“Days in the Dirt”: An Ethnography on Cricket and Self

By

Harry Christopher Richard Bowles

A thesis submitted to Cardiff Metropolitan University in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

April 2014

Director of Studies: Dr Rich Neil

Supervisors: Professor Scott Fleming & Professor Sheldon Hanton

Copyright

Attention is drawn to the fact that copyright of this thesis rests with its author. This copy of the thesis has been supplied on condition that anyone who consults it is understood to recognise that its copyright rests with the author and that no quotation from the thesis and no information derived from it may be published without the prior written consent of the author.

This thesis may be made available for consultation within the university library and may be photocopied or lent to other libraries for the purpose of consultation.

Signature of Author.................................................................

Harry C. R. Bowles
Declaration

This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

Signature of Author......................................................

Date.............................................................................

STATEMENT 1

This thesis is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. Other sources are explicitly acknowledged in the references.

Signature of Author......................................................

Date.............................................................................

STATEMENT 2

I hereby give consent for my thesis to be made available for consultation within the university library and for photocopying or inter-library loan and for the title and summary to be made available to outside organisations.

Signature of Author......................................................

Date.............................................................................
## Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER</th>
<th>TITLE</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgments</td>
<td>i</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>ii</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dedication</td>
<td>iv</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 1</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 2</td>
<td>The Research Approach</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| CHAPTER 3 | Mr Cricket  
The Story of a Cricket Aficionado | 64 |
| CHAPTER 4 | The Cricket Bubble  
Notes on a Cricketing Lifestyle | 91 |
| CHAPTER 5 | Lady Cricket  
From Flirtation to Cohabitation... | 139 |
| CHAPTER 6 | Finding Your Level  
Trial and Repudiation of a Cricketing Self | 169 |
| CHAPTER 7 | Summary of Research | 207 |
| CHAPTER 8 | Conclusion | 230 |
| References | 235 | |
| APPENDIX A | Extracts from Season Handbook (2012) | 246 |
| APPENDIX B | Example 'Player' Blog (2011) | 251 |
| APPENDIX C | The Evolution of a Research Title | 252 |
| APPENDIX D | Informed Consent and Information | 257 |
Acknowledgments

There are many people I should like to thank who have played their parts in this programme of research, many of whom will not have realised that they have played any part at all. But a Ph.D. is at times all consuming affecting even those who stand on the periphery.

Among those involved are of course the people whose roles have been more central, and who I would like to recognise personally for the contributions they have made to the completion of this study.

First, I would like to thank Dr Rich Neil and Professor Sheldon Hanton for the encouragement and support they have given from the outset. The faith they have placed in me is (among other things) the reason I have come this far, and I am sincerely grateful for the opportunities they have provided. Furthermore, I wish to thank Professor Scott Fleming for the time and counsel he donated to this research. His input has been invaluable.

Turning now to the people whose roles have been less formal, but whose contributions have been just as instrumental. In particular, I would like to thank the crew on-board HMS, The Harbour and The Tug who helped create a life outside the Ph.D. that was joyful to be a part of. Their efforts and patience with me should not go unnoticed, nor those displayed by the many friends and loved ones – both old and new – who have spent the last three and a half years on-call.

And finally, I must express a debt of gratitude to the people of this study who took on the burden of accepting me into their lives despite the nuisance this must have caused. Without naming each and every one of you, let this be my thanks to you.
Abstract

This study provides a representation of the lived transitional experiences of a group of student-cricketers on a passage toward professional cricket. Set in the local context of a university cricket academy, the investigation focused on players’ adoption of a cricketing role that they used in combination with their structured cricketing environment to explore what it might be like to be professional cricketers. The aim of the research, therefore, was to portray a culturally embedded process of identity-exploration through which a group of young men arrived at a conception of themselves as ‘cricketers’.

The data on which the study is based have been drawn from research conducted over twenty seven months from November 2010 to March 2013 where I, as a researcher, became immersed in the research context as an active member of the participant group. The methodological approach of ethnography was used to obtain an insider’s account of the student-cricket experience as seen from the point of view of the actors involved. Application of traditional ethnographic techniques such as participant observation, note taking and unstructured, field-based ‘interviews’ provided the means through which situated, day-to-day experiences were captured and explored. What is presented, therefore, reflects some of the contextual responses to real-life situations experienced by the group and its individuals, mediated through a developing analytical interest in players’ identity engagements with their cricketing environment from the theoretical standpoint of ‘emerging adulthood’ (Arnett, 2000, 2004).

Adding to the ethnographic accounts offered within this thesis, the study contributes a conceptual framework that plots players’ transitional pathways through the academy to share the key points of interaction that impinged on individual participants ‘finding their level’ in the game. Through contact and exposure to a cricketing way of life, players’ involvement with the academy saw their cricketing experiences intensify and their attachments to the game transform. This resulted in individuals either accepting or rejecting cricket based on what they came to know about themselves and the game, with the findings of the research helping to
further understanding on how a group of ‘emerging adults’ engaged with the ‘project’ of their self-identities to reach a point of self-understanding on which to base prospective identity-decisions.
To Christopher and Elizabeth Bowles.
This thesis I owe to you.
CHAPTER 1

Introduction

An Insider to the Context

I did not grow up wanting to become an ethnographer. I imagine few do. So how did I get here? How did all this happen? One explanation is that it is something that I ‘slipped into’. But do people really ‘slip into’ things as the idiom concludes? As human beings living in modern, industrialised, capitalist societies we are nurtured to believe that we have choices. Some of which are more trivial than others – but choices nonetheless and the agency to make decisions that will, in some shape or form, influence the lives we ‘create’ for ourselves. We have options available to us, and the freedom to pick and choose. We follow directions. We select our paths. We derail and get back on track, and are influenced by the order and ‘mysterious power’ of social structure (Lemert, 2005, p.106). According to Durkheimian sociology, the powers of social structure constitute the ‘hard facts’ of social life that enable or constrain individual agency (Hughes and Sharrock, 1997, p.31). Indeed, people do a lot to shape their own personal lives, but they do so in the context of large social and cultural realities (Smith, Christoffersen, Davidson and Herzog, 2011). Thus, by way of the interplay between self and society (Mills, 1959), person and context (Erikson, 1968), agency and structure (Giddens, 1990, 1991), we don’t just ‘slip in’.

By rejecting the idea of slipping into role, I find myself overriding my instinct to say that it is by chance that I am writing the introduction to my Ph.D. thesis. As a boy I despised homework, kicking and screaming my way through school every time I got stuck trying to get the words out, and as a result I never displayed any particular aptitude for academic work. All I wanted to do was play football in the winter and tennis in the summer, and play a bit of cricket in between. Sport was what I was good at, or so I thought, and I enjoyed it. I still do, and with the opportunity to look back for the purpose of delineating the subjectivities that form part of this research project I am able to piece together some of the fragments of my life's history.
that remove the sense of randomness to the person and researcher I have become. For as Corrigan (1979, p.4) pointed out, it is true that other people’s work has an effect on the way in which researchers choose their research problems, ‘but the main set of reasons for choice is to be found in the biography of the researcher’.

These fragments, as I have begun to insinuate, principally revolve around education and sport – two domains that are now entwined within this thesis. I was eight years old when my father first took me to Lord’s to watch a Test match. I don’t recall who England were playing, nor do I remember much about the day’s play, but I do remember sitting there staring at my hands, mesmerised by the enormous pair of purple and green wicket keeping gloves he had bought to keep me quiet. It was a crafty bit of parenting and the beginning of our annual pilgrimage to NW8, although at this stage there was still a way to go before cricket became a passion and my number one sporting priority. This would happen a few years later when I received the news I had been hoping for, informing me that I had been selected for the Buckinghamshire County Cricket U13s Squad. From then on, whatever happened in the classroom or outside of it, didn’t matter. I was a county cricketer, and although this never accrued much status at school, it followed me around as something that distinguished me from my peers.

To continue to believe what happened in the classroom ‘didn’t matter’ would be to disenfranchise its centrality to this narrative and the inadequacies I have felt from the moment I failed my first secondary school entrance exam. Thankfully P.E. (Physical Education) was my saving grace, and not only on the sports field, but in the classroom too where I finally began to perform well at a subject to which I could relate. From here, picking the ‘right’ university course became easy. Choosing the ‘right’ university, however, was more of a challenge. Cricket, of course, was a crucial factor and I wanted to ensure that wherever I ended up going would offer the best opportunities to practise and play. So when I came across a university prospectus that appealed to an aspiration blunted by self-doubt,
my mind was made up. Both in the classroom and at the crease\textsuperscript{1} I was a nervous character and I never thought I was good enough to make it as a professional player, but it would sure be nice to spend three years training, playing and living under the pretence that I could. All that was left was to sign up.

Arriving at university I had two goals. My first goal was to play cricket and not just any cricket, the kind of cricket where they groomed you into feeling like a professional cricketer. That was what it had said in the prospectus, or at least words to that effect, and it was a goal to which I aspired. My second was far more risky. Achieving first-class honours was an academic goal on which I placed far less emphasis, but one I hoped I could go about quietly and in my own way. However, when I was politely told that the cricket team I wished to become a part of took players “on reference only” it threw me into crisis and in need of a way to redefine myself. Reaching for the books was a risky strategy given the anxieties they had always caused. Like runs\textsuperscript{2} and wickets\textsuperscript{3}, I had grown up thinking grades made the person and as a person I had always feared not making the grade. I hadn’t enrolled at university imagining I would receive the best marks, and I certainly hadn’t imagined becoming known for being ‘top of the class’. To have developed such a sudden reputation proved confusing and it was a reputation I found difficult to accept. I knew what it had taken, and I knew what lay behind the words of each essay I had ever written. Consequently, when I was asked if I’d consider a Ph.D. following a successful undergraduate programme, I took some convincing. Education had never been a particularly happy place for me, but I had been identified for my potential and it was flattering.

Despite my reservations there was one thing that remained certain. Over the years cricket has brought me much torment. Yet as much as I have

\textsuperscript{1} An area of the wicket (a purposely prepared strip of grass) demarcated by white lines where the batsman stands and waits to receive the ball from the bowler.
\textsuperscript{2} A basic unit of scoring in cricket that batters accumulate for their team and individual scores.
\textsuperscript{3} In the event of a batsman getting out, the batter is said to have ‘lost his or her wicket’ – credit for which is given to the bowler who delivered the ball (or the fielder in the case of a run-out).
been driven to resent it, felt swamped in frustration by it and at times loathed its wearisome routine (Booth, 2008), cricket has also inspired a sense of being since the first time my father took me to Lord’s, to the last time I ‘nicked’ one on nought⁴. In this sense, cricket is part of my identity. It belongs as part of my biography as a glue like blood that binds father and son and is, among the layers of academic insecurity, the reason I became an ethnographer who chose aspiring cricketers as a populace for investigation.

**Research on Youth Sports Academies⁵**

There are many types of youth sport academy in the United Kingdom (UK) attached to various institutions and commercial organisations. Examples include those that are found within specialist ‘sports schools’ that cater for young sportspeople between the ages of 11-18. In the state sector, specialist sports schools are granted their status in recognition of their strategic commitment to raising the profile and standards of physical education and sports performance both inside, and outside the curriculum. It is a commitment that gives the schools access to government and lottery grants to put in place the facilities and the flexible study arrangements to support the combined educational and sporting needs of their student population. Although not strictly geared towards elite performer development, a central function of these schools is to facilitate sporting talent within a framework of compulsory education by providing the dual sporting and educational provision so that academic attainment and sporting success can run in parallel.

Other examples of youth sport academies in the UK are those that are affiliated to universities and colleges of higher education (HE). Much like their secondary education counterparts, the aim of these academies is to provide integrated programmes of academic and sporting excellence that enable student-athletes to fully engage with their athletic careers without

---

⁴ To have lost my wicket without scoring as a result of the ball (delivered by a bowler) making contact with the edge of my bat and being caught by a fielder or the wicketkeeper positioned behind me in a cordon of fielders collectively known as the ‘slips’.

neglecting their future employability. University-based sports academies offer young sportspeople a wide range of academic courses alongside sport-specific training and coaching facilities, and opportunities to compete beyond the limits of inter-university sport. Finance for these academies is often raised in partnerships between academic institutions, sports governing bodies, local commerce and other sporting organisations, creating a consortium of vested interest in the development and future success of the student-athlete.

Outside of formal educational contexts are youth sport academies directly connected to professional sports clubs or teams. These academies are likely to accommodate young athletes who are already contractually obliged to train and compete, and whose futures are perhaps more explicitly orientated towards a career in professional sport. An expressed aim of these academies is still to serve the holistic developmental needs of young performers of compulsory and post-compulsory school age (Manley, 2012). Nevertheless, as with all sport academies connected to levels of elite youth sport, their role is to cultivate athletic potential into the next generation of sportsmen and women. Indeed, regardless of their specific organisational and contextual differences, youth sport academies share a number of characteristics in that they try to blend education with high performance sport, and are sites to which many like-minded young people flock in the hope of getting selected and committing to sporting programmes that appeal to burgeoning athletic-identities.

Given the well documented challenges, attrition rates and risks associated with young people’s involvement in elite sport, it is unsurprising that youth sport academies have become hotbeds for social research on the developmental experiences of young people. In sport, research has paid attention to a host of interrelated issues concerning talent identification and progression (Baker, Horton, Robert-Wilson and Wall, 2003; Christensen, 2009; Mills, Butt, Maynard and Harwood, 2012; Williams and Reilly, 2000) career transition and termination (Brown and Potrac, 2009; Bruner, Munroe-Chandler and Spink, 2008; Finn and MeKenna, 2010), training, education, welfare and support (Bourke, 2003; McGillivray, 2006;
McGillivray, Fearn and McIntosh, 2005; Monk, 2000; Monk and Olsson, 2006, Monk and Russell, 2000; Parker, 1995, 1996, 2000, 2006; Platts and Smith, 2009), acts of symbolic violence, disciplinary power and surveillance (Cushion and Jones, 2006; Manley, 2012; Manley, Palmer and Roderick 2012), role engulfment (Adler and Adler, 1991; Christensen and Sørensen, 2009), as well as issues related to masculinity and identity construction (McGillivray and McIntosh, 2006; Parker, 1996, 2001, 2006; Manley, 2012). Collectively, this body of research has covered many social and environmental factors that impinge on adolescent experiences within elite youth sport (Brettschneider, 1999; Donnelly and Petherick, 2004; Hong, 2004), with a growing nucleus of research having focused specifically on the structural and cultural composition of elite youth sport environments, using ethnography as a means of capturing the lived experiences of those on the inside (see, Adler and Alder, 1991; Cushion and Jones, 2006; Parker, 1995, 1996, 2000, 2001, 2006; Manley, 2012, Manley et al., 2012).

In relation to these ethnographic studies, attention has been centred on the institutional characteristics of youth sport academies that press upon the lives, identities and developmental experiences of young people in sport. Despite offering candid portrayals of the social situations faced by different groups of academy athletes, the theoretical orientation of the research conducted by Adler and Alder (1991), Cushion and Jones (2006), Parker (1996, 2000; 2001), and Manley (2012) has concentrated on the role of structure over individual agency where matters of self are concerned. For example, Manley (2012) provides an account of the disciplinary mechanisms that infiltrated the lives of academy footballers and rugby players. Expanding on the work of Parker (1996, 2001), Manley (2012) uses a Foucauldian framework to demonstrate the manner in which academy athletes were encouraged to conform to institutional norms through an analysis of the systems of surveillance used to monitor players’ behaviours. Such surveillance techniques were deemed to reduce individuals’ sense of agency, and prompt the internalisation of the ‘right’ attitude that players came to recognise as integral to their professional development. As with previous research, working from a strictly mono-disciplinary perspective
meant little consideration was given to the psychosocial characteristics of these young people at a particular stage of their life-course – characteristics that are likely to influence the nature of the interactions young sportspeople have with their sporting environments. This thesis therefore leans on the sociological foundations of previous ethnographic research on youth sport academies (Adler and Alder, 1991; Cushion and Jones, 2006; Parker, 1995, 1996, 2000, 2001; Manley 2012). However, its focus embraces not only the environmental constraints imposed upon young athletes’ sense of self, but also the idea that the young are active agents in the creation of their adult identities as they embark on a critical process of deciding who they are and what they want to become. By doing so, the research provides an original contribution to a field of youth studies by offering an alternative insight into the way in which a group of elite, university-based cricketers explored their identities in the context of the academy setting.

**A ‘First-Class’ Education: An Introduction to the Research Context**

First-class cricket has long since been connected with higher education (HE) in Britain (Williams, 1999). In 1827 Oxford University played Cambridge University in a two-day fixture at Lord's Cricket Ground, St. John's Wood, London. The match between the two university teams was the first of its kind and was deemed by the cricketing establishment to be ‘first-class’ – a status that is otherwise associated with ‘major’ County Cricket in England and Wales that makes up the body of the modern professional game (see Birley, 2003). Regardless of the result, the match was one to be savoured for the cricketers who had made their debut first-class appearances and whose destinations in life and sport were only just beginning to unfold. For the students who attend both of these academic institutions it is a fixture that remains to this day, and a fixture from which ‘first-class’ cricket’s affiliation with British universities has grown. Indeed, it has become a tradition of the English County Cricket season to begin with ‘a game against the students’

---

6 In total, there are eighteen professional ‘major’ county cricket teams in England and Wales who compete against each other domestically in a two-tier, ‘first-class’ competition, The County Championship.
that was once the privilege of Oxford and Cambridge University Cricket Clubs, but which is now in the possession of six university centres of cricketing excellence spread regionally across England and Wales.

Founded in 2000 by the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB), in total the six university centres incorporate thirteen separate HE institutions that offer a range of degree courses to match the interests and ‘academic levels’ of the aspiring cricketers they hope to attract. Individually and collectively the academies are said to provide:

...an alternative pathway into professional cricket for young players who might be unsure of their abilities or plans, or for those unwilling to make an early choice between academia and sport, or simply for those who are late developers (Atherton, 2013, p.58).

Now sponsored by the Marylebone Cricket Club (MCC), each centre receives a financial stipend of £82,400 per year to ensure that it offers the type of structured cricketing environment to help turn cricketing dreams into reality.

Collectively, the university centres have produced ‘around a fifth of all English-qualified players in the county system’ making them a recognised part of elite cricket development in the UK (see Figure 1). It was within one of these six university cricket academies that this study was situated in order to gain insight into the student-cricket experience from the perspective of those involved. It is a perspective that deals with cricket from the standpoint of a male, able bodied, middle-class researcher researching a cohort of male, able bodied, middle-class student-cricketers whose hopes and aspirations reflect those available to them. From the time the investigation began in 2010, in the build-up to the 2011 season, the academy ‘team’ consisted of a Head Coach (Coach) who was the only paid,

---

7 Go to: http://www.ecb.co.uk/news/domestic/mcc-universities
8 Founded in 1787, the MCC is the largest private members cricket club in the world who sponsor a number of cricketing initiatives aimed at developing the game both nationally and internationally. Representing part of the cricketing establishment historically, the MCC remain involved in the governance of the game as guardian of the Laws and ‘Spirit of Cricket’.
9 Go to: http://www.lords.org/mcc/youth-cricket/mcc-universities/centres-of-excellence/
10 See also: https://static.ecb.co.uk/files/mcc-universities-booklet-11756.pdf
Figure 1: Player development pathways and programmes adapted from the ECB’s strategic plan for cricket 2006-2010.
full-time employee who had been in charge of “the cricket” from the academy’s inception in 2000, a Team Manager (Bob), an Assistant Coach and a squad of 21 players. As students, players belonged to three separate institutions and were enrolled on various degree courses from Mathematics to Sport Coaching to mirror a mixture of educational backgrounds and achievements. In cricketing terms, players’ backgrounds were more consistent in as much as they were all involved with other forms of representative cricket from ‘minor’ 11 county to major county and international squads. All players were members of provincial cricket clubs playing in leagues and competitions around the country. Some players, however, arrived at university already contracted to professional county teams and it was these individuals who would usually make up the core of what was an unofficial ‘playing squad’ of around 14 players that competed in the vast majority of the academy fixtures throughout the summer.

To help them train and prepare throughout the winter players were given free access to university gym and fitness facilities where they would congregate twice a week for one evening and one morning session of weights and strength and conditioning. They also had the use of university sports halls for one-to-one and small group coaching sessions, as well as an indoor cricket centre (or ’school’) at a nearby County Cricket ground (see Figure 2 and 3). It is here where the squad trained together every Wednesday afternoon for three hours from January to the start of the season at the end of March. During the winter period, players were also required to attend team meetings that were usually arranged at the end of squad training on Wednesday afternoons, and it was during these meetings that Coach would set out his expectations and hopes for the season. The meetings also provided the opportunity for Bob to perform some of his basic ‘house keeping’ duties by using the time to explain the contents of the Season Handbook (see Appendix A), or to take player orders for team “stash” (clothes and kit). “Stash” – complete with players’ initials and squad

11 ‘Minor’ county cricket differs from ‘major’ county cricket primarily for its ’minor’, amateur status and represents an organizationally distinct division of the game in England and Wales.
Figure 2: Indoor cricket centre interior layout (not to scale).
Figure 3: Indoor cricket centre located in plan view (not to scale).
numbers – helped create the image of a professionalised team environment in expression of the academy’s central purpose, which lay somewhere between winning cricket matches and developing county cricketers.

By the start of the season that purpose became a little more defined when the team began travelling around the country, going from ground to ground, hotel to hotel in a nomadic type of cricketing existence. It exposed players to a cricketing way of life and a chance to learn about themselves and the game. At the same time it was about performance, and the team performing well enough to reach finals and win trophies in inter-university competitions. Games were scheduled within a condensed period of approximately three months (length dependent on how well the team performed) to give those with existing ‘summer contracts’12 (see Table 1) time to join up with their county squads for the rest of the season, and to allow the best of the rest to compete for places in the combined university side that played in the County Second XI Championship for the remainder of the summer. The schedule – which clashed with the end of the academic year – consisted of a number of ‘friendlies’ that existed outside of any formal competitions against county second XIs, minor county teams and other representative sides. Running alongside these fixtures, the academy played in two-day, one-day and twenty over (t20) competitions against the five other university centres. Yet in many ways, the focal point of the winter and the season schedule was what came at the outset when those selected were given the opportunity to compete in two ‘first-class’ matches against professional county opposition. These games were both three days in length and for many would represent their first and only taste of first-class cricket. For others, however, these games would represent just the beginning of a career in professional sport. But for all, the games symbolised what the academy was all about by imposing a sense of what a future in cricket had in store.

12 ‘Summer contracts’ are a cost effective way that major county teams retain young players and bolster their professional playing squads. They are often short – one or two years/summers in length – and are easily extended in order to monitor how young talent unfolds.
Table 1: Information pertaining to key player respondents featured in the research.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Age (Start of fieldwork)</th>
<th>University year (Start of fieldwork)</th>
<th>Seasons with academy (Prior to fieldwork)</th>
<th>Seasons with academy (During fieldwork)</th>
<th>Team role</th>
<th>Degree course (Sport/other)</th>
<th>Contractual status (Summer/full)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ben</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Bowler</td>
<td>Sport</td>
<td>Summer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chris</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Bowler</td>
<td>Sport</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connor</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Batsman</td>
<td>Sport</td>
<td>Summer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Bowler</td>
<td>Sport</td>
<td>Summer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Josh</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Wicketkeeper/batsman</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lewis</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Batsman</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Summer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Bowler</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Summer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patrick</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Batsman</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Summer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ryan</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Wicketkeeper/batsman</td>
<td>Sport</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stevie</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>All-rounder</td>
<td>Sport</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simon</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Bowler</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Summer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tim</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>All-rounder</td>
<td>Sport</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In its function as a route into professional cricket, the academy offered its student members the chance to build an impression of the working lives of professional cricketers and the opportunity to explore and develop themselves in relation to that domain. It did so by providing an environment in which cricket became the focus of each individual’s existence whilst operating from inside its cultural locations, and a schedule of training and competitive fixtures that bound players to the type of cricketing commitments that they would be likely to encounter as professional players. Thus, the structures of their social situation encouraged players to enact the role of ‘cricketer’ and by doing so engage in a process of self-discovery as they explored features of the cricketer’s lifestyle, and adjusted to the demands imposed by their student-cricket experiences.

A “Day in the Dirt”: An Introduction to the Research Problem

When it comes to cricket it is often said that a match can be won or lost on the toss of a coin. Hence, there is a certain theatre attached to it as all eyes turn to the captains standing out in the middle\textsuperscript{13}. Suspense falls and then disperses in an instant while a group of student-cricketers wait for news of their captain’s decision. “Bowling” is the message relayed to the changing room. But the news is met with little other than a murmur and a few groans at the thought of spending another “day in the dirt”:

\textit{It’s the middle of the season. It’s hot, and the wicket is flat. Your team is in the field and the opposition are a decent batting side. So you slap the sun cream on and go out with the realisation you’re going to be standing in the field for the rest of the day. But you have got to keep reminding yourself that this is it – you have to do it! It’s just part of the game and somehow you have got to find some pleasure in doing it. But}

\textsuperscript{13} Prior to the start of a cricket match, the two opposing captains meet on the field of play on an area of the ground next to the wicket often referred to as the ’middle’. Under the supervision of the officiating umpires, the captains perform a coin toss whereby the winning captain gets to decide which discipline (bowling or batting) his or her team will partake in first. This is a decision that could be based on a number of factors including the weather, the conditions of the wicket and/or the comparative strength of the opposition. Therefore, until completion of ’the toss’, players and spectators alike are left in anticipation of how the match will begin.
it’s tough. It is a constant battle to keep motivating yourself on days like this... On the field, there's a bit of banter to start, but that soon wears off, and slowly you get that feeling. You realise you’re powerless, and everyone around you knows it as well. As the team drifts, you drift. You don’t give up, but you certainly feel like it whilst you recount all the things you’d rather be doing. And you know you shouldn’t think like that, but you just can’t help it. You have all this open space around you, all this time, and you have to fill it with something. From 11 o’clock you are just counting down the minutes to lunch, and then to tea, just wilting as the day goes on. You’ve done all the practice, all the weights, and all the fitness but it’s a mental thing because nothing prepares you for days like this... Then you finally come off at the close of play and I mean you can literally smell the dirt. It's just that feeling and that smell of sweat. You look around and everyone is burnt. Your skin is red and glowing. Your whites are filthy. Your socks are soaked. The day’s been long. You’re tired. You feel beaten. And as you sit there moaning about it to your teammate it starts to sink in that you’re in the field again tomorrow... Say you get off the pitch at quarter past seven and then by the time you have packed your gear, and got in the car, it is eight o’clock. Then say it takes you half an hour to get home – so it’s half past eight by the time you get there. You have a chat for half an hour, have food, then you’re off to bed to get some rest before you’re up at half seven to start all over again. It’s even tougher though when you’re staying away in a shitty hotel on the side of a motorway. That’s when you really start to question whether you want to do this at all!

(Recorded Conversation, 17.12.2012)

A “day in the dirt”, as depicted by Connor14 – a member of the academy squad who became a key informant over the course of this research project – was something that didn’t take me long to encounter. Nor did it take me long to get a feel for its connotations. Whether at the start, towards the end or during the middle of a match I’d hear the phrase being used, and watch and listen to the players’ reluctant responses. At first I found their surprising. After all, they all wanted to become professional cricketers, right? But then I began to appreciate how a changing room full of young, aspiring cricketers can be a rather curious place in the moments leading up to a team taking the field. The psychological demands that accompany the prospect of spending many hours drifting in and out of the game can differ somewhat from other more visceral team sports. Indeed, the

---

14 To protect the anonymity of group respondents, pseudonyms have been used throughout the thesis.
long hours and drawn out routines ‘which so irritate those who crave continuous excitation’ (James, 1963, p.195) can ask questions of players’ motivations whilst offering them the downtime to think and reflect. As an insider to the cricket context I knew of this intuitively. It would, however, take me a little while longer to unpack how “a day in the dirt”, and the questions it posed to a group of student-cricketers, related to their experiences as young people as they went about challenging themselves and their love for the game in the transformative context of a university cricket academy.

Often referred to as the thinking man’s (sic) game, there is a level of introspection that can linger over a cricket match brought on by both the characteristics of the game and the characters of those who play it. The existential demands that accompany cricket as a pursuit and as a profession have caused many of the game’s commentators to question whether cricket attracts a certain type of person? Men of ‘ideals’, men of ‘imagination’ men of ‘intense’ disposition are those that Roebuck (1985, p.4) speculated that cricket seems to lure. Conversely, there is an argument that cricket, by virtue of its inherent stresses, waiting around, longueurs and rain delays, can take its toll on the personalities of the people who turned it from a game into the fulcrum of their identities (Brearley, 2012; Frith, 1990; 2001). In light of this speculative link, the novelist P.J. Kavanagh in his essay The Mystery of Cricket (1981, p.113) wrote:

Like poets, cricketers spend unimaginable numbers of hours doing something as near pointless as possible, trying to dig an elusive perfection out of themselves in the face of infinite variables... Like poets their faces are deeply engraved by introspection – all cricketers seem prematurely lined – because they are as deeply locked in a struggle with themselves as they are with the opposition.

The struggle to which Kavanagh refers became the focus of this research project and a struggle that, to a certain extent, I shared with the academy players. For when it came to understanding their experiences of cricket and the academy, it was what united researcher and the researched on a human level that initiated my interest into a problem faced by the group. Indeed,
during the course of this programme of research, I began to encounter a set of personal troubles that caused me to start questioning the choices and commitments I had made, and the direction in which my life appeared to be heading. Given what I understood about myself and what I saw within others, I felt uncertain as to whether academia and the world of research and higher education was really ‘for me’, and whether the outcomes of a research apprenticeship were really worth the time and emotional investment. Although tied to a different set of challenges, this self-questioning seemed to mirror what I was witnessing amongst the players as they interacted with each other and aspects of their university-cricket environment, and asked themselves whether cricket was right for them? From here, a “day in the dirt” became a reference to a facet of the game and the players’ experiences of it that held a specific cultural meaning when it came to analysing how cricket and the academy related to them as a group young men, during a transitional period of their lives. By design, the academy represented a pathway to a future destination, and an opportunity for players to turn cricketing potential into a full-time professional reality. In this transition manifested a critical state of mind as players began to confront and assess what it might be like to be a professional cricketer, and to consign one’s life to that particular identity-course.

Set against a backdrop of social change, cricket, according to Brearley (2012), can present something of a challenge for the modern generation of cricketers. Its slow tempo and internal rhythms that can be spread across many hours and multiple days, present stark contrast to contemporary society in an age that demands the capacity to succeed quickly (Brearley, 2012). A “day in the dirt” encapsulated this tension and became expressive of the time the respondent group spent bound to the cricketing context chasing their childhood dreams of becoming professional cricketers, and the questions of cricket and self they encountered as young people engaged in this process. To this end, the cricket writer and Marxist historian C.L.R. James (1963, p.45) stated, ‘there is a zeitgeist of cricket. A particular generation of cricketers thinks in a certain way and only a change in society... will change the prevailing style.’ In other words, cricket and a
cricket team is a manifestation of a particular world (Stoddart, 2004), making the factors that bear upon its players reflective of the factors embedded within social life at a certain time of its history and development.

The views offered by James (1963) and Brearley (2012) provide a useful starting point for the theoretical grounding of what emerged over the course of this research project as the principal research problem. Whilst ‘in the field’, I became increasingly drawn to the problem of self and identity which players struggled with as they strove to turn themselves into “pros”. It was a problem that bridged both social and psychological perspectives on identity, youth and transition but also a problem that was culturally embedded and structurally shaped by the type of cricketing experiences to which the academy exposed its young protégés.

**Youth and the ‘Project’ of Self: A Theoretical Backdrop**

The following section sets out to ground the research problem from three interrelated theoretical perspectives. First, identity is considered from a position of macro social and cultural change that has caused the modern relationship between self and society to become problematic. Second, identity is viewed from the perspective of a discrete life-stage focusing on the issues of identity-formation that have been traditionally associated with adolescence. Finally, the concept of ‘emerging adulthood’ is introduced as a means of operationalising a period of identity-exploration and transition applicable to cohorts of today’s contemporary youth.

**The problem of self in the late modern age**

It has been stated that the concepts of self and identity have become problematic for individuals living in late modern societies. These problems are said to include how persons arrive actively and creatively at their own

---

15 By way of definition, identity can be treated as a composite definition of self. According to Baumeister and Muraven (1996), self is based on having a physical body, experiencing reflexive consciousness, having interpersonal relations, and exercising executive control over the process of making decisions. Identity on the other hand is a set of meaningful definitions ascribed to self, including social roles, reputation, a hierarchy of values and priorities and a conception of one's potentiality. Although distinguishable, self and identity are closely enough entwined to use interchangeably for the purpose of this thesis.
self-definitions, how they understand their own potential and fulfil it, and how well they come to know themselves in light of historical developments that have advanced the need for individuals to ‘find themselves’ and an identity that ‘fits’ (Baumeister, 1987). However, as the notion of a ‘problem’ suggests, the search for a satisfactory outcome has become increasingly perilous and difficult to achieve ever since biography became a matter of personal choice (Beck, 1992). Indeed, it has been argued by many scholars from both sociological and psychological fields that dramatic macro social and cultural change has caused society to become void of the traditional meaning structures that once guided people towards their identity-destinations (Baumeister, 1987; Beck, 1992; Côté, 2000; Giddens, 1991). As members of progressive, industrialised, capitalist nations it is claimed by Giddens (1990) that we now live in an ‘open society’ that is as emancipatory as it is burdensome and risky for the individual. Whether imagined or real, faced with an unprecedented number of freedoms and choices pertaining to work, lifestyle, love and educational opportunities, the pressure to choose the right path and to create one’s own coherent identity-story is a stress of modern life that must be individually negotiated and personally resolved (Baumeister and Muraven, 1996; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995). As a result, the self and the constituents of personal identity that contain within its narrative a sense of who the person is, where they have been, and where they intend on going has developed, according to Giddens (1991), into a ‘project’ that must be reflexively made and organised throughout the life-course. Hence, self-identity and the quest for personal fulfilment has become an increasingly accepted and legitimate aspect of everyday life (Baumeister, 1987).

