based around the participant’s perceptions of failure, past effects of FF, current experiences of FF, and coping responses to FF.

Sagar et al. (2009) found that Fear of Failure led to increased experiences of anxiety and a reduced perception of self. This resulted in the athlete’s motivation to perform being reduced, owing to fears over the possibility of losing. Accordingly, results showed that negative cognitions (thought processes) increased Fear of Failure triggering physiological responses such as tension.

In the context of coping responses, Sagar et al. (2009) discovered that athletes’ attempted to combat the effects of FF by adopting three types of coping strategy; Avoidance-focussed (AFC), emotion-focussed (EFC), and problem focussed coping (PFC). All of the athletes reported using AFC and EFC strategies, with eight of the nine adopting PFC strategies. Thus, the majority of the athletes employed a combination of all three strategies in order to overcome fear of failure. This finding is
consistent with results found in other sport-specific research that have examined athletes coping behaviours in relation to other variables such as slumps in performance, injury and retirement from sport (i.e., Gould, Udry, Bridges, & Beck, 1997; Poczwarski & Conroy, 2002). These studies found that athletes prefer to adopt a PFC strategy as opposed to an EFC or AFC approach. In contrast, Sagar et al.’s (2009) study found that the athletes employed predominantly AFC strategies, followed by EFC and then PFC strategies, outlining that PFC responses were least employed to cope with their Fear of Failure. Sagar et al. (2009) states that PFC strategies are mostly employed when an individual perceives that the stressor their experiencing is controllable, and therefore something constructive can be done to overcome it. The relative absence of the employment of PFC strategies within the sample suggests that these athletes may perceive Fear of Failure as a response to a stressor that is beyond their control, and therefore AFC and EFC strategies are deemed as the only mechanisms able to limit adverse effects of Fear of Failure.

Sagar et al.’s (2009) study was effective in providing a more detailed insight into the effects, and coping strategies surrounding FF in young elite athletes. However, the wide range of sports adopted by the participants, along-side the small sample size, makes the results hard to generalize to a wider population of young athletes. Furthermore, coping responses to Fear of Failure were identified, but findings did not establish whether these responses were effective in terms of overcoming Fear of Failure.

Sagar, Busch, & Jowett (2010) attempted to address the limitations relating to specific sports in their study, focussed on dimensions of FF and coping responses in elite adolescent football players. Their quantitative findings (utilising the PFAI) identified that despite being at a moderate level, fear of experiencing shame and embarrassment upon failure was the highest fear identified by all participants. These findings show a consistency with Sagar and Stoeber’s (2009) research, showing that fear of experiencing shame and embarrassment upon failure is a significant fear among athletes of a variety of ages, competing in a variety of sports. According to Conroy et al. (2004) fear of experiencing shame and embarrassment has been associated with negative self-talk (e.g. increases in self-blame). In addition, individuals high in FF experience greater levels of shame (in comparison to those
low in FF), thus, making them more likely to look to avoid failure and mistakes in an evaluative setting.

In terms of coping strategies, this study further supported Sagar et al.’s (2009) findings; outlining that all players employed a combination of AFC, EFC, and PFC strategies to combat fears of failure. As with Sagar et al.’s (2009) study, AFC strategies were reported most frequently, with PFC strategies reported the least, therefore reinforcing Sagar et al.’s (2009) conclusion that young elite athletes predominantly employ ineffective coping strategies. Despite these findings contributing to knowledge by identifying coping responses to Fear of Failure, there are still aspects of the study which could be improved in further research. Both of Sagar et al.’s (2009, 2010) studies, as with a lot of sport-related research, focus specifically on elite athletes. Again, this makes the findings difficult to generalize to a wider population of different ages and ability levels. In addition, a lot of research into FF (including this study) has been cross-sectional in design and therefore cannot inform us as to whether an individual’s FF level fluctuates over time.

2.7 Rationale For the Research Study

By analysing the findings of previous studies, and recognising possible limitations, it becomes clear as to which direction future research should follow in order to continue to contribute to knowledge. Sagar et al. (2010) determined that current research does not inform us as to whether an athlete’s fear of failure fluctuates over time in accordance with events within a sporting season (i.e. Major competitions). Therefore future studies would benefit from research more longitudinal in design, assessing a player’s (or athletes) fear of failure over a period of time as opposed to a one off scenario. In addition to this, research would also benefit from investigations using a semi-professional or amateur sample, creating a comparison between FF levels and coping strategies used between the elite and the non-elite. Taking this into consideration, the purpose of this study will be to examine the fluctuation of Fear of Failure, and coping strategies employed in men’s collegiate soccer.
CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY
3.1 Introduction

In order to address the research aim ‘fluctuation of Fear of Failure’, the study adopted a mixed-method, longitudinal approach. Quantitative analysis was used to identify players with high Fear of Failure levels, with the four highest scoring players taking part in the qualitative collection stages. Participants were then interviewed three times over a six week period; which over time allowed for different situational factors to arise which caused, or prevented Fear or Failure.

3.2 Participants

Fifteen male football players (2 goalkeepers, 5 defenders, 5 midfielders, and 3 strikers) from a University football programme volunteered to take part in the quantitative analysis stage of the present study. Players were between 18 and 23 years of age (M = 20, SD = 1.5), all were active members of the Universities Elite squad, but were classified as non-elite participants. Four players took part in the qualitative interview phase. At the time of the study, all players had been members of the squad for at least 6 months and played in different positions. Player 1 (P1) was a midfielder (age 21 years), player 2 (P2) was a goalkeeper (age 19 years), player 3 (P3) was a midfielder (age 19 years), and player 4 (P4) was a defender (age 20 years).

3.3 Pilot Interviews

For the inexperienced interviewer, pilot interviews have been recognised as an imperative part of effective data collection (Gratton & Jones, 2010). Other research has supported this, noting that pilots can determine a guide’s effectiveness at measuring what it intends to, thus enhancing the validity of the data collection (Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Cohen et al., 2007; Basit, 2010). Considering the relative inexperience of the interviewer, the pilot interviews were seen as a vital process to improve both the guide and the interviewer’s competencies.

Two pilot interviews were carried out (and audio recorded) with player 4 prior to the main interview process. The purpose of these preliminary interviews was to test: 1) the appropriateness of questions in relation to the studies aims, 2) the clarity of the questions and the way in which they were asked, 3) the order in which questions
were asked, and 4) the flow between questions (which would allow for natural flow
and sequence in conversation).

Based on player 4’s feedback, and the researcher’s critique of the interview
transcript, amendments were made to simplify the wording of some questions and to
make the interview guide more specific to the research aims. The following quote is
an example of such amendments, “Would you be willing to share your most
traumatic experience of failure?” was modified to read “Provide me with 3 examples
of previous games in which you experienced feelings of fear during the build-
up/preparation? Talk to me about your thoughts and feelings going into these
games?” This change was deemed appropriate by the researcher as rather than
asking the participant to focus on an experience of actual failure; the question was
made to ask for specific examples of fear prior to performance, becoming more
suitable to the research aims.

A second pilot interview was again carried out with player 4. After the researcher’s
critique of the interview transcript, appropriate changes were again made to improve
the validity of the interview guide. Questions surrounding the absence of fear prior to
past performance were removed from the interview guide. The researcher deemed
this modification necessary because this collection of questions counted for a large
percentage of the interview duration, and felt that factors causing an absence of Fear
of Failure should be allowed to arise naturally within the interview process.

Because of player 4’s involvement in the pilot interviews, he was excluded from the
main study, and the final interview guide was used to interview the three players who
participated in the current study.

3.4 Interview Guide

The guide for the first interviews was divided into six sections: a pre-interview
section, introduction, perceptions of failure, past experiences of Fear of Failure,
current experiences of Fear of Failure, and a post-interview section.

The pre-interview section was used to further build rapport, explain the reasons for
audio taping the interview, reiterate the confidential nature of the research, and
remind the participants that they can decline any questions and withdraw from the
interview at any stage. The first section was an introductory section consisting of general questions based around their season so far (i.e., Talk to me about how the season is going so far from both a personal and a team level?). This section was designed to further build rapport and trust with the participants, to prevent them from feeling threatened to share what could be sensitive and private information later in the interview. The second section was based around gaging an understanding of the participants perceptions of failure (i.e., How would you define failure in football? What do you see as the consequences of failure in football?).

The third section aimed to recognise past experiences of fear of failure and the coping strategies used by the participants. Questions were retrospective in nature and asked participants to provide examples of games where they felt fearful in the build-up to performance (i.e., “Provide me with 3 examples of previous games in which you experienced feelings of fear during the build-up/preparation?”), and to describe thoughts, emotions, and coping responses in relation to their fear of failure (i.e., “Describe your thoughts of losing/getting beaten/not winning going into these games?” “What did you do, or say to yourself to deal with the negative thoughts you were experiencing?”). The use of the terms losing, getting beaten, or not winning were dependent upon the specific responses the participant gave in the second section (perceptions of failure) of the interview.

The fourth section aimed to ascertain current experiences of fear of failure, and more specifically in relation to the participant’s next game. Questions were prospective in nature. Participants were asked questions about the game that was approaching (i.e., Who? What? Where? When?), the opposition they will be facing (Talk to me about your opponents? What do you know about them?), and how they are preparing for the game (Give me an insight into how you are preparing for this game?). They were then questioned about their fears of failure for this game (Describe your thoughts and feelings going into this game? Tell me what thoughts you’ve had about losing/getting beaten/not winning this game?), what impact these fears had upon their behaviour (Talk to me about how these thoughts/feelings/fears are affecting you going into this game?), and how they attempt to cope with them (What are you doing or saying to yourself to deal with these thoughts/feelings?).
At the end of each section of the interview, participants were asked if there was anything they wished to add concerning what had been discussed and if they were happy to continue. The post-interview section acted as a debriefing and gave both the participant and the researcher a chance to clarify aspects of the interview, and to unwind the interview, changing the focus to less personal issues bringing a natural end to the interview process. In addition, this section gave the participant a chance to reflect upon the interview experience and to ‘let go’ of any emotions interviews of this kind can evoke (King, 1996).

The guide for the second and third interviews consisted of three sections: introductory section, current experiences of Fear of Failure, and a post-interview section. The introductory section consisted of questions relating to games, training, and well-being since the previous interview (i.e. Talk to me about the last few weeks, how have training and any games gone? How are you feeling physically? How are you feeling physically/psychologically?). The main section aimed to ascertain participant’s current experiences of Fear of Failure, relating to thoughts, feelings, and coping strategies approaching their next game. The post-interview section was again used for both parties to refine aspects of the interview, and bring the interview to a natural close.

### 3.5 Data Collection

The procedure consisted of four stages: seeking consent, quantitative data collection, initial meetings, and qualitative data collection.