In consideration of the nature of the relationship between self and society, Giddens (1991), along with other modernist theorists such as Ulrich Beck (1992), has provided an elaborate framework that draws important macro-micro links between societal restructuring, individualisation and the challenge of identity construction in the late modern age. Modernity, as Giddens (1991) has described it, has radically altered the nature of day-to-day life to affect the most personal aspects of lived experience. According to
his thesis, doubt permeates the everyday to form a ‘general existential dimension to the contemporary social world’ (p.3) making it an aim of modern man and woman to find a level of inner security to help circumvent the anxieties caused by societies that are becoming less socially and culturally stable. The removal of pre-modern social ties, the disbanding of traditional cultural value and belief systems, and the disembedding of social relations from local contexts that once provided individuals with their feelings of time and place, has forced people to confront the issue of their self-definition whether they want to or not (Côté, 2000; Giddens, 1991). Whilst on the one hand the (de)structuring of modern society has increased personal opportunity to ‘fly the nest’ and to travel, work and learn, its order is thought to be capable of diffusing one’s sense of direction to make the projection of personal life less certain. On the existentiality of the modern social world, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995, pp.46-48) observed:

As secularisation gains ground, as new living patterns emerge, as value systems and religions compete for people’s minds, many landmarks which previously provided orientation, meaning and a personal anchoring place in a large universe have vanished… The consequence of such structural changes in society is that for the first time large numbers of people are in the position to wonder about matters not directly connected with the daily grind of earning a living. At the very moment when life becomes somewhat easier, questions on the meaning of it all can develop a new urgency. These are the old philosophical themes which now start to enter our private lives… the old ways of interpreting the world have become threadbare, and each individual finds him/herself alone with new doubts. Not everybody can find answers, and what remains are anxieties… not so much about how to survive but about what lies behind our existence, the meaning of it all.

As Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995) have suggested, the focus of day-to-day life has altered. Concerns for personal fulfilment that transcend traditional class and gender roles, as well as local community and neighbourhood relations, have become more commonplace as part of people’s day-to-day struggles. It is a level of abstraction with which some can find themselves grappling more than others, requiring a mentality and set of skills that enable individuals to perform the necessary ‘identity-work’ to negotiate the
transitions associated with the modern life-course in educational, economic and political landscapes that make us believe we must strive to get the best out of ourselves, for ourselves (Côté, 2000).

In conditions of late modernity, the responsibility of self-actualisation made Giddens (1991) believe it important that individuals develop their strategic potentials in the planning, construction and adaptation of self-identity, and the harnessing of emotional prosperity over the life-span. To this end, growing up in societies devoid of the meanings once brought to them by traditional social and cultural constraints, work, love and lifestyle choices have increased not only in access, but in value as pillars around which individuals can create, authenticate and validate a sense of self as the primary architects of their own identities. For the young in particular, presented with a wide range of potential pathways as they embark on their journey into adulthood, the search for self-identity requires consideration before committing to any future course (Shanahan, 2000). Indeed, the period of one's 'youth' is popularly thought of as the time in life when the project of self assumes the greatest importance and when, in the process of self-discovery, the problems of self arise most frequently. For 'youth' is said to stand 'between the past and future in individual life and society' (Erikson, 1958, p.42) making it a stage of the life-course strongly influenced by the pattern of social and cultural change that have made questions of identity a preoccupation of our time.

**Identity, adolescence and crisis**

Problems of self and identity across the life-course have been primarily associated with one particular phase of transition – namely that which lies between ‘adolescence’ and ‘adulthood’ (Kroger, 2004). This is in part a consequence of the work of the eminent developmental social psychologist Erik Erikson who wrote extensively on the psychosocial stages of the ‘life-cycle’, and whose work found popular emphasis for the ‘identity-crisis’ he coined in description of young people’s experiences at a certain point in time (Schwartz, 2001). In 1968 Erikson theorised adolescence and ‘young adulthood’ as a fraught and often conflicted period during which the young
may experience a sense of confusion, ‘a war within themselves’ (Erikson, 1968, p.17), as they strive to find resolutions to the basic questions of their identity in the face of having to make a series of enduring life-choices.

Since publication, Erikson’s theoretical expositions on identity, youth and crisis have been widely used to focus on the complex interplay between the social and the psychological in the formation and stabilisation of the ‘ego’ (a sense of self-sameness and inner coherence over time). Indeed, a number of more contemporary scholars have attended to the link between culture and identity (see Côté, 1996, 2000) to which Erikson referred, and the relationship between person and the context of his or her self-development (see Adams, 2003; Adams and Marshall, 1996; Mortimer, Zimmer-Gembeck, Holmes and Shanahan, 2002). In this regard, Erikson (1958, 1968, 1980) provides some classical, interdisciplinary contributions when it comes to appreciating the embedded, psychosocial nature of identity and the role of community in supporting and shaping the ‘adolescing’ ego (Kroger, 2004). According to Erikson (1968, p.22), the dimensions of identity, and the problems that can arise in its development, are products ‘located in the core of the individual and yet also in the core of his communal culture’, describing the life-long process of identity-formation as a process that reaches its ‘normative crisis’ in adolescence. In depiction of this process, Erikson wrote (1968, p.22):

In psychological terms, identity-formation employs a process of simultaneous reflection and observation, a process taking place on all levels of mental functioning, by which the individual judges himself in the light of what he perceives to be the way in which others judge him in comparison to themselves and to a typology significant to them; while he judges their way of judging him in the light of how he perceives himself in comparison to them and to types that have become relevant to him. This process is, luckily, and necessarily, for the most part unconscious except where inner conditions and outer circumstances combine to aggravate a painful, or elated, identity-consciousness.

Thus, Erikson saw identity-development as a reciprocal relationship between individual and context, and a process that involves recognising and being recognised by ‘relevant’ others. In this respect, his theory on identity
reflects some of the theoretical propositions offered by George Herbert Mead (1934) who argues self-development to be dependent on interaction with other people. According to Mead, ‘the self’ is not initially there at birth. To exist, it is reliant on social context as an ‘object’ that arises out of social experience (Mead, 1934, p.247) making the very nature of identity-formation a process that incorporates a reflexive dialogue between individual and his or her social surroundings (Adams, 2003; Adams and Marshall, 1996).

The ‘identity-consciousness’ to which Erikson (1968) refers is a consciousness that arises out of a complex mix of social interactions and subjective experiences that throw early childhood identifications into doubt. This is accompanied by a sense of identity-confusion as the young person tries to cultivate a new sense of inner continuity around new social roles and developing sets of skills, values and interests (Kroger, 2004). To a certain extent, Erikson’s theory (1968) contends that some form of ‘crisis’ and level of identity-consciousness is a necessary part of young people’s psychosocial development in societies that offer ‘youth’ the opportunity to delay the initial commitments of adult life to arrive at a more firm and definite sense of who they are and what they want to achieve prior to making decisions.

An important feature of Erikson’s theory, therefore, is the role played by the ‘psychosocial moratorium’ during which identity-decisions are left in abeyance whilst the young actively search and experiment among alternatives in an attempt to find the person they wish to be (Kroger, 2005). Whilst some young people may find this search disorienting, Erikson positions himself as a proponent of the healthy function a period of moratorium can play in providing the young with the opportunity and time for exploration that may help prevent the disturbances caused later in life when a person realises they have over committed to something that they are not (see Erikson, 1958). To an increasingly greater degree, it is argued that modern society now encourages the young to enter a period of moratorium by creating and accepting pockets of time where experimentation can take place, self-understanding developed, future occupations and lifestyles
explored, and the foundations for adult role and identity-commitments laid out (Coleman, 2011; Smith, et al., 2011). A significant factor in this has been the expansion of higher education that has become an ever more popular destination for the young to go before making their transition into the labour market and committing themselves to a life of work (Arnett, 2000, 2004; Baumeister and Muraven, 1996; Côté, 2000, Côté and Bynner, 2008; Furlong, Woodman and Wyn, 2011; Shanahan, 2000).

The example of higher education provides a marker of social change that re-establishes the link made earlier between identity and selfhood and the macro structural transformations of late modernity, and in connecting this to the life-cycle and the experiences of the young person, Erikson (1968, p.23) provides another critical observation:

In discussing identity, as we now see it, we cannot separate personal growth with communal change, nor can we separate the identity crisis in individual life and contemporary crises in historical development because the two help define each other and are truly relative to each other.

As a consequence of this relativity, in a modern era that has made the project of self-identity increasingly problematic, personal development, as it relates to the ‘adolescent’ stage of the life-course, has been affected (Arnett and Taber, 1994). Indeed, it is now widely reported that ‘youth’ and the nature of adolescence has changed, with the transitional experiences of young people growing up in the contemporary world differing from those encountered by earlier generations (Coleman, 2011; Furlong and Cartmel, 2007; Smith et al., 2011). One argument is that ‘adolescence’ has become more and more elongated and decoupled with age as the young take longer to develop a clear idea about themselves, and what they desire from their adult futures and identity-commitments (Arnett, 2000, 2004; Côté and Bynner, 2008).
The rise of emerging adulthood

One criticism that can be labelled at Erikson’s work is that he does not make a clear distinction between what he refers to as ‘adolescence’ and ‘young adulthood’. Instead, throughout his writings, he appears to fuse the two ‘ages’ together under the same developmental period. In doing so, he implies a continuation of the identity-troubles and dilemmas he attributed to adolescence into an older age bracket, which is now thought to be typical within late modern societies that grant its young people the freedom to explore their identities and delay their transitions into adulthood (Furlong et al., 2011; Smith et al., 2011). Thus, without attaching any specific characteristics to it, Erikson (1968, p.156), through his notion of moratorium, suggests a time of extended adolescence during which the transition to adulthood is protracted beyond the adolescent years as the young put off the responsibilities and commitments traditionally associated with adulthood in favour of their independence, and the opportunity to experiment with roles and identities connected to various possible life-directions.

Observations of this nature have been made by a number of scholars (see Côté, 2000; Smith et al., 2011) including Jeffery Arnett (1998, 2000, 2004). Through his empirical work studying the subjective experiences of young people in their transitions to adulthood, Arnett (2000, 2004) proposes a new theory of development from the late teens through the twenties that he claims defines a qualitative and operationally distinct period of the life-course. His theory of emerging adulthood is set against a backdrop of mass cultural and social change that has increased the role of individual agency in shaping the route people take in life, and the time young people take to arrive at a sense of identity-achievement\(^\text{16}\) through the enduring choices they make in love and work. Emerging adulthood,

\(^{16}\)Identity-achievement, according to Marcia (1980), represents the culmination of a process of identity-formation that has seen the young person go through a period of exploration and decision making before committing to the pursuit of a set of self-chosen occupational and ideological goals. Like Erikson, he considered identity to be a dynamic self-structure made up of individual drives, abilities, beliefs, and individual history, contending that the better developed this structure is, the more equipped the individual is to navigate a path through life.
according to Arnett (2000, 2004), is thus a product of those structural characteristics that have extended the ‘youth phase’ as it applies to adolescent identity-exploration, and relates specifically to a period of ‘post-adolescence’ which many young people find themselves entering between the ages of 18-25, and in some cases beyond.

When it comes to describing and explaining the protracted identity-explorations and transitions of today’s youth, Arnett’s theory of emerging adulthood takes a predominantly psychological orientation and is rooted in the lengthening of the developmental processes that begin in the teens and intensify throughout the twenties as more sustained commitments begin to emerge (Bynner, 2005). Despite such commitments increasing in their consequentiality during this period, Arnett (2004) highlights how many young people in their early to mid-twenties typically do not consider themselves as ‘adults’ either from the perspective of traditional social markers (marriage, parenthood, occupational, financial and residential stability), or indeed in relation to the cognitive, emotional and behavioural attributes that contemporary societies ascribe to the meaning of adulthood (Arnett and Taber, 1994; Côtè, 2000). Instead, these young people perceive themselves to be on the threshold of making life-long decisions where the normative ‘storm and stress’ of adolescence is magnified along with feelings of hope for what the future promises and nostalgia for when life seemed a bit easier.

From this neo-Erikson perspective, Arnett (2000, 2004) conceptualises emerging adulthood according to some specific psychosocial characteristics, defining it as an ‘age’ of identity-exploration and role-experimentation, of instability and uncertainty, of self-focus and feelings of being in-between, and of unparalleled possibility and opportunity to transform one’s life. In these attributes lies one of Arnett’s main contributions to the field of youth studies, with emerging adulthood representing a concept that provides a neat synthesis of much of the critical commentary on youth and the project of self in late modern society. That said, Arnett’s theorisation has not escaped critique regarding its claims that emerging adulthood represents a ‘new stage’ of the life-course. For although
common across industrialised societies, emerging adulthood may not apply to all sectors of it, with social stratification and capital exclusion (particularly in terms of educational achievement and qualifications) remaining as moderates to the concept of ‘extended transition’ (Bynner, 2005; Côté and Bynner, 2008; Fulong et al., 2011). In other words, despite advances in modern society having increased young people’s opportunities for self-development and exploration in principle, historic socio-cultural and structural influences still apply. Indeed, Furlong and Cartmel (1997, 2007) take the position that although the nature of young people’s experiences have changed in line with society, traditional opportunity structures relating to class, ‘race’, gender, socio-economic and educational status have not evaporated but now exist in unison with wide subjective perceptions of freedom and choice. Furlong and Cartmel (1997, p.109) have referred to this as the ‘paradox of late modernity’ in which the structural foundations of social life have become more obscure, increasing perceptions of personal liberty, whilst continuing to act as a powerful constraint to individual agency. Hence, as a developmental concept, emerging adulthood does not necessary fit the transitional experiences of all young people, particularly for those of a lower socio-economic status whose opportunities to remain in education and search for their occupational niches could be appreciably limited (Bynner, 2005). In this sense, emerging adulthood could be viewed as a solely ‘middle-class-condition’ affecting only those who have the ‘actual’ rather than perceived freedoms to delay their transitions into adulthood in the form of role and identity-commitments. Nevertheless, the concept of emerging adulthood provides a useful framework in operationalizing a time in life relevant to specific cohorts of young people, particularly those in environments and cultural contexts in which they are encouraged by the nature of their experiences to engage in a process of self-examination to gain clearer insight into themselves and their abilities relative to a specific identity-goal.
The Aim and Order of Work

Presented with an environment and with opportunities to help them develop, for the student-cricketers in this study, the academy represented an avenue toward the specific career and identity-goal of professional cricket. There were, however, no guarantees that they would ever be deemed ‘good enough’ to make it as professional players over the course of their involvement with university cricket. Nor were there any guarantees that individuals’ desires and motivations to want to become professional cricketers would remain stable in light of the type of cricketing experiences the academy exposed players to. Indeed, as much as it was about development, and players developing into professional cricketers, the academy was also about personal exploration and players determining how far they wished to take cricket in their transition towards adulthood, and enduring adult commitments. The aim of the research, therefore, was to convey the process of identity-exploration through which a group of ‘emerging adults’ confronted the issue of their self-definition and arrived at a conception of themselves as ‘cricketers’. In addressing the central aim of the study, this thesis provides a detailed examination of a culturally embedded period of transition and the interactions that took place that saw the academy players react to, and try to make sense of, their student-cricket experiences in order to take some control over the direction in which they sensed their lives were heading.

A significant factor in the interactions described within this thesis was the part played by ‘Coach’ whose self-narrative symbolised a man who had dedicated his life to the game, and whose enigmatic and forthright character placed him at the forefront of the players’ cricketing experiences. Chapter Three, Mr Cricket, therefore presents a representation of Coach via the self-narrative around which he constructed his identity as a former professional cricketer that held symbolic relevance to the identity-explorations of the student-cricketers under his guidance. It was a self-narrative that spoke as much for Coach’s own life as it did for the characteristics of the professional game that the players used as a point of reference in projecting their lives into the future. For when it came to
professional cricket, there was an intimate connection between the identity-commitments Coach had made and the life-choices his student-cricketers were on the verge of making.

This connection makes Coach an integral part of what unfolds throughout the remainder of the thesis. Indeed his commentary features as a major source of insight in recounting the student-cricket experiences and what the academy was preparing its players to step into. Alongside the insights offered by Coach, the academy's training and playing schedule deliberately exposed its individuals to what it might be like to be professional cricketers travelling around the country, playing cricket and living according to its lifestyle. It was a lifestyle that required personal adjustment, with Chapter Four, *The Cricket Bubble*, reporting on its characteristics and players' understanding and responses to it as their cricketing experiences gained in intensity.

Exposure to a cricketing way of life not only helped players to familiarise themselves with what a future in cricket might hold, but it also helped to highlight how their relationship with the game was beginning to transform into something a little more serious. Under the metaphor of a romantic attachment, Chapter Five, *Lady Cricket*, explores the root of players' emotional and motivational connection with the game and, in light of their on going pursuit of cricket, how 'love' was aggrandised as the central justification for further commitment. Amid the transformation of their cricketing experiences, deciding on whether or not they still 'loved' cricket, and to what level of the game their affections applied, was part of a process of interaction that saw players challenge the goal of wanting to become professional cricketers according to how gratifying cricket had become.

With the academy making cricket a matter of personal and collective deliberation, Chapter Six, *Finding Your Level*, builds on players' reflexive engagement with their cricketing environment and their adopted cricket role. In this regard, 'finding your level' represented a coming together of players' cricketing experiences into a specific transitional outcome, with the chapter providing a montage of the crises and dilemmas players faced in deciding whether cricket was 'right' for them as a career. Finding their level
in the game constituted players reaching a degree of self-understanding upon which to base prospective identity-decisions and thus marked an important developmental milestone in their cricketing careers, and their lives as young people.

The research findings and descriptive accounts offered in Chapters Three, Four, Five and Six are distilled within a conceptual framework that is presented and reviewed in Chapter Seven. The framework provides a visual representation of the players’ transitional pathway through the academy from entry to exit, plotting the journey taken and the key points of interaction that impinged on a process of culturally embedded identity-exploration. The research concludes in Chapter Eight where I argue for the role played by structured peer group cultures in the developmental transitions of emerging adults, emphasising the need for future research to build understanding on how to equip young people with the identity-skills necessary for the negotiation of modern life.

The empirical findings presented in this thesis are supported by combinations of theoretical and empirical sources, as well as material drawn from journalistic and anecdotal publications that have been infused within the text. The purpose of this approach is twofold: 1) to complement a critical analysis of the players’ student-cricket experiences, and 2) to enable the thesis – and the arguments presented within each chapter – to be located in its contribution to the respective fields of study that it informs. But first, I deal with the adopted research approach and the methods utilised to capture aspects of players’ ‘lived’ experiences. To this end, the aim of Chapter Two is to provide critical insight into the nature and practice of ethnographic research in what might be classified as a ‘confessional’ portrayal of the research experience (Van Maanen, 1988). By doing so, I seek to convey the spirit in which this research was performed that involved my direct and sustained contact with the researched group in preparation for the production of the ethnographic text.
CHAPTER 2
The Research Approach

To address the aim of this study, ethnography was adopted as the research strategy to provide a nuanced, in-depth, cultural analysis of the identity explorations and transitional experiences of a group of student-cricketers on their pathway towards professional cricket. Ethnography is an approach to research that is well established in the study of youth transition and exploration of the contexts in which young people actively build their lives and self-understandings (Furlong et al., 2011). Indeed, from an ethnographic perspective it is possible through research to develop an awareness of the ways young people interpret, construct and shape their identities within a given set of circumstances, with ethnography having been used to good effect previously in contexts that combine education and high performance/professional sport (Adler and Adler, 1991; Parker, 1996). Building on the empirical work of these studies, the ethnographic method defined and described in this chapter enabled me, from the position of participant observer, to become part of my respondents' lives and shed light on aspects of their transitional experiences as cricketers and as young people. Before detailing the manner in which this was achieved, it is necessary to delineate what is meant by the term ‘ethnography’ as referred to in discussions on field-based research.

From Process to Product: Defining Ethnography

Ethnography is a ‘style’ of research used in the study of people and culture (Brewer, 2000). As an approach to research it refers to the practical steps researchers take to collect data from natural, ‘real world’ settings from the position of an involved actor (Fetterman, 1989). These steps include gaining access, finding a role, establishing relationships and procuring information by a variety of means and from a number sources that shed light on the lives and life-worlds of a particular group of people (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). Participant observation is one such means that is accompanied by a
number of other interactive techniques that rely heavily on the researcher's social competencies (to befriend, to relate, to empathise and to discuss) and intuition (Walcott, 1995). Ethnography as a means of enquiry is open-ended and unstructured, and quite often informal by nature. Nevertheless, in return for what is often an untidy and wasteful way of gathering data, ethnography enables the researcher to get behind the scenes of cultural practice as an insider, and observe first-hand a wide variety of behaviours and responses to situated events over a prolonged period of time (Pryce, 1986). Thus, for what the process of ‘fieldwork’ may lack in systemised procedures and protocols, it makes up for by the direct field-based encounters the ethnographer is exposed to in the course of a research study where, given time, proximity and experience, the researcher can begin to develop extensive analytical insights (Willis, 1978).

The above description principally defines ethnography according to the researcher’s proximal relationship to the research context that is developed for the purpose of collecting information and building understanding. Yet discussions on what the term ‘ethnography’ fully denotes stretch well beyond what happens in the field. Indeed, practical guides introducing the concept of ethnography provide a myriad of perspectives from which ethnography can be considered, understood, justified and applied across the social sciences (see Atkinson, Coffey, Delamont, Lofland and Lofland, 2007; Brewer, 2000; Fetterman, 1989; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007; Sands, 2002; Sparkes, 2002; VanMaanen, 1988, 1995). These texts help to distinguish ethnography from other forms of ‘fieldwork’ and ‘observational-research’, and encourage neophytes to challenge their preconceptions of what it is to ‘be’ an ethnographer and to ‘do’ ethnography. For example, ‘fieldwork’ is often used synonymously with ethnography to describe the work ethnographers do ‘in the field’. However, what defines the field and the work done is equivocal, for not all fieldwork is qualitative, let alone ethnographic. To avoid misinterpretation then, Van Maanen (1988, p. xi) has suggested:

Minimally, I now think that method discussions of ethnography must explicitly consider (1) the assumed relationship between culture and
behaviour (the observed); (2) the experiences of the fieldworker (the observer); (3) the representational style selected to join the observer and the observed (the tale); and (4) the role of the reader engaged in the active reconstruction of the tale (the audience).

To follow Van Maanen’s (1988) advice, in addition to describing the mechanisms of ethnographic data collection, it is important to consider what ethnographers set out to capture, and how they go about reporting it.

The roots of ethnography can be found in the imperialist, social anthropologies of the early twentieth century that typically set out to explore distant lands and places in the study of cultures far removed from the researcher’s own (Atkinson, Coffey and Delamont, 1999). Ethnography’s more contemporary use, however, is thought to have sprung from the ‘doorstep’ (i.e., local to the researcher) ethnographies produced by a group of scholars from Chicago that adopted and championed the method for the sociological analysis of ‘modern’, urban environments (Deegan, 2007). Since then, ethnography’s use as an approach to research has spread throughout the social sciences to be deployed within a wide variety of contexts both foreign to and conversant with the researcher – including contexts relating to education (Corrigan, 1979; Fleming; 1995; Lacey, 1970; Willis, 2000) and sport (Adler and Adler, 1991; Crosset, 1995; de Rond, 2008; Parker, 1996; Sugden, 2002; Wacquant, 2004). But not all that claims to be ethnography is ethnography in a traditional sense of the term (Sugden and Tomlinson, 1999). The point is that given ethnography’s historical foundations, it is the pursuit of social and cultural understanding that remains at the heart of the ethnographer’s task (Fetterman, 1989; Sands, 2002; Willis and Trondman, 2000), for in the words of Harry Walcott (1995, p.87), ‘there is no ethnography until culture makes an entry, no matter how tenuously’.

Like ethnography, ‘culture’ escapes neat definition, which provides an explanation as to why attempts at capturing it are, for the most part, ‘messy’. Broadly speaking though, one might begin to describe the meaning of culture as something that shapes, and is shaped by, human behaviour and interaction (Sands, 2002). Contextually speaking, culture can refer to a specific set of boundaries and/or locations (both physical and symbolic)
governed by rules, values and beliefs, and means of communication. In addition, culture may also refer to the manifestation of a set of recognisable characteristics displayed by individual persons and within the shared habits, routines and customs of a group of people (Willis, 1978). On what defines the nature of culture Van Maanen (1988, p. 3) pointed out, ‘culture is neither prison nor monolith. Nor of course, is it tangible’. Rather, ‘a culture is expressed only by the actions and words of its members and must be interpreted by, not given to, a fieldworker’. Here, Van Maanen raises another matter pertinent to ethnography’s definition and subsequent aims and objectives. For when it comes to the study of culture, the task is not only one of depiction, but of evaluation too (Walcott, 1995; Willis, 1978; Willis and Trondman, 2000).

But in evaluating culture lies the problem of its representation as a concept abstracted from the fieldworker’s analysis and interpretation of his or her research experiences. Whilst in the field ethnographers use their participatory involvement (observing, listening, note taking and conversing) to capture salient features of the researched group in ways that help shed light on the research problem (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). However, ethnography, as fieldwork, is only one segment of the research pursuit. At some stage the ethnographer must leave the field and begin to reconstruct aspects of a cultural scene with which he or she has become familiar from the new position of an outsider looking in. Thus whilst engaged in the act of writing the researcher remains part of the research situation, but adopts a new role within it (a role within the text). Hence the process of writing is considered a key part of the ethnographic approach (see Atkinson, 1990) with the construction of the ethnographic text conjoining ‘emic’ perspectives with the rhetorical and creative devices used in their analysis and representation. This has left the ethnographic text open to criticism, for the fieldworker must display people, and the culture(s) of which they are a part, in a narrative of ‘self-consciously selected words’ that has a degree of independence from the fieldwork upon which it is based (Van Maanen, 1988, p.4). To this end, Brewer (2000) claims that the capturing of ethnographic data is in fact enhanced by the action of reporting it making
ethnography both a proclamation of research action (the process) and a statement of research intent (the product).

Bridging these two dimensions of an ethnographer’s work are some of the methodological assumptions that pervade the exercise as a whole. Indeed no contemporary discussion pertaining to what constitutes ethnography would be complete without grounding the ethnographer’s pursuit of social and cultural understanding from a particular way of evaluating the world. However, in many ways, getting hung-up on philosophical questions of what ‘truth’ is and how it is legitimately ‘created’ is less critical than ethnographic researchers acknowledging and interrogating the subjectivities on which their work is based, and the interpretivist prism through which their observations are made (Sugden, 2005). Thus, in addition to providing an account of the data gathering and analysis techniques used in the course of an ethnographic study, a level of critical reflection should feature as a significant part of a full methodological reporting of the research experience. According to Fleming (1995, p.52), the benefits of such an approach are threefold:

First, it allows the researcher to engage in a process of systematic reflexivity; second, it allows the researcher’s interpretivist stance to be made clear from the outset; and third, it also enables the researcher to ‘come clean’ about the way in which the research was conducted, and make the nature of the creative process explicit.

In light of the advantages described by Fleming, what follows is a ‘confessional’ portrayal of the research process as I experienced it from the position of a newly arrived fieldworker to a more hardened member of the cultural group. In doing so I wish to reveal some of the ‘hoary dialectic between the subjective researcher and the object of his studies’ (Cohen in Pryce, 1986, p. xvii) from which the findings of this study were constructed. My aim is to include within the account some of the major actions and decisions I took during the course of my three-year research engagement in addition to some of the thoughts, feelings and blunders of interaction I experienced along the way.
Fieldwork: The Process

The remainder of this chapter provides a critical overview of the research endeavour from my initial dealings with players and squad, through gaining their full acceptance, to analysing and writing about the student-cricket experience from the perspective of those involved. By providing what I believe to be an open and honest reflection of my research experiences – that include how I grappled with my method of enquiry and at times felt completely overwhelmed by it – I seek to be ‘up-front’ about how I position myself in the text as an authoritative voice on the events that shaped my recognition and understanding for what was ‘going on’. By doing so, I hope to portray both the two-way process of ethnographic fieldwork, and the more solitary occupation of putting it all together.

A word on access

Much has been written on the difficulties ethnographers face negotiating access into the field and the resistance they often come across from the many powers that stand in their way (see Parker, 1996). In truth, my entry was comparatively straightforward, and negotiated mainly on my behalf prior to my first afternoon at squad training in the build up to the 2011 season. Naturally my first few steps – notebook in one hand, pencil in the other – were tentative and characterised by all the anxieties and trepidations of one’s first day at school, but from having no involvement at all to having some was, all-in-all, a relatively smooth transition.

There was, however, one catch. I was arriving under the guise of a Ph.D. student and trainee ‘sport psychologist’ assigned with providing some level of ‘support’ to individuals and squad – the very idea of which made me privately (and sometimes publically in those initial days) blush. I was neither qualified nor comfortable with the persona that was met, in the most part, rather dubiously by players and Coach. Perhaps it was my own personal discomfort that caused their suspicions of me. For I was not

---

17 Having expressed a personal interest to study the group, a member of my supervisory team used his existing relationships with the academy’s gatekeepers to clear a point of entry and facilitate my initial ‘route’ in.
Insensitive to the ‘face-work’ that took place during these introductory encounters as I tried hard to gain acceptance and blend in as best I could – a task not easily achieved for someone standing at six feet seven inches tall. Nevertheless, despite some of the embarrassment it caused me, the fragile image of sport psychologist at least gave the impression that I was there as someone for the players to talk to which I thought could only work in my favour, as long as I could overcome some of my own self-consciousness.

In the long run though, it was a persona from which I would depart for it was a ‘performance’ that I felt I could not uphold with any degree of legitimacy, but also one that I found wasn’t entirely conducive to my actions as an ethnographic researcher. I wanted to drop barriers, not create them and to do that I had to find a way of being myself\(^{18}\). So I resorted very quickly to what I knew best. I picked up a cricket bat, and started to shadow some shots\(^{19}\) as I stood around watching the players ready themselves for nets one afternoon. Not only did I want to make it clear that I knew which end of the “stick”\(^{20}\) to hold, it was also part of a mindful and very deliberate strategy to make who I was and what I was doing appear less formal\(^{21}\). As it was not just access to the environment that I sought, but access to the thoughts, feelings and perceptions of individual persons too.

Developing the kind of meaningful relationships that would grant access to individuals would take time and considerable amounts of energy that a few swings of a cricket bat could not secure. Even so, they were the start of my gradual movement from a largely passive bystander to full

---

\(^{18}\) On the topic of the researcher’s ‘appearance’, Fetterman (1989, p.56) emphasises the value of honesty when it comes to researchers attempting to adapt their behaviours and manage their image to fit their research surroundings. In his opinion, being ‘natural is more effective than any performance’ as even the most accomplished actor is bound to ‘slip up’ at some stage during the research. That said, the ‘ethnographic self’ is still to be managed in strategic ways to facilitate the process of researching (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007), making ‘identity work’ a pervasive feature of the ethnographic enterprise (Coffey, 1999).

\(^{19}\) Play a series of imaginary cricket shots as though I was batting against a bowler.

\(^{20}\) Cricket parlance for a cricket bat.

\(^{21}\) Fleming (1995, p.58) decided on a similar strategy in his school-based study on sport and South Asian youth by adopting a ‘least authoritative’ role as a ‘sort-of P.E. teacher’ for the purpose of reducing social distance, and enhancing field relations with the subjects of his research.
interactive member of the group. Indeed, it had always been my intention to progress my involvement from standing on the fringes of training once a week – and delivering the occasional squad counselling session for players to air their grievances – to joining the team on their season’s escapades. This, however, was reliant on me being a) invited, and b) accounted for in the organisation that took place months in advance of the first fixture. I had never had a conversation that had confirmed any of these matters, as I had not been party to the formative dealings that had granted my initial access. So when I broached the prospect of travelling and staying with the team during the season with Bob, the academy’s team manager, he growled doubting whether there would be room for me on the team bus, let alone money left in the pot to include me on the team’s food and accommodation bill. I had been overlooked, and was in danger of being forgotten about unless of course I was willing to pay my own way. I did the sums, and it was going to prove costly, but intuition told me that I had to accompany the team ‘on the road’ if I was going to do this ‘properly’. I went back to Bob the following week to explain my predicament and my reasons for wanting to be a part of things to come, and he growled at me once again. But without promising anything, he said he’d see what he could do.

It was not out of spite that Bob stood in my way to begin with. Fieldwork is give and take, and at this stage I was seeking to take far more than I was in a position to give. Months stood at the side of training were just building blocks for what I hoped would be a long-term engagement with the squad that would run through the course of the season, and throughout the next winter and following summer. Thankfully for me, a deal was struck, with Bob agreeing to help finance my inclusion in team meals and hotel bookings in return for writing the team blog (see Appendix B for an example) and lending a hand with some of the driving. Small change, I felt, for something so valuable to the research.