#### 3.5.1 Seeking Consent

After obtaining university ethical approval and permission from the team’s football director, players were approached about participating, at their university sports complex prior to a training session. They were asked if they would volunteer to take part in the study, were informed of the study’s aims (to analyse the fluctuation of fear or failure, as well as coping strategies) and procedures, its confidential nature, and the criterion for participation (be an active part of the elite squad). Players who volunteered signed informed consent forms for their participation in the study.
3.5.2 Quantitative Data Collection

The 25-item Performance Failure Appraisal Inventory (PFAI; Conroy et al., 2002) was given to all participants to complete and return in their own time. Similar to Sagar et al.’s (2010) study, the PFAI was employed and utilised as a diagnostic tool to identify individuals with a high fear of failure. The PFAI consists of 25 items, divided into 5 subscales, each measuring a specific dimension of the aversive consequences of failure. These are: Fear of experiencing shame and embarrassment (7 items: i.e., “When I am failing, I worry what others think about me.”), fear of devaluing one’s self-estimate (4 items: i.e., “When I am failing, I hate the fact I am not in control of the outcome.”), fear of having an uncertain future (4 items: i.e., “When I am failing, my future seems uncertain.”), fear of important others losing interest (5 items: i.e., “When I am not succeeding, people seem less interested in me.”), and fear of upsetting important others (5 items: i.e. “When I am failing, it upsets important others.”). Players were required to rate how strongly they believed each consequence would occur following failure in football. Responses were recorded on a 5-point scale from +2 (Believe 100% of the time, to -2 (Do not believe at all). All players returned the completed questionnaire via hand or e-mail within two days of receiving it. A score for each subsection of the PFAI was calculated, resulting in a general level of fear of failure for each participant.

3.5.3 Initial Meetings

Using the results of the PFAI questionnaire, players who experienced high levels of fear of failure were identified. The four players, who scored the highest levels of general fear of failure, were contacted via e-mail and were invited to take part in the interview phase of the study. Once players agreed to proceed to the next stage of data collection, a 10-15 minute pre-interview meeting was arranged with each player (individually), simulating aspects of Sagar et al.’s (2009) study. The objective of these initial meetings were to: build rapport through a face to face introduction (Gratton & Jones, 2004), explain the aims of the study in further detail, outline what the interviews will consist of (along with exemplar questions), answer any questions, to discuss any concerns the player may have about participation, and to arrange convenient interview times for both parties.
3.5.4 Qualitative Data Collection

Three semi-structured interviews were carried out with each player over a 6 week period, lasting between 30 and 50 minutes. Interview techniques were deemed appropriate as they allow participants to provide a detailed insight into the demands associated with sporting performance (Neil et al., 2009). All interviews were recorded which prevented the need for note taking. This helped to build rapport between interviewer and interviewee, which can result in the respondent divulging more information (Gratton & Jones, 2004). These interviews were all conducted individually (with only the participant and the researcher present) to allow the participant to share their experiences in a free and open manner. This allowed them to disclose more information than perhaps they would in a focus group scenario. A pre-designed interview guide (developed through pilots) was used as a flexible framework to shape the interviews and was based around key questions deemed relevant to the study. It contained open-ended questions, alongside probes (for elaboration and clarification) used to encourage participants to expand and deepen their responses (Gratton & Jones, 2004). Although all participants were asked the same questions, in the same manner, the order in which they were asked varied to maintain the flow of natural conversation, and related issues viewed as significant by the participants were also allowed to surface.

3.6 Data Analysis

The analysis of qualitative data involves the transcription and coding of large amounts of interview data into specific themes (Miles & Hubermann, 1984; 1994). The first stage of data analysis consisted of the transcription of all interviews verbatim. Following this, all transcripts were sent to the participants for ‘member checking’; enabling participants to reflect upon the interviews and to ensure the scripts represent a valid interpretation of responses (Kvale, 2009). Once accepted by participants, transcripts were read, and re-read giving the researcher a greater understanding of the data collected (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Following the coding of the transcripts, a deductive approach to analysis was taken, allowing for an open-minded approach which encourages the emergence of new themes (Patton, 2002).
The final stage of analysis involved the grouping of relevant themes into sections (i.e., causes of Fear of Failure), and identifying similarities within the sample (Appendix...).

3.7 Trustworthiness of Data

The validity of this study was enhanced through the utilisation of active listening skills such as paraphrasing throughout the interview process. Reflecting upon a speaker’s responses through paraphrasing demonstrates that the listener has interpreted what the speaker is trying to communicate effectively (Weger, Castle, & Emmet, 2010), and thereby confirms the speaker’s responses to experiences as valid. It is said that reliability lies in the ability of a study to replicate the same method and context at any time and produce similar results (Newby, 2010). The use of a semi-structure interview guide across the whole sample maintained continuity between interviews whilst allowing for elaboration and probing into any emergent themes. Secondly, a full and detailed description of the research protocol has been presented in this chapter, enabling replication of the process and confirming the reliability of the study. Trustworthiness of a research study can be founded within the credibility of data produced. The credibility of data represents the believability of results (Gratton & Jones, 2010), as well as how conceivable the interpretation of the research findings are (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The trustworthiness of research findings was enhanced through processes of ‘member checking’ (see 3.6: Data Analysis). This process gave participants the opportunity to accept or decline the interpretation of transcripts in relation to their responses during interviews. The participant’s acceptance of transcripts enhanced the credibility of the study, and therefore the aforementioned trustworthiness of results (Miles and Huberman, 1984).
CHAPTER 4

RESULTS
4.1 Quantitative results

Results from the PFAI questionnaires were utilised only as a diagnostic tool to determine appropriate participants for the qualitative interviews. Therefore results will not be included in this section.

4.2 Qualitative results

The results from the qualitative interviews are presented below in six sections: perceptions of failure, situational factors causing fear of failure, consequences of fear of failure, coping responses to fear of failure, situational factors preventing fear of failure, and consequences of an absence of fear of failure.

4.2.1 Perceptions of failure

To begin the interview process, each participant was asked to define failure in their own words to provide a basic understanding into their perceptions of failure. Data analysis revealed one theme: underperforming, which was identified by all participants:

Underperforming (n=3): which consisted firstly of not meeting personal standards, for example participant 3 identified failure as not reaching personal standards in the following quote, “I set myself very high standards, because I know that I can reach that level [of performance]…and when I don’t, I see that as failure”. And secondly making mistakes, summarised by participant 2 in the following quote, “[Failure is] letting in an easy goal that you should have saved”.

Participants were also asked questions relating to their perceived consequences of failure. One theme identified by all (n=3) participants was failure having ‘interpersonal consequences’. Participant 3 gave an insight into how he perceived failure would affect the relationship between him and his team-mates in the following quote:

Others around me think that I’m not very good, like they won’t perceive me as technically good if I’m not performing well. I look to other people’s perceptions of me a lot, so if I’m not performing well constantly, then I feel like…their lowering me in their expectations.
4.2.2 Situational Factors Causing Fear of Failure

Over the entire interview process, participants collectively reported nineteen different factors (all of which can be found in Appendix A) which caused them to fear failure.

Data analysis revealed three causes that all participants (n=3) identified at some stage of the data collection process, these included poor form, strength of opposition, and the importance of success.

Focusing first on poor form, this involved: fears relating to continuing bad form. For example, Participant 2 gave insight into the worry of maintaining poor form in the following quote, “It was a fear of the continuation of that slump, and where it would have let me”. And secondly, fears associated with poor team form. Participant 1 provided a good example of how the team’s poor form affected his mind-set approaching a game in the following quote “the first game of the season I feared it [losing], we had lost a couple of early games…I didn’t really know what to expect”.

Secondly the strength of the opposition, this involved two things, firstly: fears relating to individual players. For example, Participant 1 provided an understanding into the worries related to the opposition in the following quote “It makes you worry a bit; you always hear things like ah they’ve got this player, that player, bla bla bla, like they’re going to be a good team”. And secondly previous negative experiences against the opposition. For example, participant 3 gave insight into how previous experiences impact upon thoughts of failure in the following quote:

I’m fearful of it [underperforming] because I found the last game against them really tough. They’re a physical side and the physical side of my game is not the best…they just wanted to kick me…I’m expecting the same thing to happen tomorrow.

Participant 2 provided a further insight into the influence of the opposition upon thoughts in the following quote “it’s higher than I realise, if I gave it a percentage id probably say like 70% [of entire thoughts]”.

Finally, the Importance of success, involving the importance of winning the game, as highlighted by Participant 2:
I feared it [losing the game] because of how much that game had been hyped up, by us, the management. We all knew how important that was to us, to get the 3 points, and pull away from them at the top of the league.

And the importance of individual success (a good performance), again as highlighted by participant 2:

I’m fearful of it [underperforming] because it’s a massive opportunity because of who’s going to be there, the contacts they have, the contacts they can get me, and where they can get me...every little opportunity I get I’ve got, I need to take to get as high as I can.

In addition, Participants (n=2) also identified a lack of preparation as a causal factor of fear of failure. This consisted of fears relating to a lack of fitness, described in the following quote from participant 2:

We haven’t played in 10 weeks...nothing that we’ve done can prepare me for what’s going to happen tomorrow...that’s going to play on my mind and that’s probably my biggest fear at the moment that I’m not going to be sharp.

And poor game-day preparations; which Participant 1 gave an insight to in the following quote:

You end up rushing around...all of a sudden you’re not thinking about the game, negative thoughts come in...I’m thinking I’m not prepared, and that’s when you can start to fear it... that your performance won't be as good as it could be.

4.2.3 Consequences of Fear of Failure

The findings show that Fear of Failure affected the sample in four ways. It affected their well-being, thoughts, behaviour, and sporting performance. Fear of failure influenced well-being by increasing feelings of anxiety (n=3), nervousness (n=3), fear of the game (n=1), and apprehension (n=1). Fearing failure appears to adversely influence the players thought processes in two ways: increased thoughts of the consequences of failure (n=3), and increased thoughts about mistakes (n=2), consisting of thoughts about making mistakes, and thoughts of the consequences of mistakes. For example, Participant 3 gave an insight into thoughts of the
consequences of making mistakes in the following quote, “I don’t want to be the one that plays s**t and makes a mistake that leads to us losing a game and breaking that run, I don’t want it to be down to me”.

Fearing failure also affected the player’s behaviour in two ways. It negatively impacted upon their interpersonal behaviour (n=2), which involved going ‘within’ themselves (n=1), and isolation from team-mates (n=1). For example, participant 2 gave insight into how fear of failure can cause isolation in a team environment in the following quote, “I end up having to go to the little toilet next to the dressing room just to get away, I don’t want to let anyone see I’m struggling”. In contrast, players (n=2) also identified that in certain situations fearing failure affected behaviour by increasing motivation. This involved increased motivation to prepare effectively (n=1), explained by participant 1 in the following quote “It’s not as though it’s (fear of failure) never going to be in your head, it’s always going to be there, I accept that and I make sure that it drives me on to be as prepared as I can”, and increased focus (n=2).

All players (n=3) felt that fearing failure impacted upon their footballing performance, this included a drop in confidence, and forcing play. For example, participant 3 described how a drop in confidence affected decision-making during performance in the following quote, “I just ended up being ineffective, I wouldn’t call for the ball, I wouldn’t demand it like I would if I was confident…I thought all I’d do is give it away”.

4.2.4 Coping Responses to Fear of Failure

Coping strategies were divided into three categories: avoidance-focussed coping strategies, emotion-focussed coping strategies, and problem-focussed coping strategies.