On the varying degrees of ethnographic engagement, see Sugden and Tomlinson (1999, p.387) who distinguished between prolonged forms of ‘depth immersion’ that became characteristic of this research, and more fleeting forms of ‘ethnographic visiting’ which my earliest research encounters reflected.
Finding a role and establishing an identity

To think I would have possession of the keys to the team minibus was mistaken. The driving, along with all things directly to do with cricket, was Coach’s territory and he protected those boundaries strongly. Over the winter (November 2010 – March 2011), I had developed an amiable relationship with Coach but I was still a little cautious around him and I sensed he was a still a bit wary of me too. To try and forge the beginnings of a trusting relationship with him, I had made a concerted effort each week to turn up to training twenty minutes early to catch Coach on his own whilst he prowled around the indoor facility waiting for everyone else to arrive. By doing so, I was manufacturing a window of opportunity to talk to Coach one-to-one without the pressure of other eyes watching. Along with Bob and the rest of the squad, it was critical that I gained Coach’s approval and when it came to this task arriving early was a wise move. It was what he liked to see, which I picked up on quickly every time he reminded his players of their responsibility to not only get to training on-time, but to be ready to begin on-time. Needless to say, I arrived on campus ready to depart for my first trip with the squad in April 2011 with what felt like hours to spare and offered Coach my assistance to do the driving – an offer which was politely, yet quite matter-of-factly, turned down.

With my services behind the wheel having been temporarily declined, I was left having to determine where best it was for me to sit for the journey to come. In deciding upon my whereabouts I had two options: 1) jump in with Coach in the driver’s cabin, or 2) join in with the players in one of the 15 seats available behind him. Out of all the judgement calls ethnographers are required to make over the length of their studies to avoid the many ‘perils’ of field research (see Sudgen, 1997), this may seem a rather trivial one. For me, though, without a visible role or identity as a non-playing member of the fold it represented a minor crossroads that I had to negotiate carefully. In front of the players, I did not want to appear too ‘matey’ with Coach and risk becoming part of the “banter” that was aired in Coach’s direction whilst on the minibus. At the same time, I did not want to appear too ‘matey’ with the players in front of Coach, for I was aware of the
fact that Coach had half an eye on me, and I was keen to gain his utmost trust and respect – not distance myself by becoming embroiled in the antics of players and squad as they looked for ways to combat the boredom brought on by hours of motorway travel. I therefore decided to try and make the best of both worlds. Instead of jumping on first, I held back and let the players bundle on before me to take their places towards the back end of the vehicle. Following their lead, I clambered in after them and onto the two seats left vacant directly behind Coach, and tried my best to settle – aware that I had thirteen sets of eyes staring at the back of my head. I was, however, on the road and extremely pleased to be there.

My dilemma had been centred on trying to avoid becoming affiliated with just one side of a coach-athlete divide. If possible, I wanted to remain neutral rather than having to define precisely ‘whose side’ I was on (Parker, 1996, p.291), and as the minibus incident helps to illustrate, the role and identity of the researcher doing fieldwork is complex and multifaceted. This is due to the different forms of human interaction and social relations ethnography requires the researcher to carry out and maintain (Fleming, 1997). Thus, the potential for role conflict is great, particularly at the beginning of the research process when the ethnographic researcher is focused on building positive relationships and gaining acceptance (see Fleming, 1995; Parker, 1996; Pryce, 1986). Issues of self-presentation and/or preservation are rarely straightforward in the process of fieldworkers negotiating their roles and establishing their identities. Palmer and Thompson (2010, p.435) reflected:

Ethnographic research demands a painstaking sensitivity to explaining who you are and what you are doing in order to gain the trust and confidence of those in the field, and this frequently requires the researcher to adopt multiple roles and identities according to their interactions with gatekeepers and participants alike.

Approaching the situation as I did – sensitive to the risk of relational association – I found a level of compromise. By allowing my seat to be decided for me, I discovered myself in a position where I could easily communicate with both players and Coach, and whilst acting as a go-
between (relaying messages between the players and Coach), I was able to manage both relationships without jeopardising either from the outset.

The minibus, among other places, was a new social environment that I would have to get used to that was qualitatively and experientially different from the backdrop of training and net practice. It was not as if I was completely unfamiliar with the setting that had me sitting in the back of a minibus surrounded by a bunch of sports people of a similar age and inclination. Rather, it was more to do with the fact that I was still finding my feet and learning my trade as an ethnographer (which was not proving easy). A few days earlier, I had had my first taste of what it was like to be in a changing room as a non-player, non-coach and complete nonentity, and it had been awkward – painfully so – throughout the entire three days. The intimacy afforded by the quiet moments and periods of contemplation that come and go during a game of cricket left me looking up at the ceiling or down at the floor not knowing where to fix my gaze. I did not want to just sit there bearing down on everybody, but there was little other place to go. In fact, the arrival of the cricket season thrust me into contact with the group in a manner for which I was totally unprepared. I would be sharing close quarters with them on an almost daily basis for whole days and nights at a time, living and breathing the highs and lows and frequent points of tension. I found myself in motorway service stations, hotels, gyms, and swimming pools, and at dining tables contributing to the atmosphere. Sometimes, I would even find myself sharing bedrooms with players and of course the hospitality of many cricket grounds up and down the country. It was a lot to take in and a lot to get used to from the perspective of an academic researcher, and for a while I walked around totally shell shocked and utterly exhausted.

The strain of participating in field-based research is such that the researcher has to learn to tolerate the stresses associated with another’s way of life (Parker, 1996). But the emotions experienced in the course of research, whether positive or negative, need not be a burden to the researcher’s intellectual activity. Rather, I considered the strain of being ‘on tour’ with the group to be a sign of my developing emotional connectedness
to the cultural practices of the academy that I could use analytically. On
researchers becoming emotionally affected by the processes of doing field
research, Coffey (1999) states that researcher emotionality is not only
entirely normal and appropriate to the task of researching, but a
fundamental feature of well-executed ethnography. For fieldwork (as with
the act of writing) is both physical and emotional work reliant on the
fieldworker drawing on a variety of sensory experiences (Sparkes, 2009).

As my first season with the squad picked up a head of steam, I was
still doing the blogs for Bob but they were behind the scenes and I felt the
need to be more hands-on. That said, I was not going to force the issue. I did
some small jobs like helping Bob to set out practice equipment and training
aids23 on the outfield before the start of a day’s play and help collect bits of
kit at the end of it. Slowly I started to play a more active part in team warm-
ups, but always waited to be invited to join in. With time, I would eventually
share some of the driving with Coach and become routinely involved with
the team’s pre-match rituals including those of the team’s first choice wicket
keeper, Josh, who began to utilise me of his own accord as a sounding-board
and extra pair of hands. I was compliant and always ready and willing to
listen to what he had to say, and he liked that. He loathed people getting in
his ear before the start of a morning’s play advising him on what he should
or should not do to prepare. Rather, all he wanted was to prepare as he saw
fit that merely required someone with a basic set of skills who could throw,
catch and hit cricket balls at his request. All I asked is that he cleared it with
Coach first.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, given our developing relationship, it was
Josh who delivered the news that confirmed I was on the verge (in his eyes
at least) of being accepted. One afternoon while stuck in stationary traffic
between junctions on the M42 he told me that he, along with rest of his
teammates, recognised me first and foremost as a “cricketer” rather than
“some weird anthropologist guy”, and that this distinction was going to be
the key to my success in the long run. The instant he said it I knew his words

23 Cones, plyometric hurdles, resistance bands, cricket balls, baseball mitts, target stumps etc.
had left a mark. Moments like this happen sparingly in the course of fieldwork, but when they do they are so significant that it sets off a feeling inside the researcher that makes one aware that what has just been said or done is an important cog in the greater whole of the research project. It is like getting down on one knee and smashing a ball over the ropes for six. You know that it is a big moment in your innings but just how big is impossible to tell. Nonetheless, the sensation makes you believe that you’re on to a winner.

To add another layer of context to Josh’s words, he was a student reading social policy and together we bonded not only over cricketing matters, but also over our many discussions on social research methods, including ethnography. Unlike most if not all of my other respondents, he displayed, at times, a somewhat unsettling grasp for what I was doing and what I was trying to achieve by hanging around with him and his teammates. In fact, sometimes it felt like he knew more about the processes of ethnographic fieldwork than I did. And, in the same way he started to use me as confidante for some of the reservations he had about becoming a professional cricketer, I began to see him as a friendly and supportive figure. Josh was also a pivotal member of the side in all formats of the game in my first season with the squad, and through his performances and general demeanour he was well respected among his teammates. As a result, I trusted him, his words, and his perceptions of me that were kind and ultimately reassuring. Having established my identity as a “cricketer” and as a person that understood the technicalities and nuances of the game (something that came naturally to me) I was well on my way to adopting the type of role that would add value to the environment and start to aid what I was primarily there to do.

**Fieldwork relationships and data collection**

Part of the challenge of ethnographic research in its primary stages is balancing the time and effort it takes to settle in, find a role and establish some sort of identity, with one’s objectives as a researcher to gather information through the strength of the relationships formed with
individuals and the group. Relationships, however, are not definite. Nor are they particularly stable in the context of this kind of research. The vast majority exist in flux and require careful management, and this is especially true in sporting environments where the pressures to perform, gain results and to be successful are high and frequently aggravated. Whether applied to the ethnographer’s relationship with specific persons or to the collective group, nurturing ‘profitable’ field relations is fundamental to the project of one’s research (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). Not only do they help to secure the researcher’s position among influential cultural members, but healthy relationships also help to foster the quality of interaction that takes place between the parties (Fleming, 1995).

A mistake that I made with regards to the management of fieldwork relations was that once I had developed a working rapport with players and Coach, I dropped my guard. Earlier I mentioned some of the territories that Coach in his role as Head Coach staunchly protected. A reason for this was that, in my opinion, he was visibly wary of people trying to oust him from his job and sole means of making a living. Ingrained within the history of the team were years of squabbling and backbiting that I found myself having to wade through sensibly. Behind the scenes I knew conversations about Coach (and whether he was still ‘fit’ for purpose) were taking place that, without being involved, I could fathom by virtue of just being around the squad. And while all this was going on in the background (and quite often in the foreground) there was me, a young cricket enthusiast that had arrived seemingly out of nowhere trying to get involved and lend a hand with Coach’s team. I was still yet to have taken a share in the driving – part of the deal brokered by Bob that got me on the road in the first place – but I was getting on just fine with Coach until I overstepped the mark.

Part of the issue was that once I became recognised as someone who could throw cricket balls and knock catches up and into the air, players, understandably, began to use me more and more. Where Josh and his pre-performance routines were concerned, I had always asked that Josh cleared our actions with Coach first, and each time Coach quite reasonably permitted them. But with others, as the requests for catches and “throw
downs” came flying in, and out of my own willingness to be of assistance to one and all, the lines of communication between what I was doing, the players, and Coach were lost. So when Coach began to point his finger at players in the changing rooms to put a stop to them deliberately seeking my support following what had been a rather disappointing day’s cricket, I knew that in effect he was pointing his finger at me. He had mentioned nothing of it during the day which confirmed to me that Coach was indeed keeping tabs on my activities, and for a while it shook me up not only because Coach had taken a dim view of my actions, but because my actions had inadvertently got the players into trouble.

One thing that I learnt from this encounter was that Coach was naturally untrusting of people. Years of involvement at professional levels of the game looking over his shoulder with an eye out for the next man coming through had taught him so. It did not help either that in my first year with the team players made a point of telling me all the ‘bad’ things Coach had done during his time as Head Coach that had spanned over a decade, and at one point this thesis could have easily become about the mythology that surrounded him and the team environment. The incident also prompted me to consider my actions more closely, and to reflect on the privileges that had been bestowed upon me. I subsequently decided it was best to take a step back for the benefit of going forward, and take some time to build stronger relations with Coach – taking into account the micro-political scene at the time. From then on I would take nothing for granted and make sure that I was visibly respectful of Coach’s authority and word on the game. It was a move that served me well and the start of what became a trusting relationship with Coach that I would look back on and cherish.

Significant episodes like the one described above, along with many other less rousing occurrences, where reported as soon after the event as possible in my notebook that had on its pages bits of dialogue, description and personal recollection relating to the entire research experience of each day. What I would finish up with was not a neatly sectioned mass of substantive field notes, but a jumbled collection of ramblings that had

---

24 Cricket parlance for batting practice.
methodological reflections and raw ‘data’ entwined. Indeed, quite often I found one could not exist without the other in as much as my role, thoughts, feelings and actions toward the day’s events went hand-in-hand with what actually happened, and how subsequently I began to interpret their relevance to the bigger picture that would start to emerge.

Although often rushed, I wrote up my field notes dutifully every night and found myself constantly frustrated by the fact that what I was able to capture on paper was limited by my ability to ‘write reality’ and all those subtle, ‘intangible’ bits of culture to which Van Maneen (1988) once referred. There was so much that was rich about the players’ experiences to speak for and to write about that, on the one hand, I felt incredibly fortunate to have such an interesting environment to participate in and observe. However, on the other hand, these feelings were somewhat marred by the fact that I felt totally unable to do justice to any of it. Part of me wished for a video camera so that I could go around recording everything as it happened and then think about it later. Note taking and analysis left me feeling tired, for cricket is generally a whole day affair and where the academy’s schedule was concerned, cricketing ‘days’ were often spread across the week and over multiple nights too. Thus, a prolonged stint ‘in the field’ would leave me feeling drained and mentally fatigued in a way that doubtless interfered with my reflections, and I longed for an easy way of doing it. Looking back, I am glad that I did not have one as by using the rudimentary and arduous practice of putting pen to paper, I was forced to absorb each and every moment as it happened, and as a result those moments marked themselves on my memory in a way that was easy for me to recall, and in a fashion that compelled me to go back to them. I tried the ‘talking into a Dictaphone’ method once, but found the whole experience too peculiar to carry on with, particularly as I was without another person to interact with and often without a private and convenient space to do it. Instead, I relied on the ‘discipline of daily writing’ as a way of recording my observations and preventing them from fading from my memory (Hammersely and Atkinson, 2007, p.144).
Towards the end of my first season in the field, and for the rest of my time with the academy, I did, however, start making better use of technologies. As with all intellectual ‘crafts’, note taking is a skill that needs to be worked on and developed (Emerson, Fretz and Shaw, 2007), and in trying to perfect it my iPhone became a revelation to me. Not only did it have voice recording facilities that I could use (still overtly but less intrusively than a Dictaphone) when casual conversation became interesting, but through its other applications I could use it as means of tapping down notes quickly and more discreetly. It is not uncommon to have a mobile phone, but few people walk around with a notebook, and not only did players have mobile phones, but they loved using them to keep in touch with the world whilst they were stuck out on a limb playing cricket. Consequently, what I was doing ‘playing’ on my phone all the time was nothing out of the ordinary. However, to be seen sat in a corner, or walking around a boundary with a notebook in hand was, and it drew unwanted attention.

With the use of my iPhone I managed to counteract and cover-up some of the patent curiosity that goes with ethnographic fieldwork, and what I would eventually end up with by using this technique was a chronology of the day that I could later upload onto my personal laptop and add detail at home or in the sanctuary of my hotel bedroom. It was ultimately extremely productive, and by using my iPhone to record information it also helped to ease some of the strain caused by being a participant and a researcher all in one go (Pryce, 1986). I could keep my phone in my pocket whilst larking around with the players and take it out as soon as I felt the need to. It also enabled me to capture far more information than I could have using a notebook. Whereas pencil and paper limited appreciably the scope of recording ‘on-the-go’, this crafty bit of kit did not. Inevitably, this meant working late into the night to transform on-the-spot speeches and verbatim remarks into something that resembled the day. The downside of this was that the more I was capable of capturing, the more I wanted to capture leaving me feeling like I was constantly trying to catch-up
as I made the error of striving to turn myself into the all-seeing, all-hearing ethnographer.

Even with the use of an iPhone that allowed me to record information almost instantaneously, I had to rely heavily on memory in order to write down bits of conversation as it happened or soon after it took place – something at which I felt I became amazingly proficient. I also believe, like Pryce (1986, p.299), that most of the information that I recorded in this way is ‘fairly accurate’ and ‘if not accurate word-for-word, accurate in tone, flavour and in the emotions expressed’. Supplemented by overt, digital voice recordings of field-based conversations the majority of the material presented in this thesis is the product of such memory work and the wider processes of ethnographic fieldwork that involved me immersing myself in the ways of the group and amassing layer upon layer of observational insight through months of repetition and routine.

A note on ethics

Melding one’s research into the background to become part of the cultural scene is an inherent part of the ethnographic process even when that process is conducted strictly overtly (Wheaton, 1997). Indeed, it might be beneficial to consider ethnographic research to exist on a continuum that conjoins the ethnographer’s movement from outsider to insider with the decreasing ‘visibility’ of his or her research actions. In other words, as the researcher starts to pick up more roles and responsibilities and moves closer to the ‘inside’ of his or her researched group, the actual processes of doing research begin to fade. This transition from outsider to insider that simultaneously begins to mask the researcher’s activities is likely to be aided when the ethnographer is of a similar age, gender, nationality, class and ethnicity of those he or she studies. In my case, this was further assisted by the ‘identity’ to which I played up to in order to impose myself as ‘an insider to the context’ (see Dandelion, 1997) and to ensure that I was never perceived to be completely out of place.

Although unquestionably beneficial to this research, ethically speaking melding oneself into the background is problematic, as is the vast
majority of the ethnographer’s fieldwork that is largely performed in an ambiguous and unregulated fashion (Wheaton, 1997). Accompanying the researcher’s ‘insider status’ is the blurring of the professional boundaries that might otherwise discourage people from being so open. Previously, I highlighted how I wanted to ‘drop barriers, not create them’, and create a persona that made my research appear less ‘formal’ in a deliberate attempt to befriend the group and gain access to the person. To this end, Tomlinson (1997) has made note of the flattery that takes place in the complex social dynamic between researcher and the subjects of his or her research, and calls for pragmatism in resolving what is deemed acceptable in the course of blurring boundaries for the sake of accessing critical issues. Without them, it is easy for ethnographers to start to believe that nothing is off limits and that everything is relevant to the greater good of their research. So, when it came to negotiating the inter-personal complexities brought on by the processes of ethnographic fieldwork, the ethical principle of ‘McFees’s friends’ served as a useful point of departure (Fleming, 2013, p.39). The principle, according to Fleming (2013) is an uncomplicated one and works on the notion that researchers should treat their research participants in a spirit of friendship based on concern for the well-being of others. Thus, it became my objective to behave (at all times) with compassion and sensitivity, honesty and integrity, and display within my conduct and personal demeanour a level of respect, admiration and appreciation towards Coach, his players and the academy environment.

Related to the notion of ethnographers disguising their research and befriending for the purpose of gathering data, is what constitutes public and private knowledge in the event of finding something out (Sands, 2002). Indeed, there were a number of occasions when I would catch myself ‘eavesdropping’ on conversations of which I was not a part. It is an unavoidable part of just hanging around, watching, listening and being alert to what is unfolding, which once had me accused by Connor of being a “sly bastard” whilst I loitered (quite uneasily) next to two of his teammates in discussion. The accusation was tongue-in-cheek, but it was enough to make me reflect on how some of my actions could be perceived.
The most regrettable incident where the private became public took place whilst I was sitting next to a player in the driver’s cabin of the minibus. Coach was forever leaving piles of personal documentation lying around and on this occasion the player in question took it upon himself to rummage through one of the mounds of paper on the dashboard. They were documents that may well have been interesting to read, but documents in which I had no interest. Nonetheless, with Coach out of the way, the player proceeded to talk me through them in what he perceived to be harmless fun between friends. I told him to stop and reminded him of my position as a researcher but it was too late. He had informed me of matters relating to Coach’s personal life that I would have preferred not to know. But I was now in possession of that knowledge, and I could do nothing about it.

Another ethical tension triggered by this encounter was that when I asked the player to stop, and explained the reason why, he still could not see anything wrong with it. Perhaps this was my fault for reasons of ‘friendship’ described above, but it may also have had something to do with the fact that he had very little sense of what my research was actually about – even at this late stage. Declaration of research intent is another ambiguous area of the ethnographic approach due to its methodological foundations in a philosophy of naturalism25 (Brewer, 2000). As Corrigan (1979) highlighted, ethnographic research does not necessarily begin with a set of well-formulated aims, hypotheses and objectives. Instead the researcher often goes in with a set of perspectives on the world and comes out wearing a new set of lenses as a result of his or her engagement with real people in real settings. The evolution of my research title is a case in point (see Appendix C) and describes the personal journey I made in the course of the research which was intimately connected to the process of ethnographic enquiry that sees the researcher become ‘part of the research situation’, and both affect it, and become affected by it in both a physical and more abstract sense (Fleming, 1995, p.52). Consequently, it becomes difficult to predict the

---

25 Brewer (2000) went as far as to say that ethnography is research that abandons natural science models of research practice in favour of understanding naturally occurring behaviour in its own terms.
precise nature and direction an ethnographic study will take if the researcher allows emergent themes and conceptual issues to rise from the people and context at the centre of his or her study.

In assessment of the potential risks associated with this mode of mutual research involvement, ethical clearance was sought from the University's Ethics Committee prior to the start of fieldwork, and granted on the basis of a proposal that set out my research interests and how I planned to address them. Clearance was also approved under the stipulation that I a) carried out the research overtly, and b) gained informed consent from the persons that would be subjected to research (see Appendix D). During the research's undertaking, I received a total of thirty-one signed consent forms that accounted for all affiliated squad members (players plus supporting figures like Coach) over the two university cricket seasons I spent connected with the day-to-day running of the academy. Their consent permitted my activities as an ethnographic researcher to observe and record information and to write, as players and Coach would say, “your book H”. Apart from the method of study to which individuals were specifically consenting, the exact research topic, however, changed as my research interests shifted towards a problem that seemed to enfold the group.

Furthering the discussion on some of the ethical issues that surround informed consent, Mellick and Fleming (2010) highlight the possibility for any number of individuals to enter into the researcher's field of vision whilst engaged in ethnographic forms of enquiry. Indeed, the thirty-one individuals who gave their consent for me to join in with and write about their lives were a mere fraction of the people that I encountered whilst researching; people who may have directly or indirectly influenced the direction of the research at any given point in time. Moreover, when it came to players describing their experiences as student-cricketers and as young men they would regularly refer to people who existed outside of the research context, but whose stories became relevant to the themes raised within this thesis. Both these issues came to light as a by-product of ‘normal’, day-to-day interaction and thus entered into a research arrangement that could not be governed by any absolute rules. Rather, it became a requirement of the
processes of ethnographic fieldwork that I monitored my actions reflexively and solicited advice where necessary. This also applied to issues of anonymity and disclosure that inevitably become compromised as a consequence of the biographical and/or contextual information contained within rich narrative accounts. The issue is complex, and can often lack a straightforward resolution especially when individual and group identities become deducible from an aggregation of details central to the research report (Mellick and Fleming, 2010). Like many ethical considerations, the problem of anonymity relies on ‘good’ judgement and as a guide to ‘good’ practice, alongside the concept of ‘McFee’s friends’ (Fleming, 2013), I chose to follow the views Hammersley and Atkinson (2007, p.225) have shared with many others (see Fleming 1995, 1997; Fetterman; 1989; Parker, 1996; Pryce, 1986; Sands, 2002; Sugden, 1997, 2002; Willis, 1978; 2000), in that:

...Ethnographers must weigh the importance and contribution of their research against the chances and scale of any harm that is likely to be caused (to the people involved, to others, or to future access), against the values of honesty and fairness, against any infringement of privacy involved, and against any likely consequences for themselves and other researchers. But this must be done on the basis of a realistic view of human relations, not an idealised one; and there will be conflicting indications, difficult judgements, and probably disagreements. Ethical issues are not matters on which simple and consensual decisions can always be made.

To complete the picture of fieldwork that I have so far tried to create, there is one final comment I wish to make that concerns the betrayals that necessarily follow the flattery that begins the ethnographer’s passage of immersion, and the sense of guilt I felt as a result when I began to negotiate my exit from the field. They were feelings that were sparked by a conversation I had with Bob as we walked a boundary’s edge one summer’s afternoon. He wanted to check my sizes for next season’s training kit. The tracksuit trousers had always come up a bit short – nothing that I was not used to – and he wanted to see if he could do something about it. So I told him of my plans, and he seemed surprised and disappointed. My constant presence over the preceding months and weeks had left the impression that
it was going to continue, and it got me thinking. By that point I was a fully integrated and operational member of the team and for a high proportion of the players, all they knew of the academy involved me in it. Through their acceptance of me, I had turned myself into an intrinsic part of their student-cricket experiences, playing a hand in their cricketing and personal development, and now I was planning on stepping away. In other words, I had got what I needed and was ready to enter the next phase of the research exercise. Whether it was through lending an ear, or offering a word or two of advice, I had been contributing which was reflected in the poignancy that attended the last time I helped pack away the practise equipment that lay strewn across the outfield after two years of following the team's every move. My time experiencing what they experienced was up and saw me departing from my role within a field of cultural practice with the responsibility of placing it all together.

**Deskwork: The Product**

**From field to desk**

Withdrawing from my position in the field was not an entirely clean break. In fact, the transition was somewhat tapered with communications carried forward into the following university year before gradually phasing out. For a number of players I remained part of their lives as a point of contact that they could access via text message or phone call, and I enjoyed catching up with them whenever I could to receive some of the inside track. It was a credit to the authenticity of our relationships that they were maintained in this way and whilst acting as an outlet for them, I was provided with an alternative perspective on some of the storylines that continued to take shape from inside the group. Big changes were afoot, and out of intrigue and personal attachment I kept my ear close to the ground as a new influx of players entered the fold and preparations got under way in anticipation for another Championship season, and round of first-class fixtures.

It was during this period that I heard that Coach had lost his job. I elicit this point not to cast judgement, but in order to draw attention to the
circumstances that surround the task of writing, constructing analyses, recreating scenes, developing characters and transposing lived experiences into representations that live within the text. In the conversations I would have with a number of Coach’s former players after the event, I was taken by the fondness with which they spoke of him and reminisced about this time or that, which was so often concealed or completely forgotten about when cricketing passions ran in the way of how people otherwise felt. His sudden departure, however, brought about a change in the attitudes displayed towards him that helped endorse my suspicion that in the working relationship that exists between coach and athlete, leader and apostle, polarity and difference of opinion is often a function of the relationship, not necessarily a dysfunction. There was little doubt that, at times, Coach was a difficult character to get along with, but of greater significance to the young lives he directed was what his life represented. Indeed from the standpoint of the aspiring professional cricketer, Coach’s exit added another layer of symbolism to the narrative that identified him as a man who had spent his life in cricket and whose fortunes and life-chances had been governed by the game around which he constructed his identity.

If Coach losing his job served any purpose to the body of research presented in this thesis, it vindicated his role and characterisation within the story I was in the midst of collating, which connected his life to the questions of cricket, self, identity and commitment asked by players of the group. In my new role as writer, I would continue to come across Coach – as I did a number of the academy players – at local cricket clubs and matches and interact with him in the way we had both got used to. I was, however, now assuming a position of control over the research process that I had lacked up until this point. The research had always been partly dictated by what unfolded in the course of fieldwork, and it was whilst engaged in fieldwork that the research problem, and its associate themes, had started to emerge. Now I was at a distance from it all. Instead of being led by the day-to-day activities of the team, I found myself in a position where I was beginning to select which aspects of the university cricket experience were most salient to the critical issue I wished to discern.
Like all the decisions made in the practice of ethnographic research, it involved a level of systematic subjectivity in choosing fragments of personal and collective experience that could be used to convey an image of the greater whole. It would, however, be disingenuous to suggest that they were decisions I made exclusively from my desk, for these were decisions that were based on the partially formed analyses that ran inside the pages of my field notes and in connection with my own personal and intellectual development. Hence they were decisions that involved refining the layers of the image rather than creating it from scratch. And so, in reference to the preceding description, my transition from field to desk was marked by three interrelated components. First, it involved the adoption of a new role that returned me to the position of an outsider, with insider knowledge and connections. Accompanying this change in role, I encountered a shift in power from having to follow the twists and turns of fieldwork, to having the self-determination to choose which aspects of a cultural experience I wished to share. And finally, my movement from fieldworker to desk-worker incorporated the start of the writing process and the production of the ethnographic text.

Writing and analysis

When it comes to the analysis and write-up of ethnographic data, the process of transforming field notes and interview transcripts into theoretical informed interpretations has been described within the literature as one that consists of no standardised procedures or protocols (Hammersely and Atkinson, 2007; Rock, 2007). Rather, the manner in which the ethnographer attempts to make sense of his or her ‘data’ is often portrayed as something that is uniquely personal (see Walford, 2002), shaped by the embodied experience (Coffey, 1999), time pressures and practical constraints of ethnographic research (Parker, 1998). The process is, nonetheless, underpinned by the general need to get to know one’s data, and to identify salient aspects of group-life expressed within the materials captured. It is a process that begins as soon as the researcher enters the field and continues throughout the reminder of the investigation as a complex
mix of recorded information is steadily categorised and compressed, drafted and redrafted into a textual product full of ‘ethnographic verve’ (Parker, 2002, p. 128).

Understanding data analysis as an on-going rather than a discrete stage of the research process helps to locate its contribution to the decisions researchers make both in and out of the field. According to Rock (2007), the process of data analysis in the early and middle stages of fieldwork is not unlike trying to construct a jigsaw whose final design and configuration changes with each piece found. Rock (2007) goes on to suggest that the search for each succeeding piece is then adjusted in accordance with the cumulative image of the research environment that starts to emerge. In other words, the continual cycle of collecting, analysing and reflecting on one’s data imparts a direct influence on the cycle that follows, as preliminary ideas and analytical hunches open up lines of inquiry for the researcher to select and pursue (Hamersley and Atkinson, 2007).

To place the relationship between data collection and analysis into perspective, during fieldwork, as information was gathered from field-based observations and recorded conversations, data were transcribed and reflected upon simultaneously, and its content analysed for its standout out features (Parker, 1996, 2002). In relation to the transcription of recorded conversations specifically, contextual descriptions were embedded into the body of the text to depict the tone and setting of the conversation, and to couch verbatim remarks into a growing history of events. Transcription, whether in relation to the write-up of field notes or recorded field-based conversations, was an important step in getting close to the data that helped enhance my familiarity with the words and instances reported. As well as helping to reinforce what I had come to know, it also helped to highlight any gaps in my knowledge that needed to be filled in order to turn speculative inferences into evidence-based interpretations. Much like the compilation and write-up of field notes, the monotonous task of listening back and typing out a conversation verbatim was one that would set in motion a cascade of thoughts, feelings and ideas about the data that would be noted down in a series of ‘comment-boxes’ that would develop in the right-hand
margin of the page. Alongside ideas etched on Post-It notes and mind-maps, they represented the ‘sparks of understanding’ (Rock, 2007) that would drive data collection forward. Furthermore, they marked the beginning of organising categories and more concrete conceptual analyses that would be developed in accordance with new information, and refined and enhanced through the creative act of writing (Atkinson, 1990; Walcott, 1995). In this sense, writing represented a secondary analytical phase that was responsible for transforming my experiences and understanding of a social world into chunks of ethnographic prose.

Although the act of writing in itself followed no distinct methodological routine, the analytical process of producing a narrative rich in data and grounded in social theory consisted of:

1) Segmenting fieldwork experiences into some broad themes (chapter titles);
2) Identifying some key sensitising concepts (subtitles) from passages of field-notes and interview transcript;
3) Ordering large sections of raw material according to their meaning and relationship to each other and the general theme of the chapter under construction;
4) Consulting the work of others whilst continuing to dwell in the data and the nature of my fieldwork experiences to distil the central thread holding the thesis together.

Of course, in reality, the process was a little messier than the four-stages depicted. Drafts of chapters were produced and concepts remodelled according to the ways they would develop in the dual process of reviewing the literature and putting pen to paper. Quite often, it was in the time-lapse between the drafting and re-drafting of a chapter where its constitutive themes and analytical threads would develop the most. Despite being connected, each chapter was written as an independent event. Consequently, in their construction, each chapter took on a character of its own as I read around the topics and issues raised within the data and
continued to burrow down towards the core the research problem. Subsequent redrafting was therefore influenced by the analytical progress made during the drafting of each new chapter, as well as the contact that continued with members of the cultural group.

Staying in touch with the academy context through players and Coach was of benefit to the writing process in a number of ways. Indeed, as I embarked on the solitary and introspective enterprise of writing, crossing paths or arranging the occasional coffee with a player or two helped maintain a sense of realness to the people and lives I was in the process of portraying. Verbal and physical contact ensured that these persons and the persons they represented did not just become figments of my imagination – although memory was a continuous analytical and emotive resource. Instead, I tried to remain communicatively and emotionally attached to the fortunes of individuals and group as I sat at my desk describing the events of fieldwork a world apart from the time and place in which they happened. It was whilst in the process of trying to analyse and reconstruct these events that I realised it was the context in which words were spoken or actions taken, that provided them with their meaning; meaning which otherwise had to be artificially applied through stylistic, evidentiary and argumentative choices made in the act of writing (Atkinson, 1990). During the writing phase of this programme of research, I would be lying if I said I did not pine to be back among the fold, dedicating my life to the academy’s cricketing schedule, and feeling as I had once felt at the time of a conversation’s recording. For at the time of documentation, note taking was as much about the embodied sensations that had alerted my interests as it was about serenely collecting one’s thoughts.26

With empathy and shared experience part of the methodological rigour of this type of research (Willis, 1978), I should therefore admit to feeling, on occasions, a little emotionally cut-off while I set about assembling data into a textual representation of the academy, in the knowledge that the team were somewhere far away without me. One of the most surreal moments came when I found myself typing away with one eye on the

26 See Coffey (1999) for a discussion on ethnography as emotionally ‘embodied’ work.
television watching a young bowler get through his overs on his way to a five-wicket haul, in his debut Championship game for his county. The young bowler in question was ‘George’ and there I was, including him in my writing under a pseudonym, reflecting on a time gone past, and imagining that I was still sharing in his experiences. Instead, there he was, at the start of his professional career, continuing to share his experiences with me only this time through the virtual medium of a television screen.