All players (n=3) employed avoidance-focussed strategies at some stage throughout the interview process. These consisted of precise preparation (n=3): used to distract the players from their fears of the outcome, explained in participant 3’s following quote, “I’ve been trying to keep myself busy…focussing on eating well, drinking well, getting sleep…stops me from thinking too much about Saturday’s game and the outcome”. And thought blocking (n=2) relating to the players stopping themselves
thinking negatively about the outcome, described in the following quote from participant 1, “previous experiences have taught me that thinking about losing doesn’t help me at all and you have to just push it out as much as possible”. A result of particular interest was an avoidance-focussed coping strategy employed by participant 2. It involved buying new equipment in an attempt to step away from a period of poor form and was described in the following quote, “I bought myself new boots…I think was still trying to run away from what had gone on in the past, the slump I was in”.

Participants (n=3) also employed emotion-focussed strategies in the form of Self-Talk (n=3): used for reassurance, confidence, and to create a positive mind-set, described by participant 1 in the following quote, “to overcome that you try and be positive, you tell yourself well we’ve got good players, I’m a good player, just focus on what I can do to them…that gives me a lot of confidence”. Visualisation (n=3): again used for confidence and reassurance, described in depth by participant 3 in the following quote, “I will start to visualise…I’ll try and look back to games earlier in the season where I’ve done well…just try and remind myself that I have done it, I can do it, and I will do it tomorrow”. And Social-Support (n=2): involving social support from coaches (n=1), and from team-mates (n=1). For example, Participant 3 identified that he looked to team-mates for reassurance and confidence in the following quote, “I wanted to be told I was going to play and they wouldn’t worry if I did play bad because they understood my situation”.

Only one player (P2) employed a problem-focussed coping strategy in the form of Social-Support: This involved the assistance of a professional psychologist to determine strategies to improve decision-making during performance, participant 2 described this in the following quote:

I knew it was psychological, none of the mistakes I had made were technical, it was all just decision making, which is why I went and saw the psychologist…we got all these strategies in place that we thought I could use.
4.2.5 Situational Factors Preventing Fear of Failure

Over the entire interview process the sample reported nine situational factors (see appendix A) which prevented them from fearing failure. Data analysis revealed three preventing factors that all participants (n=3) identified at some stage of the data collection, these included positive training performance, positive previous performance, and good form.

Focussing first on positive training performances: relating to performing well in training sessions during the build-up for a game. Participant 1 provided a description of the influence of good training in the following quote, “training well, just builds confidence, keeps me confident, and makes me think I can play well, there’s no reason to think I won’t when trainings been good”.

Secondly, positive previous game performances: this related to the individual performing well in their previous game. For example, participant 2 identified how performing well in the previous game helped maintain a positive mind-set in the following quote, “I know I played well last week, now I’m in a sense of looking to carry it (form) on, as opposed to digging to find the form you know”.

Thirdly, Good form: this consisted of good individual form, identified in the following quote from participant 3:

You kind of acknowledge that it’s there, you’re a bit scared of failing…but at the moment I’m almost seeing that as a good thing, when you’re in good form you can look at things differently…you don’t fear it [failure] so much.

Good team form, for example, participant 1 described the effect of good team form in the following quote, “I expect us to keep that run going…I’m just full of confidence at the moment, especially coz of how the team has been playing”. And an absence of failure, which effect is summarised by participant 2 in the following quote “there’s nothing that I’ve seen or done, that should give me any reason to feel anything other than confident”.

In addition, players (n=2) also identified early success during the game prevented them fearing failure. For example, participant 3 gave an insight into the impact of
early success in the following quote, “I had some nice, neat touches early on and then I was in the game...I had it in my head that this time it was my day and my confidence just grew and grew from there”.

4.2.6 Consequences of an Absence of Fear of Failure

As with the previous section outlining the consequences of fear of failure, the findings show that the absence of fear of failure impacted the players in four ways. It affected their well-being, thoughts, behaviour, and sporting performance.

The absence of fear of failure positively affected the player’s well-being by increasing: feelings of relaxation (n=3), and confidence (n=3). Not fearing failure positively impacted upon the players thoughts by: maintaining a positive mind-set (n=3), explained by participant 3 in the following quote, “it’s [not fearing failure] just got my whole mind-set a lot more positive. My thoughts have all been about what I could do well Wednesday”. Increasing thoughts of success rather than failure (n=2), for example, participant 1 outlined his change of thoughts in the following quote, “if you know you can beat them, you’re more likely to think about winning than losing”. And a sense of positive momentum (n=2), for example, participant 3 spoke of ‘floating’ into the next game in the following quote, “Playing well in the previous game just allows you to almost float through to the next game without any problems”.

The absence of fear of failure affected players behaviour by facilitating effective preparation (n=2). For example, participant 3 highlighted how the absence of fear of failure supports preparation for the next game in the following quote, “everything just seems easier...preparation is better going into the next game if you’ve played well before”. Finally, not fearing failure improved footballing performance by increasing confidence during the game (n=2). For example, participant 3 identified that the increase in confidence meant he was more inclined to take risks in the following quote, “I wanted the ball then; I felt I could do something you know”.
4.3 Summary

This chapter presented results in six sections: perceptions of failure, situational factors causing Fear of Failure, consequences of Fear of Failure, coping responses to Fear of Failure, situational factors causing an absence of Fear of Failure, and consequences of an absence of Fear of Failure.

Participants predominantly viewed failure as ‘underperforming’ from both a team and an individual perspective. Situational factors that caused the individuals to Fear Failure involved perceptions of poor form, strong opposition, lack of preparation, and when success was deemed significantly important. Fear of Failure adversely affected the player’s well-being, thoughts, behaviours, and sporting performance. Although it was found that in some cases, Fearing Failure positively influenced behaviour by increasing focus and encouraging precise preparation. Players predominantly employed a combination of Avoidance-Focussed (AFC) and Emotion-Focussed (EFC) coping strategies in response to their fears of failure. In contrast, a Problem-Focussed coping strategy (PFC) was employed just once by one player during the entire interview process. Situational factors that prevented the individuals from Fearing Failure involved perceptions of good form, positive training performance, and a positive previous game performance. The absence of Fear of Failure positively affected the participant’s well-being, thoughts, behaviour, and sporting performance.
5.1 Introduction

The final chapter will discuss the present study’s findings in relation to previous literature. Each section of results will be discussed identifying similarities and differences between these findings and existing research. This chapter will then proceed to propose the practical implications of the study’s findings, specifically focussing on the implications for coaches and the Sports Psychology Consultant (SPC). To conclude the chapter and the research as a whole; strengths, limitations, and future research directions will be presented, culminating in a final conclusion.

5.2 Contribution to Knowledge

Previous Fear of Failure literature has highlighted effects (i.e., Sagar et al., 2010) and coping responses (Sagar et al., 2009) to Fear of Failure, but hasn’t necessarily focussed in detail upon what causes it, and whether it is a concept that can fluctuate over time. The present study is the first attempt to look at Fear of Failure experiences over a period of time; identifying what factors cause it, and the effects it has on athletes, whilst also identifying factors that prevent Fear of Failure, and the effects that it’s absence can have. By highlighting situational factors that cause, and also prevent Fear of Failure, the findings suggest that the concept of Fear of Failure is one that fluctuates over time, and is dependant, and influenced by the situation an individual finds themselves in.

5.2.1 Perceptions of Failure

Assessing the participants perceptions of failure and appraised consequences, helped to provide a basic understanding of the samples mind-set towards failure. Participants predominantly perceived failure as underperforming, relating to not meeting personal standards and making mistakes. This suggests the findings support Conroy et al.’s (2001) contemporary theory that an individual’s perception of failure is determined by how well their basic needs are met, as opposed to factors relating to the outcome. In this context, participants experience of underperforming inhibited feelings of competence, and is therefore perceived as failure. In terms of appraised consequences of failure, participants primarily cited negative interpersonal consequences as a perceived effect of failure. The fact that players appraised failure
as having aversive consequences may explain why in some situations players viewed failure as threatening, and as a result feared it. This supports Lazarus’ (1999; 2000) Cognitive-Motivational-Relational Theory, which suggests that the apprehension of a threatening outcome will elicit feelings of fear.

5.2.2 Situational Factors Causing Fear of Failure

The qualitative data revealed the situational factors which contributed to the participants Fear of Failure. Periods of poor form, strength of the opposition, and when success was deemed significantly important, were situational factors most cited by the players. The importance of success was recognised by all players as a significant factor contributing to Fear of Failure. The findings would suggest that the player’s thoughts relating to how important success was elicits secondary thoughts relating to the consequences of failure. The fact that they have already considered success as being significantly important would suggest that being successful was a meaningful goal, and therefore failure would put the achievement of that goal in danger. This ultimately means that failure is perceived as a threat producing feelings of fear, and supports the Cognitive-Motivational-Relational theory’s (Lazarus, (1999; 2000) predictions, explaining why this situational factor would cause Fear Failure. Furthermore, poor form, and strength of opponents emerged as causes of Fear of Failure, resembling the results of Sagar et al.’s (2010) study whose elite sample also identified these factors as causes of Fear of Failure. This would suggest a possible similarity between the elite and non-elite, suggesting that certain situational factors will elicit feelings of fear regardless of ability level.

5.2.3 Consequences of Fear of Failure

The findings showed that Fear of Failure negatively affected the player’s well-being, thoughts, behaviour, and sporting performance. Fear of Failure influenced the player’s well-being by eliciting feelings of anxiety and nervousness, and impacted upon thoughts by increasing thoughts of the consequences of failure, and of making mistakes. This resembles previous literature that suggested experiences of anxiety can be associated with a shift in an individual’s attention from the task (i.e., the game) towards threatening stimuli (i.e., consequences of failure), noting that there is a tendency to dwell on these threatening stimuli (Derryberry & Reed, 2002; Fox,
Fear of Failure adversely impacted upon the participant’s behaviour in the short-term by inducing problems such as isolation from the rest of the team. These findings are in line with those identified recently in Sagar et al.’s (2009; 2010) study’s that examined Fear of Failure effects in football and a number of other sports. It could therefore be proposed that Fear of Failure can have adverse effects upon interpersonal behaviour in both the elite and the non-elite, and across a variety of sports. Fear of Failure appears to affect the players sporting performance by causing a drop in confidence levels, preventing them from performing to their optimum level.

An interesting finding worth noting is that in a period of good form, two players appraised Fear of Failure as facilitative, motivating them to prepare effectively and focus on the task ahead. This significantly differs from previous research and could be attributed to the period of good form creating a positive mind-set, which in turn causes the individual to perceive Fear of Failure effects as facilitative.

5.2.4 Coping responses to Fear of Failure

It was recognised in the data that the players all employed predominantly AFC and EFC strategies in response to their Fears of Failure. A PFC strategy was identified only once throughout the period of research. These findings are inconsistent with previous literature (Grove, Lavallee, & Gordon, 1997; Poczwardowski & Conroy, 2002) that suggests athletes use all three strategies in combination and prefer PFC strategies over AFC and EFC strategies. This difference in findings may however be due to study’s focus upon a ‘Fear of Failure’ as opposed to failure itself. PFC strategies are mostly employed when an individual perceives that the stressor can be controlled (Sagar et al., 2009), this could suggest that Fear of Failure is a stressor that these players perceived to be beyond their control, and may explain the greater use of AFC and EFC strategies as a response to Fear of Failure.

An interesting finding worth recognising is the role of preparation in dealing with Fear of Failure effects. Despite being classified as an AFC strategy, precise preparation was identified by all players as being effective at drawing focus away from fears of the outcome, and instead towards the processes of preparation. The participants
highlighted that the sense of building a routine within their preparation, encouraged relaxation and reassurance as to their readiness for performance.