George was a success story whose life had moved on considerably from the period I was in the midst of depicting. The separation was symbolic of the gap between the past and the present that I was constantly trying to bridge each time I looked back at my field notes with a fresh set of perspectives and biases. Although largely an unsocial exercise, writing does not take place in a vacuum. That said, having George performing in front of me on a television screen could not hide the fact that I was there on my own and completely detached from the cultural context that gave birth to our relationship. Fieldwork naturally involves ‘people work’ and through the relational nature of the activity ideas and impressions of what is unfolding are formed on the spot, and in the dialectic between researcher and the researched. In this sense, fieldwork is a collaborative venture. The project of writing, however, is less so. Instead, what is conceived in the field and in the course of interaction between two or more people is left in the hands/head of the researcher to mould, mesh, analyse and transform to illustrate a set of concepts.

In conjunction with the literary devices ethnographers use in order to ‘transform’ qualitative data, the separation between process and product is problematic with the production of the ethnographic text having been widely criticised and deconstructed for what exists within its creation. The danger, according to Agar (1995), is that in striving to produce the cultural scene that once housed the data, the process and product of ethnography can lose their connection. In other words, what is written and presented around the data no longer reflects the circumstances in which it was collected. To this end, Agar (1995) argued that it should be the content and structure of the material world that drives its textual form otherwise one is
at risk of contradicting ethnography's fundamental claim to report real people, doing real things.

Regarding some of the tensions and controversies that surround ethnography's representation, Van Maanen (1988, 1995) has been an eminent voice in the interpretation and appreciation of the ethnographic craft, and the 'imagination' and 'creativity' that is required to turn aspects of 'culture' into plausible forms of reality. In the opening pages of his edited book, *Representation in Ethnography* (1995), he quotes, somewhat ironically, one of the twentieth century pioneers of the ethnographic method Branislaw Malinowski (1922) who once asked, 'what is this ethnographer's magic, by which he is able to evoke the real spirits of the natives, the true picture of tribal life?' The words of Malinowski illuminate an epistemological position that once framed ethnography as a 'relatively simple look, listen and learn procedure' that is no longer so innocently accepted (Van Maanen, 1995, p.2). Along with others such as Paul Atkinson (1990), Van Maanen (1988, 1995) has endorsed a heightened awareness of the ethnographic text that goes beyond a traditional, positivist epistemology of a straightforward cultural description based on first-hand experience, to a textual construction of reality that represents more than the mere reproduction of emic perspectives (Atkinson, 1990; Walcott, 1995).

Such critiques have brought questions over 'style' and 'genre' to the fore of the academic discourse that encircles 'contemporary ethnography' with which for a while, I became preoccupied. Indeed, I began to fixate over how my work might be categorised as a 'product' and criticised accordingly, but as Pryce (1989, p.285) reflected, there is no exact 'blueprint' that the ethnographer can follow, and if one is to follow Agar's (1995) stance and allow the captured, evidential material to dictate its representational form, each ethnographic text *should*, theoretically, be different. And so, I decided to settle on a style that came naturally to me and one that principally fitted the data collected. By this I mean the representational 'genre' matched the style in which my field notes were written and the content they expressed. I purposefully wanted to maintain some of the senses that accompanied fieldwork and the emotionality that formed part of the players' experiences.
as cricketers and as young men striving to become something. Furthermore, I wanted to ensure that I maintained a trace of myself as the interpretive instrument within the text, and continue to engage my subjectivities within the research process rather than start to disguise them.

The epistemological foundations of my chosen research approach are rooted in principle two of Wright Mills' (1959, p.14) sociological imagination that distinguishes the relationship between ‘personal troubles’ and ‘public issues’ that transcend the inner life of the individual and his or her local context, to form part of the structure of social life. That is to say, the interpretative method used in the course of this study involved me, the researcher, recognising and being able to relate to the personal troubles expressed by a group of student-cricketers in the context of a university cricket academy, and connecting them intellectually to a wider social and historical frame of reference. This self-reflexive technique is based on the researcher's ability to 'analyse the intersection of his own social paradigms with those of the people he wishes to understand', and how ‘his own experience is minutely locked into another’s’ (Willis, 1978, p.197). Consequently, alongside relevant theoretical interludes, I continue to appear within the remaining chapters of this thesis not, I hope, to detract from the voices of the group, but to make explicit my voice among theirs and to more accurately reflect the analytical passage I followed.

Before moving on to examine the transitional experiences of the student-cricketers I studied, the following chapter offers a biographical case-study of Coach and the narrative around which he constructed his identity. The rationale for this is threefold:

1) As gatekeeper to the academy environment, my relationship with Coach was central to my longevity in the field. Thus, it was a relationship in which I invested heavily, influencing the data gathered, and the themes that would start to emerge;

2) As a former professional player, umpire and county coach, he represented a man who had devoted his life to the game which
players came to recognise in their personal assessments of the risks associated with committing their lives to cricket;

3) Through his role as head coach, his influence over the academy environment formed a central feature of players’ cricketing socialisation as they came into contact with Coach’s ‘lived’ understanding for what it meant to be a professional cricketer.

Drawing on relevant literature, Chapter 3 provides an account of Coach’s symbolism that formed part of cultural discourse that enfolded the group. In this sense, Chapter 3, *Mr Cricket: The Story of a Cricketing Aficionado*, provides an important and relevant point of departure for the discussions on identity-exploration and youth transition that follow in the remainder of the thesis.
CHAPTER 3

Mr Cricket

The Story of a Cricket Aficionado

To have a career as a professional sports person is often considered an alluring prospect, glamorised by the ‘rags-to-riches’ story promoted within popular media (McGillivray, Fearn and McIntosh, 2005; McGillivray and McIntosh, 2006). Yet the career path has been considered a ‘precarious’ one with a reality of it lying in the experiences of those who never reached fame or fortune (Roderick, 2006). Nevertheless, even for those who never quite ‘made it’ sport is likely to have demanded a level of personal investment and sacrifice inhibiting development in other life-domains. It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that given sport’s ‘disabling qualities’ many post-career athletes seek positions related to their careers as ex-performers. Coaching is one such example, aided by the common (mis)conception that a career as a professional sports person equips the individual with the necessary ‘insider-knowledge’ to train and socialise the next generation.

It was never my intention to study Coach, but the topic of Coach was one I could not ignore given his tendency to divide opinion. Emerging as a man entrenched by his own cricketing self-narrative, there was a certain amount of controversy that followed him in his wake. Descriptions of him as a “bully” with a “heart of gold” who only “cared about himself” were but a few of the befuddling mix of assertions claiming to speak for Coach’s essential character that were offered to me as warnings for what I should expect to uncover, before I had ever had the chance to get to know him properly. With time I would learn that many statements purporting to divulge the ‘real’ Coach were just part of a series of public myths that surrounded him and which his antagonists saw fit for me to believe. Indeed, they were stories that presented direct challenges to the coherence of Coach’s personal identity-story that he constructed in preservation of his authenticity and authority.
In order to arrive at this conclusion, however, I would have to sift my way through versions of Coach that often went beyond verification, but were nonetheless treated as a form of cultural reality. Endorsing my suspicions, a player once informed me, “None of that shit’s confirmed mate...” as we caught up over coffee. Josh was about to enter his final year with the academy and was thus fully versed in the mythology that encircled Coach.

No one has ever been like ‘Yeah, I was definitely there, it happened!’ Like when he supposedly reversed into a car door, and then tells the guy whose car it was to mind his own business – no one actually confirms that shit.

(Field notes, 26. 10. 2013)

Josh laughed as he reflected. Tales about Coach often contained a comic twist for it helped in their sale for mass consumption as part of a process of myth making and caricaturing that became a measure of the social tissue that bound the group. Indeed, throughout my time in the field a caricature of Coach would emerge consisting of a string of parodied phrases and imitations used to undermine his legitimacy.

Amidst all this, it was easy to lose sight of Coach’s symbolic value as a former professional cricketer whose life in the game had been anything but a fairy-tale. Talking to me about his adjustment to the social environment as player and captain at the start of his university degree, Chris, the only former professional cricketer, other than Coach, to have been involved in the academy during my time with the set-up, told me how hard he found it to be around “some of the boys” at times when they used to mock fellow players, and rubbish Coach as if they were “already professional cricketers”:

Just little things like that irritated me, especially the way they had a go at Coach and stuff – despite the amount of respect he should really deserve. And yet they talk about him as though he’s a moron who knows nothing about the game of cricket. He’s someone at the end of the day who has played county cricket, you know what I mean? They had no sort of grounds to be making comments like they did. What I’m trying to say is that he’s got a lot of experience hasn’t he? I’m not saying what he does with the boys is always right, because it is boring some of it, but I don’t think it’s right to be shouting stuff about him and
slagging him off. They probably don’t realise what he has done in the game...

(Field notes, 9. 11. 2012)

I could have written any number of stories about Coach such was the depth of discussion and contradiction that accompanied his every move. Having established him as a figure of importance, it became just a question of which direction I wished to follow in the broader context of an evolving research project. That is to say, I would have to start to dismantle some of the identity-myths that avowed to represent him in my own construction and understanding of Coach, and decide from a position of empathy, which ‘Coach’ was important to my analysis and appreciation of the experiences of a group of young men being guided by his jurisdiction.

If there was one thing that stood out about Coach, it was his ardent mistrust of cricket that revealed itself whenever he spoke of the “revolving wheel” to which a cricketer’s career is exposed. For there was nothing ‘rose-tinted’ about his reflections on the nature of a career in professional sport. “You’ve got to be careful you see Harry…” he would say to me on his way to expressing the dangers of “wasting years” trying to find a role in cricket as a modest county professional. “In the end those years spent trying have got to mean something. You can’t just stand back and let cricket use you…” for as far as Coach was concerned, there was nothing worse than being a county cricketer “and not quite being good enough.”

Taken from his experiences of a lifetime spent in cricket as player, umpire and coach, it was through these biographical extracts that I would begin to unravel Coach’s symbolic-identity as a constant reminder of the ‘journeyman’ cricketer, whose adoption and internalisation of the game’s ‘professionalised’ values had guided not only a career, but a series of life-choices. Wedded to the game, cricket was inscribed within the self-concept that Coach conveyed through a cricketing persona that contained within its narrative both a sense of pride and regret for his passion.
Narrative, Identity and the Unravelling of a Cricketing Persona

I remember batting here one year with Bernard Hedges right at the end of his career. It was a beautiful day – you had marquees all around there look, lots of people around the place. I came in about 10 past 3, and I batted for a while, struck a few boundaries, played nicely, and it was about 10 minutes before tea when Bernard comes up to me at the end of an over and says...

Coach steps in towards me re-enacting the moment.

... ‘I’m a bit knackered’. Old bloke he was – 39 Bernard at the time. ‘I’m going to have a bit of a breather’ he said. ‘I’m going to push it back and forward to mid-off until teatime and between now and then I’m not bothered about scoring any runs really…’ He was about 70 or 80 not-out, and I was thinking ‘what is he talking about?’ Anyway, there was me crash, bang, woomppffff, out, gone, caught, thank you very much ten minutes before tea! And there was Bernard continuing to play gently, just pushing it back down the pitch and around here look, like that you see, and he comes in at tea and he says to me ‘you daft fucker! What did you do that for?’ he said. ‘I told you what I was going to do, why didn’t you just do the same?’ I didn’t give it a thought you know! I just thought it was Bernard being a bit grumpy. Anyway, he comes in has a shower – nice showers in those days – has a cup of tea and a few sandwiches, goes back out and gets 185 not-out by the close of play. And there was me see, sat in there look, on my arse, right there! It was a wonderful 18 I scored...

(Field notes, 30.5.2012)

In the fading light, I stood amidst the scene of Coach’s monologue looking over towards the pavilion where he had once sat in contemplation. It was 8.45pm on the eve of the next fixture, and I had decided to accompany Coach on his routine surveillance trip that he performed as part of his pre-match ritual. Standing next to the covered wicket, Coach looked relaxed as he absorbed his surroundings, analysing it for the following day’s play. “Big field this. Strange shape isn’t it? Hard to defend. Plenty of ones on offer here look...” he said, pointing out the imaginary gaps in the field. A cold, blustery wind swept across the outfield. “I bet it can get cold playing down here...?” I say, in response to the chill in the air. “We had soup brought out to us one year when I played. Old Del-boy28 – he’ll be down here tomorrow!” I

---

27 Former first-class cricketer of the early 1950s to late 1960s.
28 A nickname used by Coach in reference to the cricket ground’s former curator
watched and listened as Coach continued to study the playing area in the context of his hypotheses.

“67 I played my first game here... we set them 310 to win. They got 300 in the end. High scoring game it was...” he said, reflecting on a moment once lived.

“I played my first game here in 2007...” came a voice standing alongside Coach. It was Ryan, a recent member of the squad who’d joined us on the scouting expedition.

“Did you... so that makes it 40 years difference?! 40 years eh...” Out of the silence that followed, Coach continued. “...A bit of thinking needs to go on at this ground doesn’t it, mind. Nothing magic! What do you think? Big boundaries aren’t they? Big there look, big there, big there...” Coach reiterated, returning to his commentary as he turned a full 360 degrees. “...Anyone who gets caught on the boundary tomorrow should be beheaded in the tower!”

I looked out over the city skyline in the direction Coach was pointing. “I know a guy who used to play for Devon right. He scored a hundred one year in a limited overs game without hitting a boundary. Some effort that isn’t it! He did it against Leicestershire. Amazing really – fancy the ball never going over the boundary...!” Ryan and I looked at each other with a hint of disbelief, but in the pattern of Coach’s rumination there was a message Coach was trying to impart – for a batsman, if you get in, listen, make your chances count, and avoid making the same mistakes that he had.

From here, the three of us headed back towards the team hotel stopping off for a drink in the Gardeners Arms on the way. The next hour was as enjoyable an hour as I had spent with Coach in the two seasons travelling with the team. Ryan and I listened as Coach spoke fervently about the “good old days” of professional cricket when the game was a more “sociable pursuit” where players helped and supported each other, and learned to play the game in the bar, over a drink, alongside the opposition. The topics of Coach’s self-narration formed essential parts of his cricketing persona that he communicated daily in the context of his relational setting.
In the modern world in which we live, identity is said to be a ‘life story’ (McAdams, 1993; McLoed, 1997). To supporters of narrative theory, the uniquely personal stories that people tell about themselves serve more than a narcissistic function. Instead, stories are thought to operate in a self-organising fashion to scaffold interpersonal and private experiences in the making and remaking of the self. Indeed, narratives of self have been defined by Giddens (1991) as the stories by means of which self-identity is reflexively made and understood, both by the individual concerned and by others. To this end, McAdams (1993) postulates that in order to find out about a person you must first listen to their story, for their story defines their identity, and their identity defines what is meaningful in their life that, when applied to Coach, was plain for everyone to see.

Through gritted teeth, I would catch Coach in the rear view mirror muttering to himself as he stared, transfixed to the road ahead through glazed, steely eyes. This was the regular view I would get from my seat behind the driver’s cabin during journeys to and from cricketing destinations. “Play straight” I would read from his lips, his hand gestures confirming my interpretation. Motorways can be tiresome at the best of times – especially if you have spent much of your working life following a set of familiar routes. The odd word to one’s self to fight the boredom was quite acceptable in my eyes for it could be lonely up there behind the wheel, separated from the rest of the travelling party. I knew this from experience, not that it would appear to bother Coach who often portrayed quite a lonely figure among the collective.

I would continue to watch in fascination, as Coach would slowly lock himself into conversation, his actions animating his silent words. “Cricket scores please H”, he would ask, suddenly, breaking himself away from his internal dialogue. I would look to my phone and fill him in with the latest details from around the county grounds, his ear holding out for reports on the county he served throughout his playing days. “Who got the runs please?” One-by-one, I would read out the batsmen’s scores. “And the wickets?” I would repeat the exercise this time for the bowlers’ figures. Invariably, the news would be followed by a resigned “tut” and with a shake
of his head, Coach would return to his personal monologue, but before long he would be engaging me once more.

“So come on then, tell me. You’re more qualified than me. What is it about Manchester United that makes them so successful? What does Sir Alex do that other coaches don’t do?”

“Good question... Can you really put it down to one thing?” “I’d reply, buying myself some time to think of a plausible response.

“No, I suppose you can’t really. Mind you, he must be doing something that others aren’t doing. What I don’t understand Harry is why cricket can’t learn more from blokes and teams like that...?”

And so the conversation would continue, in the acoustics of the oncoming traffic, on trying to whittle down the finite variables that determine success in elite sport. I was happy to play my part in a conversation we would had many times before. I understood that winning and success were important topics for Coach, whose career had depended on them. “There’s only one certainty in cricket H”, he’d make sure to remind me whenever we started to converse about the game or the future of one of his players in it. “...And that’s one day you’ll get the sack!” I’d chuckle nervously at his brutal honesty. Coach was always very candid when it came to ‘facts’ about life in the game. It was a vulnerability he understood. After all, he was speaking from experience. He had lived that life, and it was in the midst of its “revolving wheel” he was still operating late into his working career.

The value of his team’s success was in fact an image in which Coach took great pride in the presence of new company, and it was right at the very start of my fieldwork that Coach first alerted me to the fact that his team were “the most successful of the type in the country.” From this point on, I would learn that the team’s record was something that Coach was extremely proud of which he took upon himself to promote in public. Walking into the team’s winter training venue one icy Wednesday afternoon in February 2011, just a few weeks into my fieldwork, Coach approached me as I looked for a seat awaiting the arrival of the squad. He stretched out a hand to greet me, and with the other he passed me a wodge of headed paper.
It was his cricket CV containing a group of cobbled together references from numerous individuals in the cricketing world – famous names included – and a copy for me to keep. Attached to the document was a list of the academy’s success since his appointment. Their record spoke for itself – intrigued though I was to find out why he had handed me a copy of his CV for my own records. He explained how he felt it was important for his players to realise the reputation the team had and the responsibility they had in helping to maintain it. His explanation did not go very far in explaining why he had given me a copy of his cricketing CV but the list, I would learn, held great significance for Coach, and it was the first of many such lists that I would collate over my time in the field. The results it displayed acted like a type of fortress that Coach used to project a sense of achievement and protect any insecurity that lay within its walls. The list ratified the team’s record into something distributable which Coach used to endorse his self-worth, not to mention a “hard to beat” mentality that he displayed against a cultural backdrop of myth making and caricaturing.

There was, however, one competition missing from that piece of paper, derided by Coach as the one that didn’t matter.

“Another medal to add to the collection, H…” Coach said, with a wry smile as he slid past me towards the changing room. “…You’ve won them all now…” he reminded me as I made a head start on packing away the training kit on the edge of the outfield. “Another one to put on the piece of paper! We’re officially the most successful team in the country!” continued Coach, the day’s victory banishing any lingering doubt. I stopped what I was doing and followed Coach towards the changing room. Inside, I watched as the players brushed off their most recent triumph as they began to think about pastures new. Undeterred, Coach continued to express his satisfaction to the gaggle of players in the midst of undressing and packing away their equipment.

“Six years in a row we’ve one a trophy – you can’t stop us! And it’s pissed it down all year. More trophies than Barcelona! It feels worth coming up when you win something…”

I stand there in the corner watching as the players packed their stuff as quickly as they could and continued to chat amongst themselves. I realised then that Coach was talking to himself! Taking in the scene, I got a sense of what mattered, and to whom. Although pleased, victory to the players seemed virtually irrelevant. For them it was the end of one season and the start of the next, as they went from here to another part of the country to apply their skills elsewhere. To
Coach, though, it meant everything. In a season destroyed by rain even “micky-mouse cricket” meant something to him now. 

(Field notes, 19.6.2012)

It had been a season’s ending victory in the national t20 competition and the icing on the cake for Coach. It certainly sweetened his mood on our three-hour drive back to base, on a day tempered by his emotions. Coach was always a little prone to emotional outbursts when results, points and championship victories were at stake. His seemingly blinkered appetite for winning often meant he wore his heart on his sleeve. None of this cool, calm, take the emotion out of it stuff. There was no telling Coach to behave in an ‘intelligent’ fashion, and this often meant operating in an environment infused by exhibitions of the “Celtic blood and fire” on which he prided himself. Dealing with emotion was just part and parcel of everyone’s daily emotional labour that went unnoticed by Coach who accepted it as a fundamental constituent of professional sport. “I think I’ll treat myself to a glass of champagne and a bacon sandwich when I get home, H…” he said, as we pulled onto the motorway, pleased that we had made the trip. His world, at least from the outside, seemed complete, as we set off on our last journey together neatly capping the end of my travels with the squad that had been marked by his team’s continuing success. By this stage, it felt like I had experienced all the highs and lows of a life ‘on the road’ that Coach was so used to. It had helped me to develop a new appreciation for the working career of the “county pro”, and the demands of the habitual lifestyle that cricket brought upon its people that had structured much of Coach’s life, and shaped much of his character.

Upon asking Coach for his views on what he made of the working life of a journeyman county cricketer, he responded firmly, pointing his finger into my chest in defence of the profession:

*A good honest, professional, who is paid for his labour. There’s great honour in that. It’s what we used to call the ‘old county pro’. I tell you I played with a lot of good cricketers, a lot better than me, who never played Test cricket, but they were good cricketers and deserving of their pay. They worked hard on that field, and they worked hard off it.*
Played for the love of it and the privilege of being a professional sportsman.

(Field notes, 17. 10. 2012)

It was unsurprising that Coach reacted so passionately. The “love” he described was part of his own attachment to the game, but whether this was mutual or unrequited I remained unsure. Nevertheless, it was a longstanding relationship that had stood the test of time and endured many periods of transformation as Coach had gone from player, player-coach, to umpire and back to coach again.

At the age of 22, Coach had made the decision to travel overseas in an attempt to fashion a living as a full-time professional cricketer. Cricket was about to become his job and a “lovely way to make a living, if you can”. His first trip to the southern hemisphere set in motion a routine of travel that would last the length of his playing career. Playing cricket for his county in the summer, he’d travel abroad in the winter to fulfil numerous playing and coaching roles that presented themselves through networks of friends and contacts within the “cricket family”. They were days that Coach remembered fondly:

Coach: We were playing Middlesex at Lord’s in early May and I remember Clive Radley saying to me, ‘There is a coaching job going in Johannesburg if you want to do it’? I said ‘Yeah I’d love to go abroad’ and he said ‘Alright then, leave it to me…’ So I did, and I got the job and went over to the Transvaal for three years back and forth. And then we caught the boat home one year from Johannesburg down to Cape Town, had a day there, and we all went along to Newlands – lovely! You been to Cape Town?

[I’m unable to squeeze in a word before Coach returns to his flow]

Coach: Splendid isn’t it! Anyway, I got talking to a few of the chaps there, knew them a bit, they asked me what I’d been doing, I said I’d been coaching up in the Transvaal and really enjoyed it, nice big city, lovely climate – ‘Ah’ he said ‘You’re wasting your fuckin’ time there my friend...’

[Coach said, imitating his best South African accent]
Coach: ‘...Why don’t you come to the Cape my friend?’ I said ‘Well, I haven’t got a job here’ and he was like ‘Ohhh don’t worry about that my friend...’ going on like this you see. He said there is a school here ‘A big school my friend in the Rondebosch’. He wrote it all down for me and he said ‘Draft a letter my friend to the Headmaster’ – lovely place Cape Town I thought! So I wrote off to the Headmaster telling him that I’d done all this coaching, but I didn’t hear anything. And then at the end of July I got this letter to say I’d got a job. I was like ‘Cape Town that sounds nice’, so I went and I had 17 winters there...!

(Recorded conversation, 18. 6. 2012)

There was a certain romance Coach attached to this period. It was as though his nomadic existence jumping between coaching roles in schools, cricket clubs and universities, and playing league cricket to chase a wage in the winter before returning home in the summer to play for his county, allowed him to lead a lifestyle seemingly bereft of responsibility outside of the world he had created for himself. And it was inside this cricketing preserve that Coach was still standing by virtue of his employed position as academy coach, and an outlook associated with his former role as a professional cricketer. “I’ve led a cricket life in that sense...” he explained, as he took me through his fifty years of involvement, “...which is a bit narrow really because I haven’t had the time to do anything else even if I wanted to do it”. His confession spoke loudly of the industry he’d got himself “muddled up” in since his teens. “Have you ever had a year out of cricket?” I asked. “No, never...!” came his quick response “...but if it’s something you enjoy doing then you know...” he said, shrugging his shoulders. Indeed, it was as if it was by accident that “in a short space of time” and “without planning” he’d joined a cricketing one-way system that he’d entered based on a strong sense that being on a cricket field in April “was like being in heaven”. Thinking back over his time in the game Coach added:

I have enjoyed every second of it really. I feel a bit guilty about it actually – waking up in the morning and going out onto a cricket field. Don’t think I deserved it particularly, it just happened...

(Recorded conversation, 18. 6. 2012)
Coach was always very explicit in the manner with which he presented himself that he never divorced from his experiences in the game. To this end, he agreed “absolutely” that the game can become a part of you “especially when playing for a living”. In support of this idea, Roderick (2006) has highlighted how playing professional sport is such a demanding, all-encompassing venture that it is inevitable that a person’s self-identity becomes determined by it. This certainly seemed applicable to Coach whose life had been defined by cricket. Like the players he now guided, cricket for Coach had been the fulcrum of his role commitments since childhood, and it was his constant efforts to keep the narrative going that drew my attention towards the story upon which he enacted this role. Indeed, it was a cricketing persona that was long in its creation, and which continued to be supported by his day-to-day performances as ‘Coach’.

Coach: *I sort of played for my county in what they used to call ‘colts’ at an early age. And then at 15/16 I played for the second XI where they asked me if I’d like to go to Lord’s and spend two years there – a bit like what some of our lads have done… So I did that. I had two years there and then came back and signed full time for my county side. But in those interim years I did sort of winter jobs labouring on building sites and working in the brewery and stuff like that, you know. I drove a lorry one year! Yeah I did all that. And then when I was 19/20, what happened in the last year at Lord’s we all had to do our what they called the ‘B certificate’ – the MCC B certificate…*

HB: *What was that?*

Coach: *Like a coaching certificate, which was quite good. And only three of us passed it out of 28…*

HB: *You being one?*

Coach: *Yeah, I was one of them. In those days you used to go from Lord’s and join up with a Second XI team throughout the season, and then come back into Lord’s after a match. So it was quite tough in that sense. It’s what they call the YCs [Young Cricketers] now. We used to sell score cards on match days. We worked with the groundsman too, and helped clean up the stands. There were all sorts of duties you had to do. But that was when you were on what they called the ‘B staff’, and a year later you either got promoted and you went onto the ‘A staff’ – which was when you just played cricket everyday – or they just got rid of you…*
I enquired as to whether Coach had been one of the lucky few]

Coach: Yeah. I got onto that. Once on the ‘A staff’ Harry you practised in the nets every day and then you’d go out and play cricket for your county second team all over the place, as well as for the MCC in out-matches against schools and clubs sides and what have you. So say MCC would be playing a game at a school in the north of the country one day, you’d come back down to London that night, and then back out to a school in Surrey the next day, play, and then come back into Lord’s and then back out again, but this time to start a game for your county. In and out, in and out like that. So that’s what I spent most my time doing. About seven or eight of us went on to play county cricket from there, but no big names as such...

HB: No one who went on to play for England then?

Coach: Not over those two years anyway. There were some real nut cases, mind! But what it taught you Harry... [Coach pauses] ...We used to have digs nearby. You didn’t have any money, so you used to have to go into the ground every day and work, finishing the day at seven o’clock. So that’s what you did. 10 ‘till 7 everyday – unless you were playing of course! And I came back from Lord’s, joined my county full-time in the summer and spent the next 3 or 4 winters just labouring and getting a job because my Dad said that is what I had to go out and do. We talked about going back to school and he said, ‘well you’ve had your chance to do that and you fluffed it’, so that was it really...

(Recorded conversation, 18. 6. 2012)

It was in the driver’s cabin of the minibus where Coach and I would have some of our longest and most personal discussions, such as this one. With my hands tied to the steering wheel, I became a captive audience for Coach to air his views about self and world, with Coach never forgetting to return to the cricketing experiences that had helped shape them. He frequently spoke colourfully about his past, his school days, his sporting achievements, his childhood aspirations and what he spent most of his time doing at school. “You know what I wanted to be when I was a kid?” Coach once asked, leaving me no time to hazard a guess. “The middle weight champion of the world! I was once a schoolboy amateur boxing champion, and it was then when I had this big dream. But then you realise – ‘I can't do it because I’m not good enough’. That’s my little thing you know – knowing when you’re not good enough...”
As well as Coach taking an obvious pride in his former athletic prowess, he often portrayed a stark awareness of his limitations particularly when it came to the matter of school and education.

Coach: *I was a good all round games player. I was quite clever at school in the arts – English, History and those sort of subjects. I did have 100 out of 100 in general science once too, but that was just reading and learning it in parrot fashion. And then there was a gradual decline in my studies...“*

HB: *For what reason?*

Coach: *I don’t really know. I mean I got mixed up with a bit of a bad bunch at school actually looking back. They weren’t crooks but they were ‘scallies’ you know, but I enjoyed school - I was never a problem. I was disciplined. I liked my sport like everybody else. I played soccer, rugby and I played cricket from an early age! I played for my club first team when I was 14. I used to go down there regularly. I played for representative schools for rugby and soccer as a kid. But there are a lot of kids like that you know. I did very poorly in my GCEs and O-levels looking back. I didn’t work hard enough – paid the price!*

(Recorded conversation, 18. 6. 2012)

Here, Coach communicated a self-investment in cricket to the detriment of much else. “I missed out on education really and that is why I can see the merit of people doing this at university. That was the greatest regret of my life not going to college...“, essentially condemning Coach to the path he’d chosen,“...because what I saw happening was people going to university and becoming cricketers...” However, in contrast to Coach, it was arguably without the same dependency on cricket.

A believer in the “genes”, for Coach you either displayed the “attitude”, “application” and the “right tenacity” or you did not, and the more familiar I became with the pattern of Coach’s self-narrative, the sooner I began to realise that Coach may have still been coming to terms with the fact that in the end, he did not have the attributes to succeed as a county cricketer. Along with school and education having “not done better as a player” was another of Coach’s “greatest regrets”. “I could play mind” he made sure to remind me whenever we spoke about his relative drawbacks
as a player. “I found Second XI cricket easy. Yeah, I breezed through that! But the problem was Harry, when it came to playing first-class cricket I never performed like I knew I could!” When I asked Coach to think of a reason for this he stated: “Temperament really? I just didn’t have that confidence about myself to score runs at that level”.

At the beginning of his playing career, though, Coach conveyed his decision to pursue cricket as his vocation, to which there only ever seemed one outcome:

The hard part was getting on the staff in the first place and then playing! I got into the first team fairly easily. It was always going to happen. I was never not going to play in the first team because I coasted through second team cricket like slicing a banana. I always felt like I was picking shit when I first played – you do though don’t you? It’s not difficult to play first-class cricket in that sense. But then there comes a point where there is an expectancy that you have got to produce these figures. And once you have done that and you get in the side you have to cement that, consolidate that, and then become a senior player...

(Recorded conversation, 18. 6. 2012)

However, when it came to reaching the expectations of first-class cricket Coach said, “I was always a junior player in that sense Harry, always”, eventually settling in a peripheral role as his county’s Second XI captain where he remained having never set “the bricks and mortar” in place to play at the next level.

Coach would often reminisce in this way. At first he would build himself up on the basis of his “potential” and what he found easy, before undermining the foundations upon which his life had been set with a sense of disappointment and under achievement. Consequently, when it came to Coach’s story there were always two strands to his narrative. He regularly spoke of the “privileges” associated with being a professional sportsman that accompanied his awareness for cricket’s harsh realities, and a feeling of what might have been. Indeed, whenever Coach spoke about his career, there was always a sense of a promise that went unfulfilled, an enjoyment that he could not always capture, and a frank recognition of the
uncompromising, “selfish” world in which cricketers seek to find their sense of self-worth (see Roebuck, 1985). They were the “facts of it”, and yet despite first-hand knowledge of them Coach still managed to maintain a romantic connection with his past that was so important for his overall sense of belonging.

...Being a professional sportsman is a privilege in my eyes – you get paid to do something that you want to do. Now, these kids do it for the glitz and glamour. Well I tell you, there’s not a lot of that about. It’s a very uncertain profession, no matter how hard you work for it, someone can always take it away. But it’s a privilege nonetheless. You see for me Harry, it’s about enjoyment – enjoying the thing that you do, especially in sport. That’s the most important thing, and I always say it. If you don’t enjoy it, then get out of it quick, because that’s when the game controls you. And I say that because I had ability, but I never believed in myself enough to ever get on top of the game and start to enjoy it like I should have. If I was batting the next day, I was so worried about the importance of scoring runs I’d go to bed at 9 o’clock whether I felt tired or not, because that is what I thought I should do in order to succeed. And that was one of my biggest mistakes. Why not stay up in the bar and have a drink, if that’s what you want to do? I always struggled to come to terms with that...

(Field notes, 17. 10. 2012)

The game, as he described it, was “on top” of him and controlling his every move, but this was Coach describing his experiences as player, and as time went on I began to question whether Coach had ever got out from under its grip.