5.2.5 Situational factors preventing Fear of Failure

The qualitative data revealed the situational factors that prevented the participant’s Fearing Failure. Positive performances in training, positive performance in the previous game, good form, and early in game success were the factors most cited by the players. All factors were found to prevent Fear of Failure by increasing the player’s confidence levels, maintaining a positive mind-set approaching the next game.

5.2.6 Consequences of an absence of Fear of Failure

In contrast to the previous section outlining consequences of Fear of Failure, the absence of Fear of Failure positively affected the player’s well-being, thoughts, behaviours, and sporting performance. Instead of causing feelings of anxiety and nervousness, the absence of Fear of Failure maintained well-being by eliciting feelings of confidence and relaxation. Working oppositely to Fear of Failure, the absence of it prevented thoughts of the consequences of failure and making mistakes, and instead encouraged the players to adopt a positive mind-set; focussing on how they can affect the game, and thinking more about success than failure. The absence of Fear of Failure influenced behaviour by inducing a positive outlook, which facilitated effective preparation by making the process of preparing for a game seem easy. Relating specifically to the factor of early in game success, the absence of Fear of Failure, in complete contrast to the presence of it, positively impacted upon performance by raising confidence levels. This encouraged the players to take appropriate risks during a game, improving individual effectiveness and enabling them to reach optimum levels of performance.

5.3 Practical Implications

The study’s findings have numerous practical implications for athletes, coaches, as well as the SPC. It is important coaches understand the impact they can have upon an athletes Fear of Failure. Positive performances in training were recognised by all participants as a factor that can prevent Fear of Failure. Considering this, it is
important that coaches do all in their power to ensure their athletes perceive their training performance as successful. Coaches should be able to manipulate the motivational climate of training sessions to ensure their athletes experience feelings of success, thus improving confidence and the maintenance of a positive mind-set going into competition. Another important finding for coaches to consider is the effectiveness of precise preparation at dealing with the effects of Fear of Failure. Coaches should encourage athletes suffering from a Fear of Failure to develop a solid routine in terms of preparation for games and competition. This will help to draw focus away from worries relating to the outcome and towards the processes of effective preparation. This will help to relax athletes in the build-up for important competitions, and could lead to improvements in performance.

For the SPC, it is important to recognise the influence of self-confidence upon players Fear of Failure. The findings show that self-confidence which derived from factors such as good form and successful training helped to prevent Fear of Failure. This suggests that self-confidence has buffering effects, helping to protect players from Fears of Failure, or preventing them altogether. The SPC could utilise psychological interventions such as positive visualisation to increase self-confidence, and therefore buffer the effects of Fear of Failure. Secondly, it is imperative that the SPC identifies that some players were able to view Fear of Failure as facilitative towards performance. SPC’s could look to educate coaches, players, and parents on the positive motivational effects of Fear of Failure, possibly working to change the negative perceptions surrounding Fear of Failure.

5.4 Strengths, Limitations, and Future Research Directions

The study assessed Fear of Failure and Coping strategies within three interviews over a six week period, and is therefore categorised as longitudinal in design. The lengthy data collection process facilitated the emergence of numerous situational factors, which caused and prevented Fear of Failure. This enabled findings to confirm that Fear of Failure is in fact a concept that fluctuates over time, and determines that the longitudinal approach is a significant strength of the research study. Despite this, upon critically analysing the overall design, it could be considered that collecting data over just a six week period can be a limitation of the
study. The data was collected during a mid-season phase (December-February), and therefore doesn’t take into account the situational factors that could arise as a result of pre-season, post-season, and major events (i.e., cup competitions), and the impact they could have upon an individual’s Fear of Failure. Taking this into consideration, it can be argued that future research should attempt to address this limitation by collecting qualitative data over the course of an entire season, to determine what affect, if any, events of the footballing season have upon levels of Fear of Failure. To assist the longitudinal nature of that particular design, participant diaries could be kept between interview phases to assess effects of and contributors to Fear of Failure, which could eradicate problems related to long-recall bias.

Despite being classed as ‘Elite’ in the context of their university, the participants actually represent a non-elite sample. Considering the majority of Fear of Failure research (i.e., Sagar et al., 2007; Sagar et al., 2009; Sagar et al., 2010) utilises an elite sample, the findings of this study contribute to knowledge by providing an insight into the Fear of Failure experiences of the non-elite. Furthermore, the sample consists of purely non-elite football players, meaning the Fear of Failure experiences identified in the findings are associated directly with football. Consequently, results provide a specific insight into to non-elite football player’s experiences of Fear of Failure, and from this perspective, the implementation of a non-elite, specific sport sample can be considered a strength. Although in one context noted as a strength, in another, the purely non-elite sample can be considered a limitation. The lack of a mixed sample means the findings cannot be generalized to a wider population of elite and non-elite footballers, and likewise, the lack of sporting variety in the sample inhibits the findings from being generalized to a wider population of sports. Taking this into consideration, future research should attempt to address these limitations by examining Fear of Failure using samples that consist of both elite and non-elite athletes, and who participate in a variety of different sports. This will address the limitations associated with generalizing results to ability and sport, and could also create an interesting comparison between the elite non-elite in terms of Fear of Failure causes and effects.

A further strength of the study concerns the age of the participants that provided results in the interview process. The average age of the three participants was 20
years, meaning findings work to generalize Fear of Failure concepts to a wider age range and provide an interesting contrast to other literature (i.e., Sagar et al., 2007; Sagar et al., 2009; Sagar et al., 2010) that mostly examines Fear of Failure in young children and adolescents. In spite of strengths identified within the sample, the fact that the sample consisted of just three participants can be considered a significant limitation. Despite providing insightful results, the small sample size makes it difficult to generalize any findings to a wider population. Future research should recognise this and look to conduct a similar longitudinal study using a larger sample size, enabling findings to be generalized to a wider population of athletes.