As previously suggested, it was from my position behind the wheel of the mini-bus that Coach and I got to know each other during the numerous motorway journeys we spent by each other’s sides. Hence the driver’s cabin became a site of observation to base much of what I had come to know about Coach. Over the course of each season I would watch and take note as the cabin would slowly transform into a private dwelling gradually filling up with Coach’s personal belongings and bits of cricketing paraphernalia. A selection of sports clothes, jumpers, t-shirts and eveningwear would come to hang from the handrails draping both the driver and passenger side windows like two sets of curtains. An old bat, and an open bag of balls would
lie in the passenger foot well. A bottle of wine would lay unopened in the glove box. Papers, magazines and other documentation would line the dashboard and would soon begin to pile high, and you may not have been mistaken to think that Coach had moved in:

‘He feels at home on this bus – safe in a world of cricket’, I thought to myself as we drove through the sunshine and showers on our way down to the south coast. Sitting in the passenger seat next to me, surrounded by odd bits and bobs, I watched Coach as he searched through the mess picking out an old copy of The Cricketer magazine to flick through its pages to pass some time.

“Clouds around H. Something tells me we might not play tomorrow...” he said, looking up from his magazine. His phone begins to ring. It was ‘Rads’ on the line.

“Rads, it’s Lenny the Lion here, just called earlier to say we are playing in Southampton tomorrow if you fancied coming along... Hey, did you hear that Dickie is receiving his OBE today from the Queen... second one yeah... I saw him on the news this morning. Repeats himself all the time you know. All the time he does, repeats himself…” The irony wasn’t lost on me.

(Field notes, 15. 5. 2012)

It was amidst this scene, that I would watch Coach in my peripheral vision as he set about his travel routine of sifting through his cluttered surroundings in search of his copy of the Daily Telegraph that he carried with him at the start of every trip. Once located, he would turn immediately to the cricket reports and sit quietly for a moment whilst he absorbed the latest opinion, before turning his attention to the main section. Flicking through the news stories he would eventually settle on the obituary section of the day’s paper. Finding the story of an ex-service man, he would begin to read me a passage or two. For some reason military men always fascinated Coach. It was as though something about their life reflected aspects of Coach’s own. Placing the newspaper to one side, he’d reach for a pen and a scrap piece of paper and start to list a group of surnames in batting order.

After the phone call, I monitored Coach as he went about finding a scrap piece of paper. Folding it once in half, he proceeded to write a list of surnames one underneath the other. A little distracted, I kept looking across at what he was doing, each time holding my gaze for a fraction
longer until I could register the names displayed. Curious, I asked what he was doing?

“Oh, just noting down next year’s squad. Always on the look out H. I tell you, if the people who say they are coming come next year, it will be scary...!” he said, with an expectant glint in his eye. “There might be some disappointed faces back there next season I can tell you!” I peer down at my watch to check the date. It felt as though the season had only just got up and running. It’s was only the 15th May!

“It’s difficult picking teams”, Coach continued. “Gooch once told me that when he used to pick the old England Test sides he’d write down all his ‘definites’ first, say his top four batters and his best three bowlers – the blokes that pick themselves you know – and then just fill in the gaps. Good way of doing it I think...”.

(Field notes, 15.5.2012)

Turning the page, he would begin to sketch a diagram of a cricket field, marking out a pitch with two sets of stumps and naming a bowler and batsman at either end. Depending on the particular type of bowler, Coach would then proceed to mark his diagram with a series of arrows and crosses according to fielding positions, and areas of the field he expected the ball to go, until the page was covered with ink. At this point, he would pass it over his head for his captain to study. Now leaning over towards the radio, Coach would notch up the volume until the cabin was filled with sound in order to listen out for the hourly sports bulletin, before engaging me with whatever was now on his mind.

“So how do you sign up for one of these degrees then? Could I do one of those...?”

“Depends what you’re interested in...?”

“Mental toughness, in cricket...”

“Ok so you’d like to do something sport related. Why mental toughness?”

“Well, I think it is very important Harry that young cricketers develop the right mental attitudes and personalities that will help them to go forward in the game. The game places demands on you, you see. It’s very unique in that sense. I’ve always thought that. And I think if players aren’t made to realise what it takes from an early age, then they risk pursuing something that will never suit their character...”

(Field notes, 15.5.2012)
I was continually intrigued by the topics of conversation Coach would strike up with me. Indeed, his sport and cricket related stories provided insight into how Coach constructed himself, and who he represented in relation to my research. What struck me the most, however, as I fastened myself to another of Coach’s catalogued storylines, this time on ‘mental toughness’, were the limited parameters dictating our dialogue. Perhaps it was the nature and context of our relationship, but as time lapsed and trust and familiarity developed the narrative through which I had come to know Coach, stagnated. There was, however, something implicit within the repetition, the stagnation, language and the discourses he used that gave value and meaning to the way he had lived his life. The academy, his role as ‘Director of Cricket’, and his career inside the professional echelons of the game were inseparable facets of the single narrative he presented to the world and it was his eagerness to assert this upon new audiences that had left the biggest impression on me the first time I met up with him formally.

I was worried about meeting Coach one-to-one for the first time. Armed with a Dictaphone, but with no formal questions prepared, I was anxious as to whether I would be able to lead a conversation to its required ends. With my interests skewed towards the players’ experiences of life in the cricket academy, my intention was to listen to Coach’s perspective on the demands the academy placed on his cricketers. However, his opening remarks set the tone for the rest of the conversation:

*Where I come from with it is I’ve been through the young professional into the first team situation, so I’ve been in the cricket environment every day, so I realise what that is. I didn’t come from this background [university] so what I try to do is to put them in the cricket environment, to take them outside of their university life. The little disadvantage, and I’ve always said this if I’m talking to anyone, the disadvantage that you sometimes get is that they have to realise very quickly that if they want to succeed at a higher level they have to take on board the disciplines involved with that, which they probably don’t know enough about, although some have come through county academies and Second XI cricket…*

(Recorded conversation, 11. 3. 2011)
It was around this narrative that Coach continued to sculpt a biography distinguishable from our surroundings in the university coffee shop. “Where I come from”, shed light on the lens through which Coach located and differentiated himself from others. It was also a gap that I would have to bridge and a history I would have to listen to if Coach was to accept me not as researcher or some other ‘professional voice’, but as someone who understood cricket. My background as a club cricketer, however, was not enough in this regard. For it was not just any old cricket that Coach discussed. Rather, it was a conception of the game that ascribed to the “disciplines” of a professionalised “cricket environment” – a notion of cricket that Coach knew to be true and felt strongly that others “probably don’t know enough about”. Without knowledge of it, I was entering into Coach’s vision of cricket, personalised to fit his particular identity-story (McAdams, 1993).

...and if you want to learn how to get forward you listen to the people who have been in the trenches because they’re only doing it for your good. In my experience, if you leave people to their own devices in most cases they won’t go forward because they don’t understand what is required. I talk about getting to the ground early. Not early, early, but early. Robin Smith for instance at the height of his career was at the Rose Bowl at 8.30 in the morning on a bowling machine, working. He probably got there at 8 o’clock. I don’t expect everyone to do that but if you want to do it there’s nothing wrong with that. Graeme Hick was in 40 minutes working before everybody got in because that’s how he saw his progress and standards as a professional player. Graham Gooch used to run from the hotel to the ground. If you realise that is what is needed, you can then do something about it...

(Recorded conversation, 11. 3. 2011)

At this point, I was not to know that ground arrival time would eventually emerge as a regular bone of contention between the players and Coach. For an 11am start, Coach believed his players should be “on deck” ready for practice by 9.00am. This often meant waking at 8am or earlier, leaving the hotel around 8.30am and arriving at the ground by 8.45am, which left ample time to drop one’s bags and be ready to “take some catches” or start any other “cricket related” activity in the two hours leading up to play. There
was never a rush, only ever time to spare for the toss of a coin, a cup of tea and a biscuit before the start of play. One morning, however, I would find myself caught in the middle of a player protest after Coach had refused his team an extra fifteen minutes in bed. Coach simply said, “they're not fucking with me” and left the hotel without his team, leaving the players stranded in their bedrooms. Coach was infuriated; Bob mortified. A public feud ensued outside the pavilion and in front of a bemused opposition as I sloped off with the keys of the minibus to collect the players from their accommodation. Collectively, the players seemed to find the whole situation hilarious, but from that day on the “train” – as the minibus would come to be known – was never missed again because when it came to this, Coach stuck resolutely to his word.

Amongst the items Coach lugged around with him a red, hardback book was never far from view. *Tom Cartwright: The Flame Still Burns* was the title of the well-loved text that Coach consulted religiously, respecting it as the opinions of a man who’d been alongside him “in the trenches” – a metaphor that drove much of what Coach believed to be true about the realities of playing the game for a living. In a future conversation I would ask Coach who had been his biggest influence during his career. “Tom Cartwright”29 he replied, before explaining his reasons for it.

> I always found his knowledge very good, and his philosophy of coaching I really did enjoy. He either thought you were the right type of person or you weren’t. He believed in tenacity and if you had the right approach in terms of coming to terms with things – both on and off the field! He had very strong ideas, firm ideas about how people should behave and how you should go about things on the cricket field...

(Recorded conversation, 18.6.2012)

It was all starting to fall into place. The words ran from his tongue like an actor reciting a script and I found it hard to distinguish whether Coach was speaking for Cartwright, or whether he was actually speaking for himself. What this clarified, though, was the narrow frame of reference that Coach

---

29 Former first-class and Test match cricketer of the early 1950s to late 1970s.
sheltered behind. Returning to the meeting I had with him at the start of my fieldwork, I asked him whether the ideas he was recounting as part of his personal belief system were based around his experience as a player and coach. He answered by saying:

Yes, and on the people I talk to because I’ve got cricket people that I go to and talk to. And they all say the same thing. I was in county cricket as a player for 20 years, but more in the development of players, the coaching side of it, bringing people through that sort of system into the first team. And I think that’s where I can offer invaluable experience. I don’t expect them to take it on board straight away but I don’t want anyone to leave the academy where they’ve been with me for three years and say, ‘Oh I wish I had worked harder.’ And in that sense broadly speaking the coach who is always popular at this level is not doing his job. The biggest single factor in any player’s development is their capacity to learn from playing in teams, not from coaches, from playing, because that’s when they find out about themselves. And my favourite phrase that I’ve picked up from the great people I’ve worked with is ‘teach yourself about yourself’.

(Recorded conversation, 11. 3. 2011)

“Teach yourself about yourself” was a common phrase Coach would use that he’d commandeered from the “handed down philosophy” he stuck by, and it fascinated me every time he said it. A cricket match gives one many hours to digress from one’s present situation to learn and to think things through, and I was learning much about the meaning of the phrase by simply watching and interacting with Coach’s match day routine. More significantly, however, I was experiencing what Coach meant by “being in the cricket environment every day” and appreciating the effects it was having on me. I watched cricket, I spoke cricket, and for periods at a time I lived cricket at the ground, in the pavilion, in the minibus, at the dining table and in the hotel. It did not take me long to pick up some of the everyday habits including keeping an eye on players, county scores and general news from the county and university circuit. I began to familiarise myself with the names and faces and to reference them in conversations with players. I found little escape from the influence of the people and culture around me. You either accepted it, or resisted it at your peril, and it was through this
reflexive gaze that I began to recognise the symbolic value of Coach’s life history.

_I’ve been in this all my life. I hope that people understand that, and I’ve learnt all my life how it works, and sometimes people who haven’t had that background don’t understand how it works, and things have to be said. It’s like being in professional football all the time isn’t it? If you haven’t been involved in the business it’s very difficult for you to display that because you probably haven’t got the knowledge of it. And I learnt. I’ve got people I talk to about cricket, people who’ve been in it all their lives, those are the people I go to. I don’t go to people who aren’t in it because I know I wouldn’t get anything from it, I’d just get, for want of a better phrase, an amateur opinion. I don’t want that._

(Recorded conversation, 11. 3. 2011)

Getting to grips with Coach’s view on cricket was a crucial element in unravelling his self-portrait. Therefore, I felt it necessary to acquire some compassion for where Coach’s stance on the game came from, about which he was very clear. For Coach, cricket was his “business” which separated him from others, and it was a “two tier system” of senior pros and their apprentices that had nurtured his development in the game to manifest itself within a story that pronounced him a proud product of his generation, despite the weight of a cultural pressure for him to depart from who he was and what he believed.

It was 4pm on a Wednesday afternoon following my second (and final) season with the squad when I walked into the student union bar packed full of excited sport students after a day free from lectures. The bar was noisy, and a little rowdy thanks the men’s football team’s post match drinks. Peering over his glasses, decked in his county blazer, ECB shirt and Arsenal tie, Coach spotted me coming through the door. I smiled and wandered towards him. “Can I buy you a drink?” he asked as he greeted me. I declined, but he insisted trotting valiantly towards the bar and returning with a drink. We toast to good health and begin to natter like old friends, our conversation whirling around some of Coach’s favourite topics about the development of young players, the life of the county pro, and the mental side of the game. I sat there and assumed my role in the relationship, listening
out for another one of Coach's many anecdotes. “Do you know what Bill Shankly always used to say about team work?” I shook my head awaiting the punch line. “It’s one of the favourite things I’ve heard. He said, in a team of 11 men you’ve got two guys playing the piano whilst the other nine shift it around the room. It’s great that, isn’t it...?” Coach said, as he began to laugh.

Joining in with his team’s celebrations, our conversation was briefly halted by the university football coach when he put his arm around Coach in a friendly embrace. “You and I, the old pros, in the bar, having a drink...”

“Old, old pro me!” Coach replied putting his glass of red to his lips. On the surface, the pair of them looked as if they were in their element.

“You look smart...” his colleague said, picking up on Coach’s attire that stood out among the tracksuits and flat peak caps of a much younger sporting generation.

“A traditionalist me, you see...”

I smiled – it summed Coach up. His dress had always been a powerful metaphor, a façade giving him a strong sense of who he was and how he fitted in as Head Coach of a university cricket academy. But there was little connection between his cricketing persona and the academic institution supporting his position. In this light, Coach’s self-narrative acted like a double-edged sword. In one sense it preserved a unity and harmony with his past, and in another it seemed to prevent Coach from connecting fully with the present.

“What do you think about the article I gave all the guys to read then...?” Coach asked me as we waited for dessert at the dinner table in the team hotel. I think back to the newspaper cutting he’d passed around the bus on the trip down.

“I’d like to have seen the rest of the article...” I responded, unsure of an appropriate answer.

“Yeah should have done that! Good idea that. I’m not sure I got the message across actually. What did I want to say? What do you think it should mean to see those 15 smiling African children?”

Coach stared at me forcing me into an answer. “There are people less fortunate than you...?”

“Quite! Think about them when you start moaning about playing cricket, staying in nice hotels, being fed, being looked after – not a bad life for a student! If they can smile then so should you...!” he said, as though he was speaking to one of his players.
"What about there's more to life than cricket?" came another voice. Leaning back in his chair with his arms folded, Patrick looked unimpressed.

“Yes that could fit too. Mind you if you want to play cricket properly it’s got to become serious at some point – just like if you wanted to be an accountant or a barrister. It’s just the same” claimed Coach before asking, “Does cricket get in the way of you getting a better degree? I suppose it does, doesn’t it…?”. 

Patrick remained quiet allowing his teammate Josh to join the conversation.

“Well yes, I suppose it does…” Josh replied, “...but it is different for me because I’m only here for the cricket. But had we played Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday last week like we were supposed to, I would have really struggled with my exam yesterday…”

“It’s the time isn’t it? It’s very time consuming. Few people understand that…” Coach said, in response to his players’ predicaments. Turning toward Patrick, he re-engaged him in the conversation, this time about the prospects of a ten-year career in county cricket for the experience of travelling the world and the financial rewards. Not finished there, Coach told him:

“And a man like you with your accountancy degree – you could then go and apply that by looking after the finances of a county club once you’re done playing. That rarely ever happens see. Few chairmen have ever played the game you know…”

Patrick looked across the table at me, trying to hide a wry smile.

“I wouldn’t say I’ve played the game though Coach…” returned Patrick.

“You’ve played first-class cricket…?”

“Yeah but hardly…”

“But you’ve played. Nobody can take that away from you…”

“No you’re right they can’t. I’ll take the two runs I scored to the grave with me…” Patrick said, pumping his fist in the air defiantly.

Leaning across the table Coach changed tack: “Some of these less academic blokes behind me… pointing his thumb over his shoulder towards the opposite table “...should think about becoming umpires you know. They’d only have to work five months of the year. It would suit some of those blokes down to the ground! Pocket your salary. Live off the expenses. Over thirty grand a year they get now and £100 a day expenses. What more could you ask for, except for a yacht in the south of France…?” Umpiring, of course, had been another string to Coach’s bow having fallen into it after his playing days were over.

“But you’ve got to really love the game to do that, and I mean really love it!” Josh replied.

“Ha, yes, I suppose you do!” reacted Coach, sticking his fork into his lemon meringue that had just arrived in front of him. Without waiting, he lowered his head and without saying a word devoured it within minutes. It made me think back to a thought I had on the bus earlier in the day about Coach feeling ‘safe in a world of cricket’.

“I might do a degree next year - get a few letters after my name.
Later that evening there was a knock at my door and in came Josh and Patrick on their return from a walk around the county ground opposite the team’s accommodation. For thirty minutes we sat and talked with the TV running in the background. The pair looked relaxed as they lounged about my room helping themselves to cups of tea, and marvelling at the facilities from across the road. In the hope of stimulating some conversation, I brought up the topic of Coach at the dinner table.

“He was driving you crazy wasn’t he mate” Josh said in the direction of Patrick, as he began to laugh.

“Oh fucking hell!!”

“Could you imagine where he would be without cricket…?” remarked Josh.

“I wouldn’t like to think…” replied Patrick.

“Exactly! That’s what I am saying. I think it has provided for him massively. It’s given him a life and something to live for…”

I watched their exchanges with interest as the pair of them tried to make sense of Coach’s position on the offerings of a life in and out of the game.

“…You see I think he considers himself very lucky to have found cricket! Do you remember last year? He used to always say ‘you can make a career out of this game. This day and age not a lot of jobs flying around…’ And the suggestion he made of the boys becoming umpires! He’s never had anything else in his life now, has he?”

Riled for the second time that evening, Patrick sprung back into life. Sitting up from his slouched position on the sofa he said:

“He has no idea mate! It’s as if there aren’t other things out there

---

30 Cricket parlance for ‘leg before wicket’ – a mode of dismissal caused by the ball (delivered by a bowler) striking the batter’s pad. The batter is only given out if the ball’s projected path is deemed by the umpire to be going on to hit the stumps in accordance with the circumstances set out by the MCC in Law 36 of the game of cricket.
By way of their personal relationships with the story being told, Patrick and Josh recognised the foundations underpinning Coach’s life and were wary of following suit – in spite of the fact that their involvement with the academy proclaimed a desire to want to become professional cricketers. Indeed, as Josh had made clear at the dinner table that evening, he was only at university “for the cricket”. Yet Josh was quite sceptical of how narrow a life in the game could be, which Coach’s self-characterisation demonstrated. To Patrick and Josh, and to the rest of their teammates, Coach’s life appeared void of alternative interests and directions as if there was “nothing else out there in the world” and in this sense, when it came to spending a lifetime in cricket, Coach symbolised the “price” that had to be paid. Crucially it was something that players like Josh and Patrick not only recognised in Coach, but also evaluated very carefully in calculating their own cricketing futures.

At the start of this chapter, I set out Coach’s ‘ardent mistrust’ of the industry on which he himself had become reliant. Through a life’s experience he was not only intimately aware of the “demands” the game placed on players young and old, but the type of commitment required to pursue cricket “properly”, and the resultant “dangers” associated with players languishing in cricket as they try desperately to find a role and their place within the game. Hence Coach was a believer in players being honest with themselves and recognising their own limitations to prevent important years being wasted. The point being is that having never laid the “bricks and mortar” needed for his own successful first-class career there was an authenticity to Coach that could not otherwise be created. This made Coach, and the narrative around which he constructed his identity, a fundamental component of the academy environment and the players’ reflexive engagement with their university cricketing experiences to which this thesis will now turn.
CHAPTER 4
The Cricket Bubble
Notes on a Cricketing Lifestyle

As the thesis progresses to focus on the student-cricket experience, Coach, and the narrative around which he constructed his identity, will continue to feature as an anchor of the text. Accompanying his symbolism, Coach’s outspoken analyses of cricket provided a critical commentary on the institutional life of the professional cricketer, and a point of departure for understanding what his players were considering committing their lives to.

One might begin to describe the start of the cricket season as the beginning of a new dawn in the cricketer’s yearly cycle. At the end of March the ‘English’ cricketer enters a world of his own as he is sucked from one living routine and transposed into another. Cut-off from life as they had come to know it in the winter, it was through a routine of travel, stay and play the academy exposed its players to a lifestyle associated with that of a professional cricketer. And so, at the turn of spring, cricket became a source of weekly structure and daily purpose for the academy players, and where their lives as students were concerned, cricket developed into more than a distraction. Indeed, cricket began to consume both players’ time and resources as each set about coming to terms with the demands of their social context, in a process Coach described as “finding your cricket legs”. This related not only to the physical adjustments that took place throughout the season, but also to the internal adjustments happening as part of the identity-explorations of a group of young men on a path towards becoming professional cricketers.

Finding Your Cricket Legs

In the build up to the season, cricket, as it has been suggested, began to assert itself highly among the priorities and preoccupations of those connected with the academy. Cricket’s final imposition at the start of the season involved both a physical displacement as well as a mental and
emotional load on the individual. “I think about it all the time…” Mark once told me on the way back from an away fixture as we sat next to each other on the team minibus, “…especially when it’s going badly”. Mark, a final year member of the team’s playing squad during my first season with the side, was not the only one to say this to me over the course of my fieldwork. For many, if not all, the academy provided them with their first taste of what cricket might be like to play for a living, and in their efforts to adapt, some appeared to cope well whilst others became a little unsettled. At some stage, however, whether hidden or disclosed, adapting to a cricketing lifestyle became troublesome for everyone.

Having arrived at our accommodation following the first day’s play of the new season Connor turned to Simon, a first year on his maiden outing with the side, and asked, “Do you like staying in hotels?” Simon looked back at Connor as if he had gone mad. “Yeah of course!” he replied, still looking a little perplexed, “Do you think this place has a pool?” Clutching our overnight bags, the three of us made for reception contemplating Simon’s optimism. “I had a mate at a county…” Connor begins to reflect, as we approached the doors. “He was probably going to make it – but he quit in the end.” It was now my turn to look at Connor quizzically. The thought of someone on the verge of ‘making it’ and quitting seemed an impossible conclusion to the story. What a waste I thought privately. “He just couldn’t handle the lifestyle” elaborated Connor, countering the look I had given him. “Lifestyle?” I repeated. It was enough to encourage Connor to continue. “He just didn’t like it, staying in hotels and shit. He hated it in fact. Shame really. He was a good player, and like I said I think he would have made it.”

At this point, Simon re-joined the conversation. “How do you find it?” he posed back at Connor. “I don’t mind it…” he replied, “But pro cricketers they do this a lot don’t they? They spend their lives in hotels. I mean it’s a massive part of it for them. You got to like it to be able to do it. Or at least learn to get along with it. It’s probably why so many have so many issues…” A wry smile followed a momentary pause. “It’s probably why I have so many issues!” he said, reflecting the statement back on himself as we stepped inside the hotel foyer and headed over to reception to collect our room keys.
When describing the nature of their cricketing experiences throughout the summer, “lifestyle” was a frequently used term. Lifestyles, said Giddens (1991), are routinised practices incorporated into the orientations, habits, and modes of action of people and groups in society that play a significant role in the reflexive shaping of self. As reflected in the content of Connor’s tale, to abide by the structure of a certain lifestyle requires appropriate adjustment on behalf of the individual to accept it as part of their developing life-course that the character behind Connor’s story appeared unable to do. Connor’s use of the word “lifestyle”, however, captured what Giddens (1991, p.83) describes more specifically as a ‘lifestyle sector’ to denote a particular time-space ‘slice’ of an individual’s overall activities that distinguishes between various adopted views about self and world. Hence the cricket lifestyle, as identified in the eyes of Connor and his teammates, related to a particular segment of their dual identities as students and as cricketers, which, during the months of the season, became engulfed by the demands of their cricketing role as all else outside their cricketing lives fell by the way side.

The concept of ‘role engulfment’ has been highlighted in previous research undertaken in elite university sport. In a five-year ethnographic study of a college basketball team, Adler and Adler (1991) highlighted the existential thrust of college athletes’ social situations that drew its members into the dynamics of the setting, and ultimately forced its individuals to retreat into their athletic roles. Over the course of the university year, Adler and Adler (1991) portrayed how college basketball became a sovereign set of social practices that absorbed players’ time and energies, isolating them from the wider student body. In another ethnographic study conducted among a similar population, Parker (1996) noted how trainees of Colby Town F.C. (a pseudonym) experienced a transformation of football from a one-time, once a week leisure activity into a daily occupational chore. Although not strictly ‘occupational’, there were similarities in the restrictive organisational embrace described by Parker (1996) that the student-basketball players at the heart of Adler and Adler’s study (1991) and the student-cricketers at the centre of this study were required to fulfil as part
of their acclimatisation into a cricketing way of life, through a playing
schedule designed to mimic that of their professional counterparts.

With the arrival of spring and the start of summer I began to
appreciate the existential dimensions of the academy’s cricket routine, and
its impact on the lives of those intimately involved. The months of pre-
season training were relatively placid in comparison to the final week of
outdoor nets in the build-up to the season’s opening fixture. From this point
on, the academy detached itself from its former position sandwiched
between players’ academic timetables to form a microcosm of its own. From
my position on the team bus, in changing rooms, at dining tables and at
cricket grounds I would observe and interact with the dualisms and role-
conflicts instigated by the team’s communal separation from alternative
rounds of life as I, along with the rest of its members, became steadily
overwhelmed by the structures of the cultural field (Adler and Adler, 1991).
Bound together for days at a time by the demands of a competitive schedule
comprised of back-to-back fixtures, games played over multiple days,
overnight stays and extended away trips, members of the travelling party
were required to share in each other’s company by strength of their
commitment to becoming professional cricketers, and it was under this
pretence that players went from pillar to post adjusting to what it meant to
embody such a role.

Reflecting on the nature of his profession, the Australian first-class
cricketer Ed Cowan (2011, p.161) noted that the professional cricketer leads
a ‘certain type of existence’ during the months of a season. It is an existence
he described within the notion of a ‘touring life’ that he believed lent itself to
the young and unconnected. Cowan’s (2011) sentiments on the nature of the
cricketer’s lifestyle resonated with those offered to me by Bob, the
academy’s Team Manager, when he described the “massive, massive
commitment” that he, along with everybody else, had to make at the arrival
of summer:

There are times when I think fucking hell do people realise what we’re
doing. You get some that say ‘you’re off to stay in another hotel’ or
‘you’ve got an easy job’. And when you look at whatever it was last
season – 61 days of cricket out of a possible 85, 26 days on the road staying in hotels, over 3,500 bloody miles driven – or whatever it was – and that’s without adding all the bloody stuff around it! You know it’s a massive, massive commitment. And people outside our environment have got no idea what that is. You know I listen to other people involved with sport around here [university], but no one seems to appreciate exactly what we’re involved with and what we actually go through during our season, and how stressful it can be in comparison.

(Recorded conversation, 20. 7. 2011)

The personal diaries of several generations of first-class cricketers indeed echo the nature of such commitment. One early example is Brain's (1981) diary of an English county season titled: Another Day, Another Match. The title encapsulates everything that is regimented, mundane and unremarkable about the plight of a run-of-the-mill county cricketer, and yet it is precisely the tale of the ordinary and the routine that provided an experience with a quality Brain (1981) felt worthy of telling.

Brain (1981), however, is not the only cricketer to have been inspired to speak the insider’s track. Since its publication many others have followed suit continuing a tradition of cricket journals revealing aspects of the infamous ‘county-grind’ (see Cowan, 2011; Smith, 2004; Wagh, 2009), adding to a burgeoning list of cricketers wishing to disclose the nature of life on board the professional cricket circuit. Indeed, ‘a diary of a season’ appears a popular genre for cricketers to tell of their experiences, which begs the question: what is inherent within the trials of a hardened county batsman (see Roebuck, 1985), or the toils of a seasoned county bowler (see Agnew, 2004) that lends itself to this style of dissemination, and what is it about their experiences that they wish to tell others?

Consistent within the reproduction of themes that run throughout these personal exposés of professional cricketers, is the encompassing reality of the cricketing experience eloquently summed up in the title of Jonathan Agnew’s diary of a professional cricketer, 8 Days a Week. At the centre of each are the psychological challenges of a game that is played on a repeated, day-by-day basis and the emotive rise and fall that accompanies a player’s quests for runs, wickets and notoriety as they confront the demands
of their cricketing existence. In this regard, Cricket’s attributes are notorious (see Frith, 2001) as players spend hours of their days bound to the context of their sporting pursuits. To this end, Roebuck (2004, p.201) highlighted that ‘professional cricket consumes a player’s time, removes him from daily life to an almost monastic degree’. Continuing along the lines of a religious devotion, Frith suggests (2001) that cricket comprises a cultural grip only recognisable within society’s other fanatical groups requiring its devotees to sacrifice any semblance of routine outside of their cricketing schedules (Cowan, 2011). In a similar vein Smith (2004, p. x-xi) reflected:

Everyday is a step on the journey, a journey in which everything is provisional. The game and the team is so much a part of my life that it is hard to imagine how I keep myself occupied during the winter. Even in the middle of the season, I try to get little breaks from the relentlessness of county cricket – an afternoon in London, a walk by the sea, a film or a book. Switching off consciously thinking about cricket is a survival strategy – it stops you going mad. But beneath the surface, the game is always there in your subconscious, and the vast mass of unfinished business: politics unresolved, conversations unfinished, errors regretted, praise withheld. When you are playing badly, it kills. When you are playing well, you could always be playing better. If you are playing very well, why isn't anyone noticing? That is what you are saying goodbye to – if you've any sense at all – in October.

The ‘provisional’ nature of the cricketing experience described by Smith (2004) and others, as players oscillate between matches and living arrangements, suggests a lifestyle that is inherently destabilising. The transience of a cricketer’s existence links to Cowan’s (2011) notion of a ‘touring life’ and the difficulties he described in maintaining any sense of unity with the relationships that existed outside of his cricketing commitments.

Whilst on tour, the cricketer is reliant on his cricketing environment (Smith, 2004). It provides him with a bed, three square meals, a set of interpersonal relations and a structured order of activity. Everything he needs to perform some of the basic functions of his life is provided for him. And yet, as Smith (2004) reminds us, it is short lived. At some point the cricketer returns home and must take up from where he left off a few days
before. But returning home doesn’t mean detachment from his cricketing self, for cricket remains an intuitive aspect of his everyday psychology that lies ‘beneath the surface’ (Smith, 2004, p. xi). Nonetheless, the process of re-integrating and compartmentalising is at a constant during the season as the cricketer moves between different facets of his life. To whom and where a cricketer’s life belongs in the summer is thus a matter of ambiguity.

Of course it was Coach who helped pre-empt some of the challenges that were likely to arise with “this sort of cricket” when I met him in the university coffee shop in the months before the start of my first season with his squad. The nomadic nature of coming and going, playing and staying on trips glossed or tainted by personal and collective fortunes, was an element of the cricketing experience Coach described that his players had to learn to accept on their way to becoming county cricketers. “I think it takes a minimum of one year to get used to travelling, playing, practising and performing...” Coach said, as he spoke to me about adjusting to a life in cricket. “It’s what we used to call “finding your cricket legs”, he continued as he entered into a passionate analysis of cricket’s existential demands:

*Cricket is very demanding of your time you see Harry and it takes a lot of experience in terms of time management. And they [players] will make mistakes with that, it’s inevitable. And they will get tired and frustrated by it. Travelling is very tiring you know! Playing is tiring too. If you spend six hours on the cricket field you’re tired at the end of it let me assure you – physically but mentally more than anything! So it’s natural to become tired. Whether you’ve batted for two sessions, whether you’ve bowled 20 overs, or whether you’ve just sat and watched and taken in what’s in front of you, it’s very demanding – particularly in April. This year we’re actually playing 20 days in the month. That’s playing mind. Never mind travel too! A young professional at a county who is at the same sort of level as these players are, they play about 4 days of cricket in April. We play 20. And those blokes at counties they’re full-time. They’ve got nothing else to do! They probably practise most days, but the university lads who’ve got other responsibilities like their studies and their social lives, it’s asking an awful lot of them and their characters. It might be that you don’t feel very well, or it might be that you have had a row with your girlfriend, or it might be that you haven’t slept very well in the hotel. All these kinds of things can affect you. You wake up in the morning, you don’t quite feel right because you’re travelling, you’ve had a strange bed to sleep in, and you don’t feel like playing. You might be tired from the previous day still, and yet you've got to get up and do it all over again.*
What coaches sometimes don’t realise Harry is that players are human beings; they have emotions and feelings outside of cricket as well, particularly in the longer form of the game which requires you to be away so much. We could be away playing cricket for 60 days this year. You might get a phone call from your girlfriend one day who is not happy with you for whatever reason, or your mum phones up because she’s got some bad news, so your emotions can actually be up and down during that time. Add that to what is going on on the cricket field then you can see how that can be very difficult to deal with for these young blokes.

(Recorded conversation, 11. 3. 2011)

Coach’s use of the phrase “finding your cricket legs” expressed not only the physical but also the emotional labour of packing up and transferring one’s life into the cricket environment. It was a sensitising concept to the nature of the cricket lifestyle, which, as Coach highlighted, would take time for individuals to build both the physical strength and emotional resources to cope with effectively. To this end, it was Coach’s belief that it was only through participating with the full rigour of an intensive cricketing schedule that players could begin to realise some of the realities of professional cricket, and decide whether it suited their “characters”.

Reflected in the content of Coach’s words, the cricket lifestyle consisted of a series of fatiguing elements. Playing and travelling was physically tiring and as the body fatigued so did the mind in its efforts to deal with the collective strain placed upon it. Its repetition meant boredom was an inevitable occurrence too. Motivation was thus susceptible to peaks and troughs, as were players’ emotions when faced with the continual challenge of picking themselves up or bringing themselves down to a state ready to perform. Finally, the social demand of spending large amounts of time in each other’s company capped a concoction of fatiguing components that made cricket an all-consuming venture that players had to adjust themselves to accordingly.

Standing in a queue for coffee in the motorway services on the way to the start of another fixture, Coach came up to me poking his finger into my midriff. “You should have got a hundred yesterday H. You lost me money!” he said, “I had a couple of bets on you with people around the boundary!
Fancy getting out in the nineties! Do you know how many runs you lot scored after you got out...?" The question left me clueless. Not for a second had it occurred to me. “Eight!” he answered. “Now what do I always say? Nothing slows you down more than wickets! You did all that work and you gave it away. You batted well. But you didn’t play well” he said, putting a halt to my sense of achievement. Coach had been at my club game the day before watching. He was a regular face down there among the players and social members. Walking from the pitch, he’d also been the first to congratulate me.

“God I’m sore today Coach. My legs. They feel knackered...” I said, reporting back on how I was feeling.

“Well you batted a long time didn't you? You had to work hard for those runs. It didn’t look an easy pitch to play on out there...”

“Cricket legs!” I said, suddenly remembering the phrase.

“Cricket legs! Exactly! Travelling, batting and bowling all day, then going out the next to do it all again. Hard work that.”

I think about the possibility and find myself thankful that it did not apply to me. For the players around me, however, it was a different story and it was then that I noticed Stevie with his head in his arms sitting with his body bent forward across a table. I could not tell whether he had fallen asleep or whether he was just resting. Either way he looked exhausted. Coffee in hand, I went up to see how he was. “How did you go yesterday?” I asked. He looked up from his place. “I did nothing. I wish I hadn't bothered. I fuckin’ hate cricket H!”

Stevie’s reaction had given me a stark reminder of what he and his teammates were going through. Whether the previous day had been marked by success or by failure, it was on to the next game without rest or recuperation making it hard for the players to liberate themselves from cricket whilst it lay at the centre of their existence. Indeed, as George, a player who I’d get to know well during my fieldwork, would tell me, “It becomes our lives in the summer...” he said. “During the season life is just geared towards the next game.” It was a social existence divided between four primary settings including the team minibus, as well as various cricket
grounds, hotels and motorway service stations that the group checked in and out of during the season. All were defined by distinctive boundaries creating a sense of enclosure captured in the use of the expression “the cricket bubble” to denote a self-contained system of cricketing time and space that the academy players became familiar with in the process of discovering whether a cricketer’s lifestyle was right for them.

**Life Inside the Cricket Bubble**

Grouped together, the factors that defined cricket as a lifestyle such as the hotels, the travel, and the routine of playing and staying created the impression that one was living amid a bubble. In other words, for days at a time, cricket found a way of engulfing everybody in a manner that made it feel like you were held captive. Of course, Coach had his own way of describing the experience, which he revealed to me one morning as we crossed each other at breakfast on our way to and from the buffet-cart. “Another day in the trenches, H!” he pronounced, holding a cup of tea in his hand and a paper under his arm. Scarred with the lines of a seasoned campaigner, Coach’s embattled figure helped rouse meaning behind his words. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Coach frequently used military references in his attempts to elucidate aspects of the game and his life within it. In some instances, he would use them to refer to the necessity of ‘discipline’ and the importance of teamwork, or to strengthen notions of rank between him and ‘his’ players. In other instances, the "General", as he was known by some, would use them to make his players aware of just how lucky they were to have cricket as their setting for contest and challenge, rather than some distant garrison outpost where young men of a similar age were committing their lives. On this occasion, however, on the final morning of a four-day trip, Coach’s statement insinuated life led under the siege of cricket and cricket related pressures. Atmospherically, it implied the game weighing down on the group. Tangibly, it inferred the restriction of movement and daily activity, and the entrenchment of oneself to a system of cricket and cricket locales.

Raising his head from his cereal bowl, Josh responded to his coach’s
comments. “A rough day in the dirt is always better than a good day in the office, hey Coach?” Josh said, in a statement that conformed to the ideals of his social environment. Coach chuckled. “Ha, yes!” he responded almost entirely by default. A steady stream of players began to fill the dining room disturbing the serenity of the once empty scene. Cup of tea in hand, it prompted Coach to continue along his path across the dining room to find a table in the corner to begin his day, as he always did, in relative solitude before another day’s cricket began to consume him.

Later that day, whilst standing alongside George in the changing room I was suddenly reminded that it was Good Friday. The news took me by surprise. Over the past few days I had completely lost track of where I was in the week as a consequence of what cricket “does” to an individual’s perception of time. At least this was what Coach had me believe when he took his place at the dining table during the tea interval between the ‘afternoon’ and ‘evening’ session of play. “Saturday tomorrow!” he said out loud, as if to remind himself. I used the opportunity to raise my own experiences of having forgotten where I was in the week just an hour or so before to which Coach quickly responded, “Cricket does that to you, you know...” with the authority of assigning a known cause to a common symptom. “...You lose track of the days in cricket. I used to do it all the time when I was playing. I could never remember what day it was. It’s just day one, day two, day three with cricket...” From his place next to Coach, Connor went on to recite something similar. “You lose your train of thought don’t ya! People ask you what day it is and you’re like ‘I don’t have a fucking clue!’ I might be able to tell you whether it was the weekend, but I couldn’t tell you whether it was Monday or Friday”. In other words, whilst ‘in’ cricket the week gets undressed of its daily titles to be replaced with cricket's very own nondescript markers that channel the cricketer’s thoughts towards the day’s value in cricketing terms.

The “cricket bubble”, that this section depicts, displayed a number of attributes comparable to those described by Erving Goffman (1961) in his analysis of the ‘moral career’ of psychiatric in-patients. In his work Asylums, Goffman (1961) introduces the sociological concept of a ‘total institution’ to
provide a micro-sociological version of the structure of self in people confined to a single social situation who, by virtue of their institutionalisation, experience modifications in who they perceive themselves to be. He declares the total institution as (p.11):

Any place of residence and work where a large number of like-situated individuals, cut off from wider society for an appreciable period of time, together lead an enclosed, formally administered round of life’.

Underpinning Goffman’s (1961, p.17) analysis is the premise that in modern society individuals tend to ‘sleep, play and work in different places, with different co-participants, under different authorities, and without an overall rational plan’ or designated purpose. Thus, a central feature of a total institution is the breakdown of the separate facets of everyday life that strip an individual of the support networks and ‘stable social arrangements’ available to them in their ‘home worlds’ to impute changes to an individual’s felt identity for the purpose of subservience and control, and shaping them towards institutional goals (Goffman, 1961, p.24).

Whilst Goffman (1961) forwards the total institution as a theoretical device to describe settings whereby individuals’ physical and social contact with the ‘outside world’ is monitored and, in some instances, completely restricted, on the nature of institutional life more generally, he acknowledges that every institution provides something of a world for its members through a capturing of people’s time and interests. To this end, he notes that all places of occupation or work in Western society possess a degree of totality – a notion that has been used previously in depiction of the encompassing reality of university (Adler and Adler, 1991) and professional sport (Gearing, 1999; Parker, 1996; Roderick, 2006). Indeed, the total institution provides a useful theoretical backdrop to begin to recount some of the properties of the student-cricket experience that formed part of the academy players’ cricketing socialisation and identity-explorations as young people.
In order to elucidate some of the most salient aspects of the “cricket bubble”, I take the course of the narrative to an away trip that I spent with the squad in my second season following their every move. To all intents and purposes, it was a trip intended to consist of a total of eight days with six days of cricket divided between two different locations, and two days of travel. Despite intentions for it to be a cricket intensive week, the aspect of cricket never materialised – for not a single ball was bowled throughout the entire period. However, it remained an intensive week of a cricketing sort nonetheless that placed the characteristics of a cricketing culture (including its people, its social structures and its binding orientation) under the microscope of group discussion, and personal introspection.

The reasons for presenting such an ‘extreme’ case are two-fold, the first being that prior to my first season travelling with the squad my greatest fear was ‘what if it rains?’ I feared that if much of the season was rained off, it may severely inhibit my ability to understand what a group of young cricketers went through during a season. It stemmed from the belief that cricket was a sport experienced on the field of play alone. As I would discover, this belief was not entirely accurate which brings me to my second reason for presenting the following case as a framework for discussion. Rain (as is the weather more generally) is an unwanted but nevertheless unavoidable part of the cricketer’s daily psyche, and when it falls, its impact on the individual and group dynamics magnifies some of the taken for granted characteristics of the environment that relies on the presence of cricket to bind it together.

**Day 1: Travel and relocation**

Standing on a damp pavement edge I watched as George lumbered down the road towards me, his stride inhibited by the enormous cricket bag he was dragging along behind him. The straps of a laptop carry case and an adjacent sports bag divided his body into segments from left to right, and from right to left respectively – his laden figure typifying what lay ahead. “I’ve got shit loads of stuff haven’t I…” he said, as he dumped his bags next to mine. I
looked down at the mound of bags at my feet symbolising the relocation of George’s student life to that of his sporting aspiration. Waiting for Coach to collect us, contemplating the journey to come, George peered up at the sky above. “The weather is so shit at the moment isn’t it...” he complained, “...we’re hardly going to play at all I don’t think!” His remonstrations were a cause for concern. “It’s going to be a loooong week if that’s the case...” he continued, preparing himself for the worst. “Not ideal!” he concluded, with the prospect of no play already beginning to agitate his young soul.

It was from our usual spot here outside the community centre and library that George and I began our tour. To place the trip into context, it was the 22\textsuperscript{nd} April 2012 and the wettest start to a County season on record. The academy had been playing since 21\textsuperscript{st} March, and had already spent a total of six nights away together and contended with a number of weather-disrupted matches. Hours spent off the pitch were outweighing hours spent on it, and it was safe to say that team and individual patience was fragile from the moment we set off.

Inside the minibus, bags containing a week’s worth of clothing and cricketing supplies were stacked high in cascading piles that left little room for George and me to sit down until we reached the University campus. Campus was where the team congregated before every match, whether home or away, to offload all the bags and reload them back onto the kit-van, driven by Bob, that would trail in the minibus’ wake. Coach would allow little time for fuss. He was always very impatient and keen to get on the road as soon as possible, giving a few toots of the horn to hurry everybody along. It would get under the skin of some, but it served a purpose of sorts for without further ado everyone would be back onto the minibus and ready to join the motorway on route to our next cricketing location.

Having settled into the journey and into conversations with Coach about the importance of “a certain type of resilience” required for cricket, I had a moment’s recollection that made the entire episode feel strangely \textit{déjà vu}. A season ago, I had been travelling with the team in the same direction and I remembered distinctly how excited I had felt about the prospect of spending five consecutive days away with the side. Travelling along the
same stretch of motorway a year later, in the same bus, surrounded by the
same characters and topics of conversation had changed little apart from the
excitement once brought on by the experience’s former novelty. Travel and
staying away had become procedural, and indeed it was standard procedure
that during a long motorway journey such as this the convoy would stop on
route to allow half an hour for everyone to stretch their legs.

Parking up outside our latest Welcome Break, one-by-one players
filtered off the bus, decked in an assortment of team clothing, and moved
from one confined space to the next. Inside the atrium, players split off into
pairs and small groups before converging once again around a table to
devour the contents of a series of rustling paper bags, and it was once on the
site of a motorway service station during one of these fast-food-feeding-
frenzies that the notion of a ‘life in limbo’ occurred to me. It was in the
evening on the way back from an away fixture when a feeling came over me
that I found experientially relevant. It was approaching another 12-hour day
with another hour left of the journey to go. Leading up to that point, the
team had played every day for the past six with consecutive days of travel
and play to follow. In the stuffy atmosphere I felt trapped and totally
overwhelmed by the situation. I sought comfort from Patrick and Josh who,
although not feeling what I was feeling, understood what I was implying
when I said that there was something stark about a motorway service
station full of people in-between destinations longing to be some place else.
As I would later understand it, the service station as an institution,
embodied everything that was ‘provisional’ about the cricketer’s existence
as a piece of temporary ground on which players had to get used to
spending periods of time that had no value other than that defined within a
framework that suggested one was on the path to becoming a professional
cricketer.

Five hours after leaving campus we arrived at our hotel. It was ten
past seven in the evening, but before checking-in with the rest of the group I
went along with Connor and Coach to assess the state of tomorrow’s playing
venue. It just so happened that the cricket ground the team were due to play
on for the following three days was tucked away at the back of the hotel car
park presenting no more than a minute’s walk from the breakfast table. On away trips the hotel made up one of two primary living quarters, usually separate in location. If all went to plan – meaning if bad weather stayed at bay – the hotel would be the place where the team’s day began and ended with the majority of it spent at the cricket ground, otherwise it risked becoming the centre-point of the team’s existence as we were soon to find out. Without cars, and with Coach in ownership of the keys to the minibus, a hotel on the outskirts of town presented no immediate avenues to ‘get away’, and with the ground within throwing distance of reception, life seemed, on this trip, entirely contained within its bounds.

Down at the ground the scene was to be expected. Puddles of surface water made the ground squelchy underfoot as we traipsed out towards the covers protecting what they could of an already weather beaten pitch. “Anymore rain tonight and we’re stuffed for tomorrow...” Coach concluded standing on the edge of the sodden square. Neither Connor nor I could disagree. There seemed little chance of a dry evening given the murky cloud cover that was forcing night quickly upon us.

Returning to the hotel, Coach informed Connor of the plans for the day ahead before collecting his room key and disappearing until dinner. “9 o’clock meet and we’ll go from there – does that sound ok? If it’s pissing down with rain then...” He paused to think of a possible alternative “...we’ll all sit outside on deck chairs or something!” he said, in an attempt to lighten the mood. With all his years of experience, his lack of a legitimate alternative highlighted the importance of our central source of structure and activity, as without cricket there was very little else that one could do to soak up so much time.

From bus to bedroom was the usually smooth transition. Players shared rooms in close quarters to each other along one or two corridors. Once players had their keys, the team would finally disperse to fill a block of time left before dinner. It often presented a much needed half an hour of adjustment in the relative privacy of one’s room, before returning to take up one’s place around the dining table. The evening meal was another heavily prescribed, prearranged and prepaid ‘team event’ that took place at an
allotted time every evening in the hotel restaurant. The dining table was in fact another central feature of the player’s daily ritual, around which all members of the team would congregate several times a day to act out their roles in one of the environment’s many social theatres.

That evening, whilst sitting among players old and new, I listened as a pair of third years mocked their academic profiles and teased Bob about forthcoming deadlines and possible coursework extensions. “I’ve not passed a single year yet on first attempt!” George managed to say through his gathering laughter. “Ha - neither have I” Ben replied in hysterics, causing everyone else to laugh along with him. I wrote as part of my field notes that night, that when speaking of the cricket bubble, it was not just the physical constraints of the hotel, the minibus, the cricket ground or a motorway service station that centralised cricket in the players’ lives, but also what they themselves helped to construct through the content of their public performances.

By 9pm I had returned to my room and the privilege of my own private space. Lying on my bed with the thoughts from the day rushing through my head, a loud knock at my door startled me. I jumped up from my position to let whoever it was in. “Disturb you did I?” Ben said, swaggering his way into my room. He went and perched himself on the coffee table pushed up against the curtains. “There’s a good chance we won’t play at all tomorrow – and it’s fuckin’ annoying!” he said. Noticing a magazine that lay at the foot of my bed, Ben went over to take a look. It was a copy of the Professional Cricketers Association (PCA) magazine Beyond the Boundaries that Coach had kindly leant me. Picking it up, Ben proceeded to skim through the magazine’s contents and share his feelings towards those aspects that seemed most relevant to him. “There’s a good bit here it says...”:

Writing this down is the first time I have actually acknowledged outwardly that I am worried, that the future away from the structure of day-to-day life as a professional cricketer terrifies me. I am worried about my family; how am I going to provide for them? What if I make the wrong career choice? The thought of going down the ‘wrong path’ is perhaps the scariest thought of all...
...As soon as I left the bubble of pro cricket, recognising that using my time productively to forge a second career was fairly easy.

(Quote recited by Ben)

“Which is what I said to you the other day didn’t I... That without cricket I’d have a lot of time to pursue other things!”

Our conversations continued along the same lines never deviating away from the sport that had us housed in this hotel room. I listened as Ben reminisced about his days playing as a county colt and the members of his peer group that had gone on to become professional cricketers. His connection with that time and the people of that period was still strong, and it was all part of what tied Ben to his current cricketing context that helped him maintain the impression that he was still following in his peers’ footsteps.

With the time fast approaching 11.30pm, Ben decided he was ready to go. Closing the door behind him I headed to my desk to record what I could of what had just taken place. It was late and having made a start on my notes I set my alarm for seven o’clock and checked my phone before getting into bed. There was a series of missed calls and messages awaiting a reply acting as a reminder of how easy it is to get caught up in the process of travel and relocation, and resuming one’s role among a group of people without a thought for what continued to exist as part of one’s life on the outside.

Day 2: Pack animals

“We’ll be lucky if we bowl a ball you know. We might not bowl a ball all week! Tough that mentally!” Coach said at the breakfast table having returned from his inspection of the ground. “Where are the nearest legal courts?” asked Bob in suggestion of a possible alternative knowing full well that a trip to the nearest magistrates was one of Coach’s favourite tricks when it came to surviving a rainy day on tour. It was a means of filling time and keeping the mind active, and a method of placing cricket into perspective that Coach ultimately enjoyed. “Ha yes – we could do that
couldn’t we?” replied Coach before shooting off in the direction of reception to wait for his players to emerge from their rooms.

It was in the hotel foyer the team assembled every morning during overnight fixtures before setting off for the ground, and it was from the foyer that together we took the short walk to the ground through a haze of mist and drizzle and committed ourselves, en masse, to a day of waiting around. “It’s weather like this that reminds me of playing rugby.” Josh said as we approached the side of a double storied, stately looking pavilion that was about to become our next point of cohabitation. “Back home I would have pulled on my kit and be pumped to play right now!” Instead Josh, like the rest of his teammates, was in a state of preoccupation with the weather that saw the usual pattern of changing room activity on the morning of a match replaced with a congregation of cricketers under the pavilion’s stoop, far from being “pumped” for what the day had in store.

“Right let’s get into some financial accounting then!” Patrick said, as he began marching towards the pavilion entrance with a satchel full of books slung across his shoulders. He had come prepared and wanted to avoid “anything but standing there needlessly taking it all in”. I followed him into the pavilion bypassing the rest of the team that seemed set on lingering outside and headed up the stairs, passed the names and signed cricket shirts lining the walls, and into an area where a few sofas and a couple of dining tables stood unoccupied. I watched as Patrick strode around the room trying to find a suitable place to settle. “Ah this is us H, this is us…” he said, as he disappeared off into a small side room separated by a thin partition wall. “Do you think I could get in an hour of work now?” he asked as he pulled his note-pad and textbook out of his bag to begin to make something of his time.

I stayed with him for a while before leaving to go and find out what the others were getting up to, passing members of the opposition on the stairs as they embarked on setting up camp on the sofas close to where Patrick was working. ‘No peace and quiet around here’ I thought to myself as I brushed shoulders with the last of a rowdy bunch and no sooner had I returned outside and re-joined the rest of the group I got a taste for the atmosphere that was starting to build. “Call it off so we can fuck off!” Ben
berated at the situation as I took my place among a huddle of bodies. “Easy there big guy...” came a word of advice from a teammate sitting close by. “But how frustrating is it though!” Ben snapped back, as feelings began to run high from the prospect of being pent up for hours to come, with nowhere else to go.

In the manner of what was taking place around me, I bided my time, moving between the small pockets of activity that popped up within the general parameters of the pavilion. One moment I would be in the changing room talking about books and films whilst it was quiet and the next, I’d find myself larking around with a bat or a ball as the quiet changing room was steadily invaded by more cricketers looking for something to do. Talking about his struggle to “come down” to the level required to concentrate on his studies following periods of inactivity spent alongside his teammates, Josh described how days like this could be “pretty frenetic socially” in relation to the enclosed yet public nature of the cricket bubble. Indeed, it was a constant challenge to find a spot of your own if you felt the urge to do so, for inside the bubble, whilst at the ground or in the hotel, there was no such thing as an exclusively private space.

On a separate occasion, during a rare moment away from the constant humdrum of the changing room, George once described to me how “intense” he found the collective, team based experience of travelling the country, playing cricket in the summer. Sitting alone in the top row of a stand on our way back to the changing room from the nets, George used adjectives such as “stuffy” and “claustrophobic” to depict what it was like to spend whole days at a time as a member of an orchestrated team of people. “It’s quite forced isn’t it” he said in reference to all the things he and his teammates did as a group. “To be with the same people for that amount of time. It’s not natural!” I nodded along agreeing with his observation believing this to be especially true when multiplied over the days of a season. “The thing is you look over there…” he said, pointing over to the away team dressing room “…and you know exactly what is going on”.

There’s a couple of people watching their dismissals on replay, someone
is lying on the sofa, there is a bit of chat flying around, someone is wandering around swinging a bat, maybe a ball is getting lobbed about, the telly is on, a couple of the boys are taking the piss out of Coach...

(Recorded Conversation 8.4.2012)

In relation to the predictability of cricket’s social environment, George confessed how tiring he found going from the ground, to the minibus, to the dining table, to the bedroom “talking about cricket and what has happened in the day, and taking the piss out of each other”, as he revealed some of the strain of being perpetually on show. He said, “We laugh a lot – but it’s pretty tiring!” I asked what he meant by this to which he replied, “Well it’s very samey – it’s just another repetitive thing that we do...” George continued. “It’s the same humour dominated by the same people – it’s the same everything really” he protested on his way to proclaiming cricket to be “pretty one dimensional really”, and himself as a “pretty one dimensional bloke”.

On the topic of communal living, George was not the only player to express an opinion. At another point during the same match a conversation had broken out between Patrick and Lewis as I sat alongside them at a table in the players’ dining room, whilst they waited for play to resume. Both Patrick and Lewis were on county development contracts that had carried over from the previous summer, and were both due to return to their counties at the end of the university season. Consequently, the pair of them possessed inside knowledge of some of the essential aspects of life as a full-time professional cricketer, and whilst reflecting openly on their feelings towards their lives as ‘cricketers’ during the summer they made reference to the behaviours of some of their colleagues at their respective counties whose actions suggested they were firmly “locked into the bubble”, which both Patrick and Lewis appeared wary of. In a passage of dialogue recorded on Dictaphone, the two of them conveyed a ‘pack-like’ dependency in the way in which some young professional cricketers ended up living their lives outside of what was imposed upon them during consecutive days of cricket.
Lewis: And so many people seem to stay within the bubble. They will literally go to training, go to lunch with the boys...

Patrick [jumping in]: Go to someone’s house and play Xbox all day...

Lewis: With the boys!

Patrick: Have dinner...

Patrick and Lewis [in tandem]: With the boys!

Patrick: Go out in the evening, with the boys.

Lewis: Pull a few girls and bring them back to the house, with the boys.

Patrick: Go to bed and get up the next day and go to training, with the boys!

(Recorded Conversation, 7. 4. 2012)

Mocking the tendency for some young professional cricketers to want to be “with the boys”, Patrick and Lewis demonstrated a critical awareness of the behavioural outcomes associated with the internalisation of cricket as a collective endeavour. In this regard, doing things ‘together’ could be deemed an ‘ideological hallmark’ of the cricket bubble, and an ‘interactional fulcrum’ (Parker, 1996, p.98) around which routine behaviour took place during the season, from morning through to noon, until they fell asleep at night, players got used to operating against a backdrop of team activity. “I think that’s another thing about the cricket bubble…” Connor once explained to me:

...is that you’re not in it alone! There’s a lot of you in there at the same time all going through it – 11 or 12 of us, all the same age, all doing the same thing, all living together all with the same interest in cricket and we have – well we all have quite a lot in common! And that’s the thing. You’re always with people. You’re never alone. The only time I’m alone in the summer is when I’m at the crease facing the bowler.

(Recorded Conversation, 20. 3. 2013)

Cricket, described Brearley (2012), is an inherently social pursuit of a rigid, monolithic nature. Indeed, cricketers spend many hours in the company of each other both on and off the field, with large proportions of this time spent
indeterminately. For a professional cricketer, a typical working day could last in excess of 10 hours directly tied to a cricket related context. Yet only a fraction of this time may be spent engaged in skill related tasks. Thus, cricketers must become proficient at managing periods of ‘downtime’ whilst held suspended by their cricketing commitments. Factor in travel and overnight stays and cricket becomes a twenty-four hour vocation that presents little opportunity to break away from the conformity of the team environment. This “forced” proximity to one another, when accompanied by regular prolonged periods of inactivity and collective boredom, places substantial demands on an individual’s relationship with the identity of the social group that is tested under a full spectrum of conditions, from the high anxiety of a close run chase, to the dreariness of having nothing to do. And so, cricketers must learn to become pack animals constantly surrounded by their own type as they share the best and worst of each others characters incited by various facets of their daily lives. “To be aware of how people are feeling, to see that someone is struggling or is having a bit of a shit day – knowing when to speak to them and what to speak to them about is important” and all part of the cricketer’s social skill set that Connor identified as a constituent of “always being with each other and there for each other”, for hours, days and weeks at a time.

It was 1.30pm – three and a half hours after arriving at the ground – before the umpires decided to abandon the day leaving the players ‘free’ to return to the hotel and occupy themselves until dinner was served at seven, and it was at the dining table during the team’s evening meal that I used the opportunity to get a sense of how people had been coping with the day. “I hate the fact that we’re trapped here. We travel together, we sleep here, we play here, we eat here…” Ben protested whilst he waited for his food to arrive. It was the start of an hour that I would find intolerable as complaints about the service, the choice, the portion size and the circumstances that had us “trapped” in the hotel rained as heavy as the showers that had fallen throughout the day. Ben was in a particularly spiteful mood as he tried his hardest to twist my arm to get the keys to the minibus and drive him to the local shops. I was made to feel quite uncomfortable as I shunned his
attempts at coercion, and after finishing my meal I excused myself from the
table trying not to disclose the fact that the course of the day’s events had
left me feeling a little low. In the sanctuary of my room I wrote in my notes
that ‘today has been a day of nothingness. Boredom and pressure has built
up and tonight at the table was a shining example’, before asking myself
whether I was of the ‘type’ suited to becoming a professional cricketer in
hindsight of what the day had helped to disclose.

Like the previous night, on settling in my room a knock came at the
door. This time it was George. “I just wanted to check you were all right? It
looked like you weren’t enjoying that conversation much?” I hadn’t. It had
got to me. “Nah, well, I don’t know…” I stuttered before conceding something
that resembled the truth. “...I guess I feel just like you lot after a while. You
just get to a point where you’ve had enough of it for one day”. I stepped out
of my room and suggested we head for the sofas opposite reception. “Yeah
you do...” agreed George as we made our way along the corridor, “...and it’s
been constant today hasn’t it! I feel like I’ve had enough of it already! Sunday
feels like such a long way away doesn’t it?”. The thought seemed to terrify
him.

Facing each other, we parked ourselves in front of reception not far
from the hotel restaurant where many of the team still held forth. “You see
when you play you don’t really see each other. You stand on your own in
your position in the field and occupy yourself and see each other at the end
of the day, but today it’s just been like… urgh!” George said, throwing his
head back against the sofa as he reminded himself of the feeling. Speaking
on behalf of his teammates he continued to try to make sense of the
situation referring back to what had taken place at the table and initiated his
show of concern.

I think people really want to play, and of course it’s quite ironic isn’t it
that when we’re playing all the time we’re like ‘get me off this field’
because when you play loads all you want to do is not play, whereas
now we just need to play for the team’s sake – for everyone’s sake –
otherwise we’re going to do each other! We’re going to make each
other go crazy aren’t we, and that’s why being stuck in the hotel not
being able to go out to go and get some food or things like that, it’s
quite difficult – especially when you’ve spent the whole day together doing pretty much nothing. And that’s probably why you get conversations like the one at the table...

(Field notes, 23. 4. 2012)

I tried reassuring him that I was fine and not to worry, aware that he had already taken on the burden. “But I do worry!” he reacted, displaying the characteristics that Connor highlighted were important for cricketers to possess in the tight knit surroundings of the cricket bubble. For as well as contributing to the frivolity of the group, being a member of the ‘pack’ meant monitoring, sharing, and consoling each other’s ups and downs as the group absorbed the emotional labour of playing “loads” of cricket, to the contrasting experience of playing no cricket at all.

Day 3: Time (wasting)

There was a shared perception among the players of the academy that cricket “really fucks everything else up” when it came to comparing life inside and outside the bubble. The idea was always delivered as a statement rather than a question making it a testimony that confirmed a sense of cultural reality. Whether in relation to revising for exams, studying for coursework, getting a part time job, finding work experience, socialising with friends, family, or spending an occasion with a loved one, there was a collective impression that cricket could be a burden when it came to the concept of dividing out and sharing one’s time.

Waking on the morning of day three, I could be forgiven for feeling optimistic when I saw that the sun was shining. Passing Coach at reception on my way to breakfast I asked whether he’d been down to the ground to take a look. “Wet. Very wet...” came his verdict, and on that note, despite clearer conditions, I prepared myself for another drawn out affair. “Time please, H?” I looked at my watch. It was 8.30am and Coach was getting a little twitchy as he waited with his morning paper for the players to emerge from their rooms. For such a stickler for time and time keeping, it amazed me that I never saw Coach consult a timepiece of his own. Instead, “Time
“Please?” was a question he posed most frequently in all settings that were not immediately connected to the field of play. Around the hotel, in the minibus or during preseason training in the indoor school, Coach never seemed to know what time it was.

Once pitch side, however, it was a different story. There, if needs be, Coach, like everybody else, could rely on cricket’s inbuilt time scales to help orientate him through the day. Conditional to the game’s format, the routine of a 9am ground arrival time for an 11am start, a 1pm lunch and a 3.40pm tea was the basic running order for two or three day fixtures. With play set to finish at 6pm or 6.30pm – dependent on how many overs had been bowled – abiding by the time frames of three, two-hour sessions of play (morning, afternoon and evening) always provided a sense of where one was in relation to an overriding sequence. Coupled with the day’s distinguishing title of Day 1, Day 2 Day 3 etcetera, ‘cricket-time’ was a time party to, but nonetheless removed from, time outside of the cricket bubble. As Bob once reflected, “Cricket is like a time warp”. The likeness was used in relation to “those little memories you have of a time gone past” in relation to the habits and routines that distorted time into a framework of cricket.

Remove cricket from a cricketer’s day, however, and ‘time’ becomes something to be managed as the cricketer is left without a structure of time he is expecting to follow from the moment he arrives at the ground, to the moment he departs. The knock on effect is that cricket’s hold on time becomes a visible part of a cricketer’s experiences as they start to ‘watch the clock’, counting down the hours until the next meal, and wondering, with all this time now left on their hands, what else could have been achieved had it not been for the sake of cricket.

At ten to nine Coach’s unease was dispersed as he addressed a full set of players with his thoughts on the hours that lay ahead. “Look I don’t think we’re going to play before lunch, if at all, but we’ll go to the ground and wait for the official word. I don’t want anyone leaving the ground without permission – understood. It’s unprofessional.” It was a reminder directed at the players that whilst operating under ‘cricket-time’, time was not theirs to be spent anywhere they wished. Rather, it was something to be served,
honoured and respected as part of the game and their responsibilities as cricketers. And so, in the same fashion as the day before, the waiting games began. In fact, the entire day resembled that of the day before right up to the point of the day’s abandonment at 1.30pm in the afternoon.

As Coach told me on more than one occasion he believed that “more time is wasted in cricket than any other profession”, and it was a conviction that he revealed to his players when addressing them for a second time that day before dismissing them from the ground.

The other thing I wanted to say is that you are going to get a lot of days like this in your careers – make no mistake of it! Those that are fortunate enough to play at a higher level are going to have to learn to cope with it. Mike Brearley always used to say ‘it is the biggest waste of time cricket when you don’t play for a day. People hang around and do absolutely nothing some of them’. So you’ve got to try and cope with that as best you can.

(Field notes, 24. 3. 2012)

Despite telling his players that they’d “just have to cope with it” Coach confessed to me privately that he had never found a way to deal with the voids of time created in cricket. Whether through rain or sitting around waiting for a change of innings, cricket, as previously described, involved frequent periods of inactivity. It was part of the game that required acceptance in as much as it was essential for every player to find a way to handle time spent in stasis, and a feature of the game that every player, at times, could find problematic.

With regards to people hanging around and “doing absolutely nothing”, it was George who emphasised to me the importance of doing “little things” that become “quite big things” when they offered a sense that “things were getting done”. At the same time, George appreciated how easy it was to become lazy. It came down to a mind-set that whilst at cricket, one was there to play cricket and nothing else, which players found hard to switch off from when the day was thrown out of kilter.