Another strength of the study again relates to the effectiveness of the research design. The procedure was specifically managed so interviews would be conducted the day before a game. This enabled participants to recall thoughts, feelings, and coping responses in closer proximity to the game, which as supported by Sagar et al. (2010), yields robust findings and prevents problems associated with long-recall bias. A final limitation of the study concerns the analysis of coping strategies. The findings in relation to coping responses simply identify which types of coping strategy were used, rarely going into any detail regarding their effectiveness at combatting the effects of Fear of Failure. Considering this, future research should look to analyse coping responses to fear of failure, and use follow-up interviews to determine whether they were successful or not.

5.5 Conclusion

The purpose of the study was to examine the fluctuation of Fear of Failure and coping responses through a process which facilitated the emergence of different causal and preventative factors over time. This study has provided insight into what situational factors may cause and prevent Fear of Failure, whilst the effects and coping responses identified provide some support to existing Fear of Failure literature. It is suggested that future research should continue a longitudinal approach to examining Fear of Failure, with the emphasis on establishing fluctuation of Fear of Failure over an entire sporting season.
REFERENCES


APPENDICIES
**Appendix A: Theme Analysis:** The following displays all themes identified by participants for each section of results. The ‘x’ indicates that the theme was identified by the participant.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perceptions of Failure</th>
<th>P1</th>
<th>P2</th>
<th>P3</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Underperforming</td>
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<tr>
<td>Not winning</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>The opposite of success</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Causes of Fear of Failure</th>
<th>P1</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Poor Form</td>
<td>x</td>
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<tr>
<td>Importance of success</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managerial pressure</td>
<td>x</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong opposition</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative previous experiences</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor performance in training</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of preparation</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weather conditions</td>
<td>x</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cup match</td>
<td>x</td>
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<tr>
<td>Testing coping strategies</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combination of stressors</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown opponents</td>
<td>x</td>
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<tr>
<td>First impression scenario</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Unusual situation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Matching previous performance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Returning from injury</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
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<tr>
<td>Early mistakes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Uncontrollable situation</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative previous performance</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Consequences of Fear of Failure</th>
<th>P1</th>
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<th>P3</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Increase in Intrinsic pressure</td>
<td>x</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased frequency of thoughts about the game (and the outcome)</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anxiety</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drop in confidence</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thoughts about mistakes</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thoughts of the consequences of failure</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nervous</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fearful of the game</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apprehension</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling uncomfortable</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal behaviour affected</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decreased performance level</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tension</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Hiding’ during the game</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivation to prepare well (focus)</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coping responses to Fear of Failure</td>
<td>P1</td>
<td>P2</td>
<td>P3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------</td>
<td>----</td>
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<td>----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Precise preparation</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-talk</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visualisation</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thought Blocking</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social-support</td>
<td></td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Effects of coping strategies used</th>
<th>P1</th>
<th>P2</th>
<th>P3</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Precise preparation</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Blocks negative thoughts</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Focussing upon the process as opposed to outcomes</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relaxed</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive challenge appraisal</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confidence</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buffers effects of other negative thoughts</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive mind-set</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

| **Self-talk**                    |    |    |    |
| Reassurance of ability           | x  | x  |    |
| Increase in confidence           | x  |    |    |
| Takes focus away from the opposition | x  |    |    |
| Relaxed                          |   | x  |    |
| Positive mind-set                | x  | x  |    |
| Positive challenge appraisal     | x  |    |    |
| Focussing upon the process as opposed to outcomes | x  |    |    |

| **Visualisation**                |    |    |    |
| Positive mind-set                | x  | x  | x  |
| Relaxed                          | x  |    |    |
| Reassurance of ability           |    | x  |    |
| Increase in confidence           |    | x  |    |
| Increased thoughts of failure    |    | x  |    |

| **Thought blocking**             |    |    |    |
| Focussing upon the process as opposed to outcomes | x  | x  | x  |
| Positive mind-set                | x  |    |    |
| Takes focus away from the opposition | x  |    |    |
| Increased thoughts of failure    | x  |    |    |
| Not able to block out all negative thoughts | x  |    |    |

<p>| <strong>Social-support</strong>               |    |    |    |
| Confidence boost                 | x  |    |    |
| Relaxed                          | x  |    |    |
| Reassurance                      | x  |    |    |
| Anxious                          | x  |    |    |
| Increased motivation to prevent perceived consequences of failure | x  |    |    |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors preventing Fear of Failure</th>
<th>P1</th>
<th>P2</th>
<th>P3</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive previous performance</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive performance in training</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good form (possibly linked with absence of failure)</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confidence in team’s ability</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive experiences against opponents</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lower expectation of others</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Early success (during the game)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Absence of failure</td>
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<tr>
<td>Confident of success</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Effects of a prevention of Fear of Failure</th>
<th>P1</th>
<th>P2</th>
<th>P3</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relaxed</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confident</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive mind-set</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
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<tr>
<td>Buffers the effect of other negative thoughts</td>
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<tr>
<td>Facilitates normal (effective) preparation</td>
<td>x</td>
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<tr>
<td>More thoughts about success than failure</td>
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<tr>
<td>Prevents negative thoughts</td>
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<tr>
<td>Prevents fearing the opposition</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reduced intrinsic pressure</td>
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<tr>
<td>Positive momentum into the next game</td>
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<tr>
<td>Effective focus of attention</td>
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<tr>
<td>Confidence in game (inclined to take risks)</td>
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