Time wasting, however, as an act in itself, was not the issue. It was the norm – as Coach’s words helped to insinuate – and an inevitable
component of a game played for long periods at a slow tempo. Rather, it was when ‘cricket-time’ lost its value as an investment that the perception of time being ‘wasted’ became hard to deal with. Attitudes would depress. Cricket would become the enemy. Repressed anxieties would rise to the surface and reveal themselves in conversation, as I watched players consult their phones and other devices of communication to keep tabs on the world outside, whirling away at a pace, and making them feel as though it was leaving them behind.

It was 3pm before I made the short walk back to the hotel alongside Connor. “Shit this is getting to me now...” he said as we climbed a sodden grass bank in the direction of the hotel car park. “What is?” I asked, inquisitively. “Sitting around not doing anything!” His shoulders were slumped. His head hung at an angle as his face flooded with concern. “It’s such a funny game cricket isn’t it? Because after a day in the dirt, the last thing you want is another day in the dirt! Now we haven’t played for a week, all you want – all I want – is another day in the dirt!” he said, missing the sense of graft that came with spending a long day in the field. “And it’s been a nice day today. Yet we haven’t bowled a ball – and we probably won’t bowl a ball tomorrow either. Getting back to the hotel now all you want is to feel as though you’ve been productive, but we haven’t. We’ve just sat around getting more and more frustrated. It sucks mate! And this...” he appealed towards the sky, “…it is the last thing you want when you’re sitting on bad form and things aren’t going for ya.” The past few weeks had put Connor in a fragile place when it came to thinking about his future. Chances to bat had been few and far between and in the limited opportunities he’d had to put together a score, he’d failed to produce one, and out of his assessment of cricket being “such a funny game” I took it as an indication of his attempts to understand it, as he engaged in a process of weighing up what a life in cricket may inevitably involve.
Day 4: Cricket and a binding orientation

If at first sitting around having nothing to do felt strange by the third, consecutive day it began to feel quite normal as the group adjusted to a new routine of rising for breakfast, and hibernating until lunch. “This is what it must feel like to be unemployed”, reflected Josh over the voices of Patrick and Lewis in conversation about the season’s batting averages, as they waited in the pavilion for lunch to be served.

The message delivered by Coach to his players that morning had been to “never moan when the sun shines”. The point being that it was far better to be tired with a focus, than to be tired of having no focus at all, and on receiving news of the third day in succession to be washed out, it had sounded professorially wise. Bound to a culture and a series of cricketing locales that encouraged the individual to think and act like a professional cricketer, without cricket, to use Coach’s words, you were “up a gum tree!” when it came to retaining emphasis to the day. There was, of course, work to be done for the start of the cricket season clashed with the final weeks of the university year. There were exams to be revising for and essays to written, and with no cricket being played there was time in the day to be getting on with such things, except few did.

“You see I actually find it really hard to do work in any other place than my room at home” said Ben as he sat in the hotel foyer on his return from lunch at the ground. “I struggle to do work because we are here to play cricket, and I find it tough to focus on it” added George. ”You also think ‘Oh I should be playing cricket now so if I was playing I wouldn’t be doing work anyway’…” continued Ben, as the pair of them proceeded to think of reasons as to why they found studying so difficult. “I think part of the reason is that you’re constantly making an effort in the environment with the team and stuff, and putting on a bit of an act” expressed George, “And when you’re sharing a room with someone that effort, that act continues…” Ben said, reinforcing his teammate’s point of view. It would be inaccurate to suggest that all players found concentrating on their scholarly responsibilities equally impossible, but most felt less was achieved while in the cricket
bubble and out of their preferred study environments, regardless of whether a day's cricket had actually been played.

In a conversation I had with Coach at lunch, he reacted in a rather dismissive fashion when I suggested more should be done to encourage cricketers to engage themselves when there was nothing else for them to do. “Yeah, well, it’s alright saying that if you’re an intellectual like Brearley. He’d probably read the works of Socrates or something during the days we’ve had”, implying that most in cricket, like himself, were just cricketers interested in playing cricket, matching the excuses that many of the players provided when it came to their academic work. In fact, Coach always encouraged his players to be attentive to the game when a game was in progress for there was always something of value to be picked up, technically or tactically, through watching, and supporting teammates out in the middle, and it was something that Coach actively looked for in the mindset of his young hopefuls.

Indeed, during my first season with the academy Coach shared with me an observation he’d made in the behaviour of one of the season’s new recruits, Patrick. For the second time in two days, Patrick was out for a low score and upon leaving the field he’d entered the changing room and returned within minutes to begin rifling through notes and pages of a textbook. “You see that to me suggests he wasn't fully focused out there. How can you get out and then straight away concentrate on your books?” Coach asked, pulling me to one side to discuss what he’d seen within the post-innings actions of the young player. In Coach’s opinion, if Patrick had been fully immersed in the task of scoring runs for the sake of the team and his career in cricket, surely he required a period of cooling off – a time to be on his own in the changing room to think, and to feel disappointed. Instead, Coach saw a young man preoccupied with matters extraneous to his cricketing future, which he found suspicious. As an outspoken advocate for the university system for the blend of educational and sporting opportunities it offered aspiring players, Coach’s suspicion of Patrick’s behaviour formed part of an embedded contradiction between academic attainment and sporting success (see Parker, 1996, 2000) that featured within the lives of his student-
cricketers. Despite the dual status that came with being a university cricketer, to display an academic predilection whilst inside the cricket bubble carried a certain degree of risk for what could be construed as a direct challenge to the occupational goal of professional cricket.

A day previous to that described above, I had been sitting next to Patrick when two members of the opposition came up to talk to him during a break in play. They were two old school friends, both of whom were signed with county squads, but unlike Patrick were nearing the end of their respective degrees and involvement with university cricket. Within recent days, Patrick had caught drift that there was a chance he could be selected for his county side in a forthcoming Pro 40 fixture that was due to be played in London on Sunday. The problem was that Patrick had an exam to sit on Monday. It was Wednesday at the time, and the team was not scheduled to make their journey home until Friday afternoon. He was in a dilemma and was thinking hard about how he might balance university and cricket without neglecting either. Subsequently he was looking for some assurance from some more experienced campaigners, both of whom made it clear where they felt Patrick’s priorities should lie. Patrick had been working around the clock, cramming in hours of revision when and where possible even if that meant getting up early to squeeze in an hour of revision before breakfast in a quiet corner of the hotel, or hitting the books straight after the disappointment of getting out. It had been noted, for it stood out against the general outlooks and perspectives that bound the group together. “Are you stupid? I don’t get your train of thought! You’re a fresher right?” responded one of them unsympathetically and in a patronising tone. Patrick nodded. “Then why do you care? There is nothing to gain by getting a first in your first-year exams!” I loitered intently listening and watching as Patrick became increasingly torn between what was ‘right’ for him to do. “You must play on Sunday! And besides, you don’t want someone else playing and scoring runs ahead of you, do you?!”

31 The Pro 40 is a ‘List A’ (the ‘one-day’ equivalent of the ‘four-day’, first-class game) cricket competition played in by the first-class counties of England and Wales as well as a representative team from Scotland and an amateur team called the Unicorns.
Coach of course had some opinions on this too, and as we continued to discuss Patrick and his behaviour around the ground, our conversation morphed into one about the pressures placed upon young cricketers like Patrick from their counties and their institutions of study to choose between the two. In most cases, it was cricket that came out on top as the principal construct to the validation, planning and projection of self in the summer, for it was in cricket that they spent most of their time under the pressure to conform to its guiding orientation. Indeed, it was this that George had been alluding to when he spoke of his life in the summer being “geared” towards cricket and the next game – a factor that was reflected most strongly by Connor when, prior to the start of the 2013 season, he admitted:

At the moment cricket is my centre. Everything that I am going to do in the next eight months is going to be geared around cricket. And hopefully in the next six or seven years everything is going to be geared around cricket in every decision that I make – even tonight! Do I go out? The season is less than two weeks away. Just small things like that. It all sort of boils down to the cricket season. If someone asks me ‘Are you going away for the summer?’ No, I have got cricket. ‘Are you going to see Kate over the summer?’ No not much because I've got cricket. You don't even get to see your family – the most important things in your life you have to squeeze in between fixtures. Everything is fitted in around cricket. Your family, your friends, girls. They all have to take second place. And I think I have accepted that. Not bought into it, but I know that if I want to make a career of it, it has got to be that way.

(Recorded Conversation, 20. 3. 2013)

Following on from this, I asked Connor whether accepting the tunnel vision that came as a feature of the cricket bubble was important, to which he responded with:

Definitely. Because if you don’t accept it you’re always going to be asking yourself ‘do I really need to play this game?’ or ‘Is this what I want?’ So I have kind of accepted it that this is what I want and that this is why I am here! I think I accepted it three years ago. And there might come a time where I realise a) this isn’t what I want, or b) I’m not cut out for it, or c) I’m not good enough, and I hope I will be able to spot that and not become one of those guys that tries to convince themselves otherwise. But I think I would have realised by now if cricket wasn’t my thing – especially after last year when we were
sitting around in hotels for the whole time. We got tested to the limit when it came to dealing with the rain and stuff. So until I reach that stage then I’ll keep working hard at it and at the moment I can’t think of anything else other than being a cricketer. Which might be a bit sad – not sad but you might think ‘Oh shit you’ve put all your eggs in one basket’ – but I think at some point you have to if you want to be a pro-cricketer.

(Recorded Conversation, 20. 3. 2013)

It was at this juncture that the context to the conversation we were having became interesting. It was dissertation hand-in day and for whatever reason Connor was not submitting a dissertation. As a final year undergraduate student he had decided against it, accepting instead a route to an ‘ordinary’ rather than an ‘honours’ degree. Just like many others who had gone before him, he had cleared a path in order to concentrate on cricket, and when it came down to deciding which path to choose, the cricket bubble was the environment that helped drag cricket into focus.

**Day 5: A game of contrasts**

No sooner has the cricketer got used to his surroundings and organised himself into a makeshift routine, he is once again uprooted and unsettled by change in the process of relocating. And so, at 10.45am on the morning of Day 5, hotel rooms were cleared of belongings and bags loaded back onto the kit-van ready to depart for the team’s next hotel and cricket ground complex, with mixed feelings about leaving what had essentially become home.

Driving like a man possessed, Coach belted along the motorway through lashing rain chuntering and chewing at his fingertips. “Oh dear, dear, dear. Please, God, let us play some cricket. Jesus, look at it!” he pleaded, “Fish don’t live well out of water!” For the last forty miles of the trip, I took over the driving allowing Coach to spread out on the passenger seat next to me. “There’s some real contrasts in cricket isn’t there” he highlighted whilst watching the road through a rain-splattered windscreen. “You can go from one extreme to the next very, very quickly from fielding in the baking heat one day, to this the next. It’s just another thing that these young blokes have
got to get used to!” he said in consideration of another dimension of the cricketer’s lifestyle that Coach believed could change “on a daily basis”.

On the subject of fluctuation, George provided an analysis that was slightly more refined than the “daily” contrasts that Coach had alluded to, when I spoke to him in the service station mid trip. Over and above daily ups and downs, he explained to me how his emotive experiences in cricket seemed to change “week-by-week, match-by-match, day-by-day, session-by-session, over-by-over, ball-by-ball” – a pattern which George considered to be the most “ridiculous” feature of his life each summer. In fact, it was the “ups and downs mate, the ups and downs” that Patrick had once cited as the most difficult part of cricket when it came to coping with the various facets of his cricketing life that conjoined many of the interrelated dimensions of the cricket bubble, but which boiled down to the performance accomplishments that ‘dominate a cricketer’s thoughts’ (Roebuck, 1985, p.38).

Speaking of contrasts, Connor once described to me a sequence of events that saw him yoyo from the “worst day’s cricket” to the “best day’s cricket” of his life in the space of a single day. He’d been away playing representative cricket for his country and what Connor went on to divulge about his experiences depicted the very essence of the emotional highs and lows that both George and Patrick had referenced as a foremost feature of their cricketing lives.

On the first day the opposition scored 500 for 5 declared. I bowled and went for sevens [seven runs per over] and then went into bat that evening and got a second ball blob [0]. We were 30 for 3 by the end of the first day. In the pavilion that night I had my head in my hands saying ‘Fuck this’ – mate, I was so depressed! Then on the third day, I went into bat again just before lunch and I was like ‘I need to score some runs here’ and by the end of the day I was 148 not-out having chased 400 on the last day to win the game. And I even hit the winning runs! Fucking great feeling. The best! I’ve never experienced anything like it.

We talked about how easy it was to get panicked by a bad game or low score to which Connor replied:

It's ridiculous mate how quickly it can turn. RIDICULOUS! My Dad had texted me the first day saying ‘I can feel your pain’ and then he texted me yesterday saying ‘That was truly remarkable – well done
son’, and it’s just so funny looking back on how contrasting it all was going from your worst day to your best day with just a day of cricket in between.

(Field notes, 31. 5. 2012)

Connor’s story was nothing out of the ordinary other than an eloquent summary of the steep emotional flux in a person’s life when its meaning is confined by limited boundaries.

Led under the orientation of ‘cricket’, in many ways life in the bubble was a simplification of the players’ more complex lives as university-cricketers. Indeed, players would often state that they felt professional cricketers’ lives were in fact “easier” than their own. It was a perception based on the idea that professional cricketers had nothing else to “worry about” other than cricket, making it common for players to wish that their lives were that ‘simple’. Retreating into their cricketing roles as a means of aspiring to this ideal, it was a commitment with a cost, as the further they dedicated themselves to the outlooks of the cricket bubble, the greater the value cricket and performance became to their everyday lives.

It has been suggested from research focused on the chronically ill that ‘restricted lives lead to restricted concerns’ (Charmaz, 1983, p.175). It is a notion applicable to the manner in which cricket and performance consumed much of what was deemed important to the individual’s life in the summer. Indeed, the ‘encompassing concern with self’ noted by Charmaz (1983, p.176) in the chronically ill matched the self-centred concerns frequently displayed by members of the academy whose lives and social activities (particularly whilst playing away) were restricted to the orientating framework of the cricket bubble that provided them with an implicit understanding for the role of runs and wickets in granting players a sense of ‘human worth’ (Roebuck, 1985, p.49). But despite knowledge of how quickly things in cricket could change, there was a general consensus among players of the academy squad that cricket consisted of more “bad days than good”.

Arriving at our accommodation, Coach’s words took on a new complexion as I navigated the narrow corridors of a commercial tower block
of rooms and compared the guesthouse comforts of the team's previous lodgings, to the cold, impersonal functionality of the new. Met with widespread despondence, it was just another contrast to add to the collection of contrasts the cricketer has to “get used to” when his life is set against limited criteria on which to pass judgment on his experiences.

**Day 6: Individualism and the collective endeavour**

There is truism among cricketers that describes cricket as an “individual sport played under the framework of the team”. As ever, these were words used by Coach in his advocacy of an aspect of the game that he felt was important for his players to internalise in striving to become “pros”. “Never leave it down to the next bloke” he would tell his team in the build-up to a run chase or the defence of a team score, for it was these individual margins that he would explain were the difference between winning and losing, or a contract at the end of a season. Under this philosophy, cricket as a collective endeavour, reduced itself to personal contributions that were not only about team success, but an individual’s longevity in the game. Yet despite his years of professional involvement from which his outlooks were inherited, Coach could never understand why cricketers in his opinion were “selfish people”.

In fact, it was a criticism often labelled at Coach that he was "selfish" in his actions and style of management. Belonging to this school of thought was the belief that Coach above all else cared most for the protection of his own reputation than he did for what individuals made of themselves and their own cricketing futures. It was a bone of contention that caused upset when members of the squad perceived that their progress was being stifled by Coach’s attempts at blocking them from competing for other representative sides. There was an impression that Coach’s authoritarian stance on deciding what players could and could not do was not out of a genuine concern for what was best for player development, but out of an industrialist desire to control his means of production and win games of cricket. The resultant tension was expressive of another dimension of the cricket bubble where individualised concerns took precedence over the mutual dependencies of an organised team environment. Not only was this
made evident in the cricketing clichés used by Coach to guide the maturation of successful cricketing mentalities, but in the players’ own attitudes to what they considered to be just and unfair in relation to their progress that clashed with Coach’s approach to man management.

There was a unanimous view held amongst the players that their involvement in the academy was based around what they took from the system in relation to personal improvements and exposure to cricketing opportunities, as opposed to what they put back in. This is not to confuse what players perceived they had to ‘put in’ in terms of hours spent training, travelling and playing, for it was acknowledged that “you’ve got to love hitting balls to make it in this game” which Patrick reiterated to me on the morning of Day 6 when I found him practising on the bowling machine in the indoor nets before the rest of his teammates had arrived at the ground. Rather, it related to the upholding of overly simplistic notions of ‘team’, ‘teamwork’ and ‘team values’ to be acted out on behalf of team functionality and success. Instead, team harmony came through a natural understanding for what brought each individual to the academy in the first place. Largely, this was to take from their experiences what was considered to be of personal value in the building of a career in professional cricket reflecting more closely the “selfish” motivational instincts of their professional counterparts.

Using the same descriptor as Coach in depicting cricketers as “selfish people”, Patrick gave reason to the cricketer’s self-centeredness when he told me that cricketers “only like doing what they like doing – like batting or bowling”. Structurally, players entered into an environment with attributes that naturally drew them together. However, set against the academy’s developmental backdrop, cricket, and the principal activities of batting or bowling, were seen in connection with a process of cricketing self-creation that emerged as a framework players used to interpret what was important in the trade off between team and individual goals (see Crosset, 1995).

For the young cricketer, however, the integration of a self-interest alongside the collective endeavours of a cricketer’s lifestyle presented a complex social terrain to navigate that was reflected in a conversation I had
with George about the selfishness to which he and his teammates often referred.

You’ve got to ask yourself what would you rather do. Get a hundred and lose? Or get nought and win the game? You’d take the hundred every time! And I’m saying every one is like that in cricket, everyone! Even though some may say I’d rather the team wins, the person who gets a hundred and gets interviewed at the end of the game and says ‘it was nice to get some runs but as long as the team gets the results’ is talking absolute bullshit! Just because the team has won and you have scored runs, or when the team lose and they say ‘oh the runs were irrelevant because we’ve lost’, they don’t actually mean that because they would still take it. That is how selfish cricket is and how selfish it has to be if you want to do well. And you’d rather do well for yourself. I’d take shit figures in the World Cup final for England if we won the game – but in the World Cup final because you can’t get further than that! But in this cricket we’re all still trying to go somewhere with it.

(Recorded Conversation, 8. 4. 2012)

George spoke in almost a whisper as if he was revealing some shameful truth about cricket team dynamics. In his opinion, the academy was about “developing individuals” – hence the priority he gave towards individuals doing well that the team was seen as a vehicle for. Attitudes of this kind were not just confined to the academy, however. From his wider cricketing experiences in county Second XI cricket, and with First XI county squads, George believed that lots of things in professional cricket went “unsaid” when it came to the “underlying feelings” and motivators which players hid from each other beneath a layer of “bullshit”.

During the course of our conversation, George recounted a story about a county cricketer he knew that depicted this undercurrent. Having being selected for a series of One Day Internationals (ODIs), the cricketer in question had been uncertain of the manner in which he should approach the string of games he was in line to play, and on seeking advice from a more experienced colleague, George described how the player had been guided:

[He was told] for the first three innings play for yourself and for the last two play for the team, which basically meant if he was to get 100 off like 190 balls in one of his first three innings he’d be doing himself a
lot of favours even if [international side] didn’t go on to win the game because he would have done well enough to secure his place for a period of time... which just shows the importance of doing well for yourself early.

(Recorded Conversation, 8. 4. 2012)

Despite George’s certainty with the way things “had to be” if a cricketer wanted to make the most out of himself and his opportunities, he checked himself when he declared that he still wasn’t sure whether the above was actually “good advice” or not. He posed the question to me, which caused me to take a deep breath. It seemed such a bold and yet fundamental question to a young man’s life when self-interest brings him to challenge his communitarian loyalties. We talked it through pending George coming to the conclusion that until “properly established” the young cricketer/young man couldn’t ever feel himself to be a true team player. Instead, mastering a role within the meritocracy of a team culture was a balancing act that a young cricketer like George had to strike on his way to establishing himself.

Beliefs of this nature, as George’s comments help to highlight, filtered into the environment through players’ experiences and connections with the professional game, that were used thereafter to assess what was required in relation to cricketing development. George’s sense of individualism was thus not only a product of a game that centralises the individual within its framing of the action (James, 1963), but of a system attached to wider society that made ‘self’ a project to be made (Giddens, 1991). Coupled with the ‘self-focus’ characteristic of young people’s transitions to adulthood (Arnett, 2004), concern for one’s own needs regularly pushed notions of team into the background in favour of individual needs, and how well individuals perceived themselves to be doing.

Day six had been a generally tetchy affair for reasons that Connor summed up when he put the spikey mood down to spending six days “on top of each other”, with no cricket or privacy. And so, it came as a welcome reprieve and break from routine when I was invited out for dinner by Josh, Patrick and Lewis when the three of them walked back from the ground to the hotel after the abandonment of another day’s play. When I asked if they
were planning on inviting the rest of the group I was told “but that would
defeat the object”, for it was not for the benefit of everyone else that they
were arranging to go out for dinner, but for the benefit of themselves.

**Day 7: No escape**

On the morning of day seven, I headed down to breakfast and went and sat
next to Bob in reception who was watching the weather forecast on the
news. “Don’t tell me we are going to play here?” I said to Bob, “I’m not sure I
could face it!” Raising an eyebrow he gave me a pensive look. “I’ve got used
to being on the road, but this – this has just been terrible! It’s the lowest I’ve
been at any point since I’ve started doing this I think. It really has got to me
all this. I went to my room yesterday afternoon and just fell asleep. I never
do that. I felt depressed”. In one sense, Bob’s admission took me by surprise.
Like Coach, he was battle hardened and never openly sentimental about life
on the road, but no matter the years of experience, there were aspects to the
cricket lifestyle that made even the hardiest vulnerable to dips in morale.
“On the road you get into the mentality of going forward. Each day is
something else; another day’s cricket, another cricket ground, another set of
challenges. But here, we’ve just become stationary haven’t we?” Whether
viewed from a team or individual perspective, it was “going forward” that
retained a sense of purpose to life in the bubble with day-to-day cricketing
events fuelling the environment with fresh incentives. This “mentality” was
part of the immersive experience that once lost revealed the full extent of
cricketing commitment. “Let’s get on the road eh” Bob said hopefully. “If we
leave by eleven we’ll be home by mid afternoon”.

For all, returning home was a means of exiting, albeit temporarily,
from the constraints of the cricket bubble we’d inhabited since departing six
days before. Indeed, having the means to “get away from it” was considered
one of the most valuable methods of coping with the all-consuming nature of
cricket's lifestyle. And yet it was its all-consuming nature that made ‘getting
away' one of the hardest things for a player to achieve. Speaking of this
difficulty Connor explained:
During most games you just do the same thing over and over. You get back to the hotel after a day’s cricket, you shower, you get some gears on, you go for food, you may walk around the town for a bit and stare at a few birds, make a derogatory comment, go back to the hotel, watch the telly and go to bed. That’s it. And it’s hard to kind of break that. Unless you go out on the piss, it’s hard to go out and actually do something different. You never have enough time. So you rarely get time, not ‘me time’, but like ‘off cricket time’ or ‘out of cricket time’.

(Recorded Conversation, 20. 3. 2013)

The notion of “out of cricket time” became increasingly important when players perceived themselves to be doing badly. During these periods, the cricket bubble was a difficult environment to be immersed in both day and night. It made players look for points of release that Connor alluded to when he described resorting to going out “on the piss” as a way of “doing something different” and breaking the repetition that limited players to their cricketing routine. “I think that’s why a lot of cricketers do it” (go out to get drunk during and after games) George once told me in an attempt at justifying his own and his teammates actions after breaking a team curfew. “It's that whole living in the moment planning for the future argument,” he continued. “Cricket is so repetitive it’s almost like a way of keeping things interesting by doing something a bit random. Particularly when things aren’t going well – you just want to get away from it.”

Seeking entertainment beyond cricket whilst in cricket was thus seen as a combative way in which players could breach the routine nature of their cricketing lives. Stories of current professional players with “100% strike rates” when it came to picking up women on nights out during or after fixtures depicted a way of dealing with aspects of the cricket lifestyle that the players of the academy took reference from. Once again, it was George who paid lip service to the importance of cricketers having alternatives to the cricketing milieus they inhabited during the months of the season. Reflecting on the significance of cricketers’ home lives in providing an avenue of “release”, George commented on the benefits he found of having a set of non-cricketing housemates to return to after a period of intense cricket:
I kind of like the thought of going off for a week and coming back and having five lads there getting on with their uni work, going to lectures, and getting on with the normal stuff that goes on in the house on a weekly basis, as it comes as a complete change. I can talk to them about what they have been up to, I can go and do something with them which will be a lot different to going back and having to call up one of the cricket lads and asking if they wanted to go out for a coffee.

(Recorded Conversation, 8.4.2012)

Reacquainting himself with a life at home appeared to help George in a process of regaining some perspective. For George, returning home to a different set of people and daily focuses became a means of detaching himself from cricket that he otherwise wouldn’t have. Relatedly, it was his belief that professional cricketers who had alternative responsibilities as husbands, boyfriends, fathers etcetera were in a better position to be able to remove themselves from the bubble, than they were as single men. Indeed, “getting away from it” was considered to be a constant challenge made easier if the person had “other things to be concerned about” that anchored them both socially and emotionally to a life outside of the bubble.

It was to a wife and the stable social arrangements associated with life at home that Bob now wished to return, and as I sat with him discussing the disruption cricket had had on facets of his family and working life, I noticed players starting to appear from their rooms with panicked expressions on their faces. They seemed surprised and rather let down by the clearer conditions and out of interest I went over and joined them at the breakfast table. “A week away. No cricket. All it’s been is a lads holiday” summed up a rather groggy looking Connor to the amusement of his peers as they started to concern themselves with the smell of alcohol on their breath.

By 9.15am the squad were amassed in the changing room waiting for news on the future of the match and tour that remained in doubt. A few hours later, as the players lounged around on the floor of the changing room using their kit bags as pillows, hopes for a quick conclusion were settled when the match was cancelled and the tour was brought to a premature end to the relief of everybody involved.
“Harry, I want to see your notes after all this!” Coach said as we departed from the ground for home. Reflecting on the week we’d had he said, “Cricket pitches and hotel rooms – that’s all you see as a cricketer” as he began to draw parallels between our experiences and that of the professional cricketers on tour. Yet the cricket bubble was more than just a physical world with physical boundaries. For the players of the academy, it constituted an entire system of reference and reflexive knowledge, social relations and time-space habits that built up over the course of the winter to enfold them by the end of the summer. During this time, the cricket bubble served to help players construct an image of the life of a professional cricketer that they acted out among the many “cricket pitches and hotel rooms” and other physical settings that drew them within touching distance of that world.

In an attempt to decipher by whom and how the cricket bubble was created, I once asked Connor to describe to me what it was that ‘encased’ him and his teammates inside its domain. “Who’s the director?” I asked, to which Connor responded first by appreciating Coach’s role in creating an environment that demanded his players’ total commitment, before recognising the individual’s part in its conception:

\begin{quote}
But at the end of the day you are the creator. It’s your decision. It’s you in the bubble. No one else. There are other people around you who choose to be a part of it and help to create it too, but I suppose you shouldn’t have to be encased by it. You should be in the bubble because you want to be in the bubble. Being encased in it sort of gives the impression that you’ve been forced in and kind of locked in. Sometimes it feels like that – like when you’ve had a shit day and you think ‘How am I going to get out of this?’ But you can’t – you can’t just then jump off a sinking ship. You gotta stay with it. And I think at the start of the season you just want to play. You’re in the bubble and you’re loving it, but as the season goes on you start to get used to the bubble and sometimes you think ‘Shit I want to get out’ and realise you can’t because you’re too far in. But I’m not saying that it comes to August and I’m sick of it! I’m not. Like I said to you before, if I didn’t love it that much I wouldn’t do it...
\end{quote}

(Recorded Conversation, 20. 3. 2012)

Part formal structure and part self and joint creation, the cricket bubble was
a holistic concept derived from both physical and abstract components of the social world it represented. Formed around a schedule of games and a quadrant of physical settings (the minibus, hotels, cricket grounds and motorway service stations), the cricket bubble became a vesicle of acculturation capable of trapping an individual within its midst. As Connor pointed out, what began as a conscious decision to enter the bubble on the basis of wanting to play cricket eventually became something of an obligation.

Although not strictly a ‘total institution’ in a Goffmanian\(^\text{32}\) (1961) sense, the properties of the cricket bubble were capable of imparting a perception of being in the world that provided its young occupants with a sense of direction. “And that’s another thing about the bubble”, Connor went on to say as we pieced together the components of the cricket bubble that made it so engrossing, “I’m a massive believer in out of sight and out of mind. But cricket is never out of my mind...” as for Connor, like many of his teammates in the months of the season, the next game, the next innings, and the next chance to make an impression never fell from view.

Arriving at the service station, I walked around on my own for a while before joining the rest of the group who’d formed along a bench in two parallel lines facing each other. “Oi, anyone fancy going for a coffee when we get back?” Ben asked whilst sinking his teeth into another McChicken nugget. I was left stunned by his proposal, for despite numerous days and nights away some players still found it hard to distance themselves when the opportunity arose.

It was late in the afternoon by the time we arrived back at a much busier university campus than the one we had departed. Whilst away, the summer term had begun. With exams around the corner, and a week of lectures missed, it was hardly the best preparation and against the backdrop

\(^{32}\) Whereas Goffman (1961) centres his analyses on residential establishments that principally revolve around involuntary membership (i.e. the psychiatric hospital), players entered the “cricket bubble” of their own accord and were, in part, responsible for its creation. The “cricket bubble” not only represented a physical world complete with settings, co-parties and behavioural routines, but a social and psychological connection with the game that became increasingly encompassing as the season wore on.
of university life running to schedule, it was easy to feel completely out of sync.

In the time it took to transfer bags from the kit-van back on to the minibus there was a bit more hanging around to rile those now desperate to get home, before commencing on the final leg of the journey. Drop-off was much like pick-up with the minibus, driven by Coach, packed to the rafters, whistling down the road on its way to depositing players near to their houses in town.

Stepping off the bus on the opposite side of the road from where we had first stepped on, George and I pulled our bags onto the pavement and walked along the road together towards home. “A few of the lads said they were going for food tonight, but I just fancy chilling out on my own and watching some of the golf to be honest...” There was a moment’s pause as we both considered what awaited us at home. “Do you know what I dislike the most about all this...?” I looked at George inquisitively. “…Returning home to empty cupboards!” I laughed. I hated that too, and as I watched George wheel his cricket bag up the street with his overnight bag and laptop carry case slung across his shoulders, I wondered how many of his teammates were thinking the same.

**Tangled Up in Cricket**

Constructed around a schedule of games and time-space demands, not only did the cricket bubble represent a physical world capable of confining an individual to a set of cricketing contexts, but it also reflected a frame of reference used by the players in their efforts to understand and assess what life might be like as professional cricketers. Part of this assessment was the extent to which players were willing to accept cricket into their lives for the sake of a professional contract, and run the risk of over committing. Questions of how far was far enough drew upon cricket’s potential to limit other work and lifestyle opportunities. For a living example, players didn’t have to look any further than Coach, but they also knew from their own experiences of cricket how easy it was to get caught up in the process of finding a place within the game.
“I often think that other options in my life haven’t been considered because of cricket. So as much as it has provided opportunities and benefits, it’s also been quite restrictive…” Lewis once said to both Patrick and I as the pair of them sat waiting to re-take the field. “In what sense?” I queried, as I asked whether it would be alright if I could record the rest of the conversation on my phone.

Lewis: It could be an excuse, but I haven’t been able to elaborate on other fields that I’d like to explore because cricket has always been there. For example work experience in the summer, I haven’t been able to go and work for say a Newspaper...

Patrick [interjecting]: Don’t be stupid mate, you don’t want to do that...

Lewis: Yeah but I’m saying for example. It’s just quite interesting because you are constantly stressing aren’t you that ‘Am I going to make it? Am I not? Am I going to get offered a contract after uni? Am I not? Whereas if you didn’t get offered a contract after university, in some ways it might be a relief: Thoughts?

Patrick: Yeah I mean when you say it would be a relief...

Lewis [interjecting]: Perhaps relief isn’t the right word but I was chatting to George last night and he said that sometimes he considers whether getting released from his county would actually open other doors for him in the long run and almost stop him from chasing something that may never be attainable. He was like, ‘I might make it as a first-class cricketer play regularly and go on to be successful, but there is every chance that is not going to happen despite how hard I work.’ I mean you could easily reach your mid to late 20s and still be on the fringes...

Patrick: Like Wrighty

Lewis [passionately]: Yeah exactly, and before you know it you’re in your early 30s and your cricket career has gone nowhere and you’re left needing to find a new direction. So what I am saying is, is it really worth that process that risks you not even becoming recognised as a cricketer?

(Recorded Conversation, 7.4.2012)

At this point, Ben strolled over to the table around which the three of us were sitting and joined the conversation. A few days before I had gone to
meet him for a coffee during which time we had discussed something similar. In fact, Ben had made reference to the same player that Patrick had dropped into conversation in the moments before Ben arrived. Over coffee, Ben had used him as an example in expressing his horror at how some players could allow themselves to get so “tangled up in cricket” that by the age of 26 they were still travelling the country playing as a “trialist”. Asking what he meant by “tangled up”, Ben explained it as having “nothing else” outside of cricket at an age when one should have more to account for their years of commitment to it. Asking him to give a reason for why he thought this could happen, he said “it’s not easy to face the reality of the ‘real world’ so once you’re in (in cricket) its hard to let go – especially if you haven’t got anything to let go for! A guy like Wrighty is never going to give it up to go and work in a shop is he?!”. 

By Ben’s reckoning, there were lots of people in cricket like this who played and continued playing just because they had done so for so long. Players such as Ben were often guarded about how much time they were willing to spend chasing cricket. No one wanted to get the reputation of being the perennial “trialist”, or be considered to have developed an unhealthy reliance on the game, but at the same time few were willing to completely disband the idea of giving it another go. In some respects, the cricket bubble was a safe-haven that provided occupants with a continued sense of direction. On the other, the nature of a cricketer’s lifestyle risked reducing a person’s sense of what was available to them outside of cricket, which Ben went on to explain when he pulled up a chair to sit alongside Patrick, Lewis and me.

Ben [in reference to Wrighty]: *He’s so far fuckin’ into cricket that I don’t think he’s got a choice to be honest other than to pursue a county contract somewhere and trial each summer…*

Lewis: *What because he has never thought about anything else?*

Patrick [disagreeing]: *Well no because he has spent so much time pursing it to just give it all up. It would be a massive step back for him!*
Ben: *Exactly! But also if he stepped out of it, it would be a massive shock to him...*

*(Recorded Conversation, 7. 4. 2012)*

Viewed from this perspective, cricket was starting to become recognised by members of the academy squad as a potential life-long commitment that they were in danger of falling into, but as Coach had once informed me whilst sitting opposite him at the dinner table, at some point cricket had to become “serious”. That is to say, cricket would have to start to be integrated alongside other enduring adult commitments that players like Ben, Patrick and Lewis were in the process of doing as they started to look back in to their personal histories with the game and explore the nature of their attachment and commitment to it.
CHAPTER 5
Lady Cricket
From Flirtation to Cohabitation and the Transformation of Cricketing Relationships

Life inside the cricket bubble was often an intense and intimate experience not least because the actions of individuals could frequently affect the moods of fellow team members. Operating in close quarters for extended periods of time meant feelings spread quickly as an entire sub-terrain of peoples’ inner realities pushed and pulled against the dynamic of the collective. Cricket related or otherwise, I was drawn by the regularity and strength of the emotional outpourings on display, but where cricket was concerned specifically, explanation found grounds in the striking similarities observed in two players’ emotional reactions to two seemingly unrelated events. One followed the end of a romantic relationship whilst the other was consequential of a piece of cricketing misfortune. Both, however, appeared equally upsetting for the individuals involved as they set about overcoming the distress caused by their respective grievances. Further to their similarities, the manner in which the two incidences were connected revealed itself in the way the former began to explain the latter through an abstract, interpretative analysis of what underpinned players’ attachments to cricket. It led to the idea that cricketers enter into a personal (romantic) relationship with the game, a metaphor that I tested in conversations with players and Coach. At first, it was a metaphor that developed in relation to the academy players’ behavioural and emotional responses to the game that incorporated feelings of envy, jealously and loss, but which later became the basis for interpreting how their cricketing experiences were starting to transform. Subsequently, under the guise of “Lady Cricket”, the structure and content of this chapter reflects how a concept of ‘love’ evolved in connection to the players’ student-cricket experiences, and to the central aim of the thesis.
Games Within the Game

From my position on the grass bank, my eyes did a quick sweep of the ground, before looking up to check the batsman’s score. *Batsman No.1: 179 not out* – glowed the orange bulbs on the electronic scoreboard. Reverting my gaze back towards the batsman, I watched intently as he stood at the striker’s end pending the next delivery stepping forward and back and then forward again to a reel of imaginary deliveries playing over in his head. Grooving his front-foot defence, he looked surprisingly discontented despite the runs he had scored and the hours he had already spent at the crease. Now dancing on the spot, he played one final stroke before settling in his place as Ben returned to his mark33, turned, and began a weary approach to the wicket to bowl and the batsman’s ritual to start all over again. “Welcome to first-class cricket” Coach pronounced as he passed me on his final lap of the boundary before the close of play. Indeed, the day’s cricket had proved a rude awakening to all receiving first-hand insight into the self-absorbed mastery of one man and his game.

Watching the batsman between deliveries, it was as if he was in a game with himself such was the manner of his sustained fixation that suggested nothing else mattered outside of commanding complete control over the pick-up and flow of his bat, and the movement of his weight into the ball. ‘Shadow batting’, as it is known in the trade, is a type of self-soothing behaviour that forms part of many players’ routines between balls. In this sense, what I had been witnessing was nothing out of the ordinary as I watched a player engage in a mode of physical and mental practice to uphold the rhythm of his innings – for it was practice that this fixture offered both groups of players as the academy went up against their first-class opponents in preparation before the start of their respective Championship seasons. Nevertheless, despite the value of the team result, there had been a definite sense that the game represented more than just practice, which Coach had emphasised in the morning before the start of the previous day’s play.

---

33 The point at which a bowler begins his or her run-up to the wicket.
Clutching a copy of the *Wisden Cricket Almanack*\(^\text{34}\) as a prop to amplify his point, Coach told his players, “Whatever happens today your name will be in the bible. Be proud of that…” he said, sticking the book out in front of him to capture everyone’s attention on the little yellow book “…Go out there and give it your best. Whether you get nought or a hundred you’ll be in here forever more.” In the build up to his team’s first-class fixture, his words set in context the personal story lines that were about to trickle out over the course of the three-day event. Indeed, the little yellow book that Coach held in front of his players represented a part of what was at stake every time a cricketer takes to the field. With it came a sense of what was personal in the communal endeavour of winning a game of cricket which I gleaned from spending much of the morning with Patrick as he nursed the torment of getting a ball that kept “a little bit low”. A morning which was followed by an afternoon with Connor listening to his “wish” to “have another go” whilst I hurled balls at him in the nets as he went about overcoming his disappointment through an artificial replacement of the real thing.

"As much as I like watching I just think that could be me out there” Connor said as he stood gazing out towards the middle, his mind remaining fixed on the chance that had been and gone. “Geez he looks good doesn’t he?” he said, in reference to his teammate, Josh, who was making the best of his opportunity to impress. “God I wish I was still out there!” he said, bemoaning the mistake he’d made before lunch as he retook his stance ready to receive another throw. The ball hits a ridge on the uneven surface, bounces up, and nicks the shoulder of Connor’s bat before carrying through to the back netting. “NOOO! You idiot Connor!” he cried, taking a violent swing at the stumps with his bat as he swivelled around on the spot. I think it best to call it a day, but Connor was insistent on doing more. “One more round H. Let’s finish on a good one…”

“What defines good?” I asked, keen to rest a weary shoulder.

---

\(^{34}\) An annual cricket reference book – colloquially know as the ‘Cricket Bible’ – published in the UK. It contains statistical records and match reports of all first-class, List A and t20 cricket played in England and Wales over a single calendar year, as well as a number of articles on cricket related topics.
“I’ll tell ya when it happens...”

Three rounds later we left the net. “Perhaps just a few under arms after tea...?” he asked, hopeful of my compliance as we made our way back towards the pavilion to join the rest of the group. “How many did you get today?” I braved asking as we approached the white picket fencing enclosing the players’ seating area. I had missed his dismissal and I hadn’t thought to check his score. “Not enough” came his short, sullen response as he turned his back on the game and his teammates and skulked off into the changing room. A few minutes later I followed him inside to find Connor alone practising a few shots in the mirror. “I’m so glad for Josh...” he said, as I brushed passed him informing him of his teammate having reached his fifty, “…but I still wish I had got some runs!” Dropping the bat, Connor went and stretched himself out on one of the benches where he remained on his own until tea, closing himself off for a while to the cricket that continued outside.

At the tea interval, I returned to the nets but this time it was with Ryan who was keen to take advantage of a chance to hit some balls. Pondering his feelings towards his role in the game he turned to me and said, “Being twelfth man is an interesting one. You’re so close to the action yet you’re so far away!” I took his analysis and applied it to all cricketers sitting, watching and awaiting their next chance for a piece of the action. “I used to be fine with it...” Ryan confessed, speaking of an earlier period of his cricketing development, “…All I needed to know then was that I had a place on the team bus. Now it feels as though the clock’s ticking a bit...” he said, as he took himself down to the opposite end of the net and got himself in position to face a few throws.

It was Ryan’s first full year of involvement with the academy having arrived at university two years before with the hope of getting a place on the squad from the outset. After finishing his A-levels, he had spent a winter playing cricket abroad before returning home for the summer to take up a place as a Young Cricketer on the ground staff at Lord’s prior to the start of his degree. With knowledge of his personal history I asked Ryan whether his full inclusion in the year’s squad was dredging up an aspiration he had since put to bed. “Yeah, most definitely...” came his reply to my enquiry, “…but I
wouldn’t address it in the same way I once did…” as for this time round, Ryan sought greater balance in the way he managed a relationship with the game that had once controlled him.

Responding to his requests for front foot shots, then back, I threw to him for twenty minutes trying to keep up with the flurry of questions that rolled from his tongue:

“Is my head alright?”
I thought so.

“How’s my balance?”
It looked fine.

“I’m not falling over am I?”
Maybe he was a fraction.

“It’s about playing late, isn’t it?”
I could see the logic.

“Actually no! It’s about moving late – not playing late necessarily?”
I could see logic in that too.

“It’s about knowing your own game, wouldn’t you say?”
The questions kept coming until the players returned to the middle signalling the end of the short net session that left me curious as to whether I had seen a glimpse of the ‘old’ Ryan in the ‘new’. Now walking back towards the pavilion, questions of technique morphed into questions over the dynamics that existed between him and his teammates when runs and wickets, places in the team, and contracts were concerned. Once again it was Josh’s name that cropped up as a focal point to our discussion. His sustained effort, as the day’s standout performer, seemed to be having an adverse effect on all those fighting against the feelings of being one of the day’s unrequited. Indeed, jealously is said not to be uncommon in cricket. Nor is it unreasonable in a game of internal competition and rivalry (Foot, 1982). Personal narratives of success and failure, of chances taken and opportunities missed create divergence among the members of a cricket team as each player vies for the game’s affection, and centre their focus on what matters most to them.
Stacking his kit in a corner of the changing room at the end of the day's play, the scene captured the social dynamics to emerge from a single day of cricket that combined Josh's individual achievements with his teammates' personal frustrations, among the collective satisfaction of being 305-5 at the close. It was these subplots or ‘games within the game’ that surfaced each day of every match that crystallised the notion that players held a personal relationship with cricket that manifested itself in the social comparisons and the private thoughts, feelings and insecurities that players experienced throughout the season. Consisting of a history that spoke for what had first attracted them to the sport, it was players' biographical connections with the game that formed the roots of their emotional and motivational attachments to it. Memories of growing up were synonymous with early experiences on the cricket pitch and the feelings of “love” and “hate” that continued to form a major source of torment and inspiration as the nature of their relationships matured into something a little more serious. To the players of the academy, cricket was more than just a game but a time-honoured love affair of bat and ball – the foundations of which were placed under scrutiny every time a player took to the field. In every performance, regardless of how well the team were doing, there was always something of personal value to be gained or lost that signified the contests that played out between the individual and cricket, as players looked for clues and strived to discover whether cricket loved them too.

**Absence Makes the Heart Grow Fonder**

Speaking to *The Independent* about the heartbreak which he experienced throughout his professional career, Lou Vincent (2011), the former New Zealand international cricketer, recognised the human bond at the centre of his emotional ups and downs with the game and the state of melancholy to which he eventually succumbed. For Vincent, playing cricket professionally – as is said to be the case for ‘most’ professional cricketers (Brearley, 2012, p.35) – was founded on a love for the game that made up a considerable proportion of who he perceived himself to be: ‘a passionate man’ pursuing his passion in the most unreserved of ways. ‘It’s like the love of your life, she
takes you back and she drops you. How many times can you have your heart broken?’ Vincent asked, in description of the feelings that finally brought an end to his career and the anguish caused by feeling continually let down by something that he loved.

Referencing Vincent’s case in his essay on cricket and depression, Brearley (2012, p.33) – the former England Test captain and trained psychoanalyst – highlighted the fact that for its ‘intensities of effort, elation and disappointment’, the sense of loss related to a lack of form, being dropped from a team, released from a professional contract or retirement is bound to be a painful experience for cricketers to deal with. This is particularly so, said Brearley (2012), when a sense of loss is filled with anger and/or hatred towards the person or thing that someone would usually turn to in a crisis. Indeed, for many players, cricket becomes a place of refuge, ritual and ‘reassuring continuity’ that cannot be easily replaced in moments when it feels like cricket has deserted them (Frith, 2001, p.242). To this end, Solomon (2002, p.15) argues that, ‘to be creatures who love, we must be creatures who can despair at what we lose’. In other words, love and despair are two opposing emotions that share the same roots. Love – in all its various forms and mutations – therefore might be considered a complex mix of tempestuous emotional states ranging from infatuation to hatred, as well as a source of human motivation and attachment with physiological drives and characteristics influencing how people act and react to the things they choose to pursue (Fisher, 2005). Mood swings, seeking clarification, focused attention, intrusive thinking, yearning, jealousy, adversity, hope, exclusivity and emotional dependence were all facets of love’s experience identified by Fisher (2005) that makes being in ‘love’ a dually pleasurable and painful phenomenon that transforms over time and circumstance. Thus, in relation to romantic attachments specifically, it was through their ‘normal chaos’ (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995) that I came to better understand the way the academy players reacted and engaged with situations that occurred as part of their cricketing lives.

Five days on from the squad’s torrid experience of being confined to changing rooms and hotels during my second season with the academy (see
Chapter 4), a trip down to the nets at the start of May (2012) for an impromptu training session signified a return to an old routine that the squad had left behind many weeks before. Driving down in time for the start of practice I thought about where the squad should have been in preparation for their fourth one-day match of the season. Instead, players were stranded by the aftermath of a fortnight’s heavy rain that continued to blight their progress. April had passed; slipped away (in cricketing terms) almost unnoticed taking the cricket with it to leave behind a void in each of the players’ lives.

Arriving at the county ground, a game of Championship cricket was about to get underway on the pitch next to the entrance of the indoor school. Knowing how sick and tired the squad became of net practice during the winter, I did not need to be inside with them to get a sense for how upset they must have been to be forced back indoors. However, having stopped to take in the view, I decided it was time to pay the squad some attention before their session came to a close. Merging into the background, I listened as Coach informed the group of more game cancellations and warned them of the chances of the following week’s cricket being affected too. The news was met quizzically as players turned to each other to ask if not tomorrow, the day after, or the week after that – when next would their season resume?

“I haven’t scored a 50 yet this year!” Connor said to me as he walked out of the net to pack away his kit. “This time last year I’d lost count! I’d scored thousands”, he joked to make light of a situation that I knew bothered him immensely. Since the team had last played back in April, eleven days of cricket had been washed out in just over two weeks, with the following two days making it twelve and thirteen respectively. After a few days apart, the players seemed revitalised and happy to be back in each other’s company. With it, however, came an even greater need to get outside and play which net practice served only to frustrate.

On the subject of cricketers satisfying their ‘needs’, it was George who once made the analogy between net practice and masturbation when he stated, “It’s true though... when you can’t get a chop (sex) what do you do loads of...?” And that’s like practising isn’t it?? Isn’t it!!” he spluttered, putting
his hand over his mouth as he became increasingly excited by the comparison. “You’re like ‘RIGHT! I can’t buy a wicket here so I NEED to get in the nets. Look at Patrick last year. He didn’t score a run, but he practised loads because he was so frustrated. It was like he was constantly...” Shaking my head at his boorish analogy but unable to find fault in the argument, I took George’s comparison to be a legitimate way of describing the feelings cricketers experienced through their performances on the field, and the simulation to that effect that takes place off it, until ‘practice’ can no longer do. “And that’s the point when you know you have to go out and do it on the pitch!” George said, in recognition of the only way a player’s intimate connection with the game could be lastingly retained.

With training over and the rest of the day free to do as they pleased, many of the squad decided to stay around for a while to watch the cricket. Standing next to George and Ben, I asked what they had planned for the remainder of the week. “Not much”, they said, suggesting that they too were feeling slightly at a loss without cricket’s tangible presence. The rhythm of travel and play, travel and play provided a pattern to life during the season that individuals got used to in the process of finding their “cricket legs”. At times, the season’s rhythm could make it feel like a horrible slog but without it I started to suspect that many of the players were beginning to ask themselves, ‘Do I miss it?’ Not only did this apply to the players, but it also held true for anyone intensely involved in the season's schedule. “Oh Christ – bloody hell – yeah definitely...” came Bob’s animated response to my observation that the academy formed as much a part of his life as it did for Coach, and the players in the summer. “...It is. It’s part of your life, absolutely! And that’s cricket for you...” he said, as he went on to explain the reason for it, and the impact his commitment to cricket had on his relationship with a loved one.

My wife goes bananas in the cricket season. She says ‘you just become a different person’ and I guess I do. It’s difficult to switch off and go from one to the other. You are away for a period of time, you’re immersed in whatever that is and you can’t simply just come back, switch off and get on with your life because it simply isn’t that easy. There are a lot of issues going on in your head, and a lot of different emotions that you
are grappling with you know. So I think we all sort of change and adapt because it’s the nature of what we are in. I do think sometimes you know is it fair of me to put my wife through it every year? But mind you, when I ask her if she’d prefer it if I gave it up she says ‘you’ll be lost without it! You’d have no purpose’ especially now I’m semi-retired. And I have thought ‘Christ that is terribly sad that’ and then I think ‘well there are lots of other things I want to do’. But I still enjoy it… It keeps me young, so I think why would I stop? I’ve got to stay active, and there’s nothing else that I can think of that will keep me as active as this.

(Field notes, 19. 6. 2012)

The notes I recorded from the conversation we had standing on a boundary’s edge echoed some of the torn loyalties described by cricketers past and present on the impact their relationship with cricket had on other important relationships in their lives. A feature of the cricketing literature is the challenge of managing the heart when it comes to players sacrificing their loved ones for the love of their sporting profession. Stories of failing relationships (Fowler; 1989; Waters, 2012), divorce (Agnew, 2002; Thorpe, 2005), and Valentine days missed due to cricket and ‘being on the road’ (Cowan, 2011) speak of split devotions and divided passions between players’ emotional connection with the game, and their emotive connection with other people. In this regard, it was telling that Coach was a single man in his mid to late sixties. Rumours of divorce, failed relationships with women and family members formed a shadow that followed him until I finally plucked up the courage to broach the subject after his own enquiry as to whether or not I had a girlfriend, or two.

HB: Any old flames in your life then Coach?

Coach: Yeah, well I have been engaged four times! Yeah, blimey, there was a bit of promotion, relegation, middle of the table stuff going on there I can tell you! It’s bad really, but it’s tough in what I was in Harry – it wasn’t good for relationships you know!

HB: What, cricket wasn’t good for them?

Coach: No not really. Not at any level – club cricket, county cricket, Test match cricket – because it’s a time consuming game this is isn’t it? It becomes a social game as well at times you know, and women don’t
handle that very well because it’s like you’re spending half your time with somebody else, you know?

HB: You think?

Coach: Absolutely! We all end up being in a bit of a relationship with it [cricket] don’t we? I mean don’t forget when you play your cricket on a Saturday you leave your house – what say 9/10 o’clock in the morning and then don’t get back until 10 in the evening? And women don’t always understand that – unless you are lucky. You can’t expect them to really. I mean I took a couple of girls to South Africa with me and they all ended up saying ‘fuck this I’m not coming back here with you if it’s going to be like how it was’. They were hard done by a bit – but I understood that – and don’t forget when I was over there I was coaching at the school in the week and then playing or coaching cricket on the weekends so where did they fit into that? In the bedroom and in the kitchen basically! It can’t have been much fun for them seeing me playing and coaching cricket and enjoying myself...

HB: No.

Coach: So there is always a price to pay isn’t there! I mean a lot of relationships go wrong anyway because of the close proximity people find themselves in all the time. But we [cricketers] are at the other extreme aren’t we, because we’re away all the time – especially when playing for a living.

(Recorded Conversation, 18.6.2012)

Coach’s reflection on the “promotion, relegation, middle of the table stuff” that he used to describe the rise and eventual fall of those who had nearly got between him and cricket, indicated just how hard it could be to sustain other meaningful relationships alongside a cricketing life. It also spoke to the volatility of relationships where romance is concerned that could be used in connection with his own and his players cricketing experiences. Indeed, on the nature and role of love in modern society, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995) theorised that romantic relationships are not havens that shelter two people from suffering, but fluid concepts that are vulnerable to change. In other words, relationships are neither stable nor static, but dynamic as the meaning of love changes in the dialogue (or lack of) between both sides of the union.
Coach also commented on the potentially detrimental role that proximity had on ‘conventional’ adult relationships between two people. According to him, the detriment of proximity worked on two fronts: 1) persons spending too much time together and failing to maintain a level of independence outside their union, and 2) persons spending too much time apart and failing to maintain a level of interdependence inside their union. From a cricketer’s perspective, this meant learning to maintain loving commitments at a distance whilst learning to manage a cricketing relationship from extremely close quarters.

As well as the long days and time away, Coach confessed that cricket could become “a social game” at times too extending individuals’ contact time with their cricketing contexts, whilst further reducing the hours invested in (other) intimate relationships. Getting away from cricket, maintaining alternative interests and finding the time as well as the emotional capacity to care for the needs of another person are thus difficulties that cricketers face during their careers. The latter has been reflected in Cowan’s (2011) description of the excitement he used to feel as a young man turning up to depart for an away trip whilst wrapped up in the honeymoon of a new stage of his cricketing relationship. For the young Cowan, fresh from university, with the chance of making it professionally, it seemed that nothing stood in the way of his cricketing infatuation until it was interrupted by the love of another person. Indeed, his relationship with his wife Virginia runs as a thread throughout his record of the trials and tribulations of a domestic cricket season as he revelled in moments of success and became pre-occupied in moments of lost form and failure without ever losing sight of the strain a cricketer’s life could put on a loving relationship at home.

But is cricket really a matter of the ‘heart’ as Cowan’s (2011) story and other similar portrayals have insinuated? A glimpse into Coach’s relationship history suggested so, and one way the complex tie between cricket and the individual has been examined was through Frith’s (1990, 2001) historical exploration of cricketing suicide. Quoting a relative suicide rate above the national average at the time of his work’s first publication,
Frith (1990, 2001) set out to answer the question as to whether cricketers were at greater risk of self-destruction than any other group of sports people. His search to find an answer begins with an analysis of the game’s characteristics but it was not, he inferred, cricket’s inherent stresses that were to blame for the men who succumbed to the depths of their despair once their playing days were over. Indeed, for the men whose transitions off the field resulted in greater turmoil that which they had ever experienced on it, cricket by virtue of its drawn out routines and cruel, frustrating patterns, could not be held responsible for transforming ‘unwary cricket-loving boys into brooding, insecure and ultimately self-destructive men’ (Frith, 2001, p.13). Rather, it was the fact that for the men who placed cricket at the core of their identities, cricket lay ‘in the silence of the heart’ to enchant, torment, and consume them well beyond their playing days (Frith, 2001, p.243). Described by Solomon (2002, p.15) as the ‘flaw in love’, it was into depression that these individuals slipped, and like the rapid decline of husband or wife after the death of their spouse, retirement removed cricket from the forefront of their lives to expose frailties in both health and character.

Married to the game and vulnerable to what the future had in store, it was Coach’s unrivalled devotion to cricket that was symbolic of the academy players’ developing commitments to it. His passion for cricket had made cricket a pillar of support (see Chapter 3) like the enduring life-partner he had never managed to secure. Whether ‘love’ remained in this union or not, Coach had stood by cricket and up until the time of writing, cricket, in one way or another, had stood by him. One thing was for sure, his relationship with cricket, like his relationship with women over the years, had been fraught with tension, bad decisions and regret, but through shear determination he’d managed to hold on to cricket like no other relationship in his life. But as he recognised, with a devotion to cricket, “there is always a price to pay”.

Driving down to the indoor school six days after my last visit, I pulled up just as George and Stevie stepped out of Stevie’s car and instantly found myself engaged in conversation. I could hardly draw breath before George
began reciting a story from the weekend about “some fucking clubby” that left Stevie envious over the fact that George had managed to get any cricket in at all. Entering the training venue alongside the two of them, my attention was instantly pulled towards Connor standing on his own at the other end of the room. Unshaven and wearing last season’s training kit, he looked as dishevelled as I had ever seen him. “Looks like you’ve been sleeping on the streets?” I said as I shook his hand. Smiling, he replied. “Yeah, might as well have been. I’ve been living in my room for the past week!” Lurching forward he clung against the netting in front of him, clutching on with his finger tips as he stared into the empty practice area. “Mate, I’m just craving to play – craving it!” he said, in an expression of how much he was missing it. “If this week gets rained off it will be a month since I played! A month! That’s a long time, especially with no club cricket to keep me going!”

Together, we started to work it out, the games missed, how many days, how many overs and how many miles that should have been travelled counting through each match to the last. “Well at least tomorrow should be on shouldn’t it?” thinking about conditions as they stood overhead. “Did you not see the weather yesterday? I got soaked to the skin walking to the shops! All I wanted was some eggs…! Eh at least I’ve got my essays done and I’ve even started some revision – that’s how desperate I’ve been. For the first time ever I’m on top of my Uni work. How’s that sound?” The pair of us started to laugh. “At least you might get a degree out of all of this now!” I dared to say. “Well now, let’s not get too far ahead of ourselves…!” he intimated, for neither nets, nor university, provided a replacement for the space in his life Connor reserved exclusively for playing cricket.

Later in the 2012 season, I witnessed a conversation between Stevie, Connor and Ryan as together they explored what existed as part of their “lockers” whilst they sat and watched a pair of teammates bat the team out of a spot of bother. Allocating “three quarters” to cricket and “one quarter” to family, Connor described himself as a “cricketing-family-man” and justified it by saying, “well I spend most of my time playing cricket. As much as I love them, I wouldn’t choose to sit and watch my family for eight hours a

35 “Clubby” was a term used in reference to run-of-the-mill ‘club’ cricketers.
day, would I?!” Portioning up his life to find space for the two things he most cared about wasn’t necessarily about finding balance, but rather, it was about deciphering, organising and prioritising what was to be deemed of greatest importance, and committing himself to the time and energy requirements of those two loving domains. Shoved away in a “drawer” were those other things considered, for the meantime at least, superfluous to family and the management of a different relationship in which he was captivated. Notably, when it came to Connor’s two most significant commitments, it was family that gave way to cricket, as Connor changed allegiances from the depths of one loving relationship to the gravities and complexities of an entirely different kind.

Twenty minutes into squad training, I got the chance to have a short conversation with Josh as he took off his pads following a ‘hit’ in the nets. Already seated in the chair next to his kit bag I wondered whether he too was yearning for cricket like Connor. Asking him whether he had similar cravings to get back outside and play, he grinned and replied, “I know exactly what you mean” before providing me with an alternative perspective on the situation.

*This might sound shit from me but I feel as though I should feel like that – like I’m missing it and gagging to get out there and play – but I don’t. Not that I don’t want to play. I do, it’s just that I’m quite comfortable with where my game is right now. Perhaps it’s because I’ve done well and got a few scores that I want to protect that feeling? So perhaps if I hadn’t I’d be more eager to get on with the season? But for now, why would I want to risk it?*

(Field notes, 8.5.2012)

Josh’s response pointed to players’ active management of their emotional statuses with the game. In this instance, it was through fear of disturbing how he currently felt about himself and the way his cricket was going that was placing a slight cap on Josh’s desire to rush back out and play. Variants of this were likely to exist too, for there could well have been members of the squad in a similar position to Connor who, like Josh, were quite happy to be at an arm’s length for now. It was this emotional divergence between
feelings of having something and then losing it, hunger and apathy, contentment and dissatisfaction, boredom and hysteria that solidified the idea that when it came to cricket it was love of a romantic type that articulated something akin to the players’ everyday battles with themselves and the game.

A week later, I met Connor for a coffee at his request on a sunny Friday afternoon in May (2012) after he had returned from another net session at the county ground. It had been a month since the squad last played which had Connor feeling a little in-between. Left abandoned by cricket, it was cricket’s unexpected absence that was beginning to make him think of places he’d rather be. “I just feel like I need to get out of this place now…” he said, almost wishful that the university season would come to a close. It was not that Connor did not enjoy university cricket. Rather, it was Connor’s eagerness to progress the relationship further that gave rise to his obvious agitation. “So far it’s been good…” he said, thinking back over the time he’d spent with the academy, “...I’ve done well here, I’ve settled in, become part of the cricket and moved on from where I was with my game, but at the moment it just feels like…” Connor turned to face the bay window squinting at the sun glaring through the double-glazing. “It’s hard to put it into words…” he said, thinking hard for a way to express himself. “...It’s like you’ve been away for a while, thinking about her all winter, going to the gym to get into shape and working really hard for the summer to arrive, and then your girlfriend cancels on ya!” he said, shaking his head in an effort to explain his frustration. “It’s tough because before leaving school I played once, maybe twice a week and trained maybe similar, and since coming over here I’ve gone from that to playing four or five days a week and training when I’m not playing. It’s been kind of like…” Once again Connor paused to try and find an appropriate likeness:

...It’s like I once had this perfect go-to bird, someone I would go and see every now and again, get with her and then leave. Now it’s like not only have I met this bird again, but I’m now living with her, and literally seeing her and going to bed with her everyday. She’s a pain in the arse sometimes but when it’s good it’s good, but when it’s shit it’s really shit. It’s funny because I used to have this coach when I was on the ground
staff at Lord’s who used to sit us down in the changing room whenever we did badly and he would always say ‘Lady Cricket will look after ya. Whatever happens, don’t worry she’ll look after ya. She might treat you badly, let you down a few times and put you through some shit, but if you work hard at it, give her a bit of attention she’ll stay by you and look after you in the end’... It was a kind of funny way of putting it but looking back I can see what he meant...

(Recorded conversation, 11.5.2012)

With regards to Connor and his teammates, like the attachments they held with friends and family, so too were their relationships with cricket changing in light of new experiences. The academy brought cricket closer to the players’ lives and it was this increasing proximity that signalled the greatest change in their cricketing relationships to now coexist alongside moments of rejoicing and heartache. Not only did Connor’s words provide emphasis to a cricketing romance that he held responsible for the way he was feeling, but to the transformation of a once casual coming and going, to cricket’s more permanent presence in his life. With it came new relationship challenges such as the one he was now facing, for cricket was fast becoming more serious, more personal and more intimate than ever before.

If not yet ‘married’ to the game contractually, then ‘cohabitation’ with a view to marriage could be used to describe the proximate transformation of a cricketing relationship that Connor alluded to as having once been merely flirtatious. This distinction is important, as in the eyes of ‘emerging adults’, marriage has been said to carry not only a legal, but also a psychological difference (Arnett, 2004). According to Arnett (2004), with the contract of marriage comes a sense of psychological permanence created by a public declaration of the intention to remain together. Cohabitation on the other hand was thought of as being less stable involving more risk and anxiety as a consequence of both sides having greater freedom to deliberate and choose. It was this contractual and/or psychological difference between marriage and cohabitation that could go some way in explaining the uncertain psychological terrain on which the academy players’ relationships with the game perched. Despite pledging an interest in cricket upon joining the academy, a future with cricket beyond the academy was not in any way
secure. Cricketing futures were instead dependent on ‘cricket’ deciding whether or not a player was indeed ‘good enough’ to warrant a contractual agreement. This said, it wasn’t just for cricket to decide. For Connor and his teammates to place their trust in cricket beyond the commitments already being made, it required more than the blind faith that “Lady Cricket would look after you”. It required analysis and self-exploration to ensure, if good enough, that cricket was in fact ‘good enough’ for them. In other words, in a relationship sense, it required chemistry.

Chemistry

In modern society, relationships founded on the principle of love are being lived increasingly interchangeably. Writing in the *Daily Mail* (May 1st 2012 p.15) to this agenda, Sir Paul Coleridge commented on the ‘never-ending carnival of human misery’ present within the family court-rooms of today’s ‘Pass the Partner society’. Speaking from his experiences as a married man and senior judge in family law he highlighted how discontent and boredom are often given as ‘justifications’ to bring an end to a relationship that is no longer deemed fulfilling. In other words, people get married for the sake of love and then get divorced for the sake of love once its primary satisfactions have been surpassed. To this end, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, (1995, p.87) commented:

This is especially true where ‘romantic love’ is seen as an ideal, for the initial phase is full of excitement and joy fed largely on the fascinating otherness of the other and the unknown. As the years pass, however, people eventually get to know each other and everyday life sets in. This can mean a new sense of togetherness... growing out of a shared history, but many couples cannot cope with the metamorphosis... the ‘trap of romantic love’ means that love starts out as infatuation and lingers as an expectation which in this form cannot be met, so that all that is left is disappointment.

From this one might suppose that the aggrandising of ‘love’ in modern society is shaping love’s experience, with divorce and breakup a product of the expectations placed on the relationship. According to Beck and Beck-Gernsheim’s (1995) analysis, the very essence of modern love means that
once the novelty has passed persons enter into a new stage of their relationship that no longer reflects its initial thrill, but a new period of what it means to be together. With the rise of romantic love as a motivator for identity and relationship commitments, Giddens (1991, p.89) forwarded ‘emotional satisfaction’ as an orientating force on which the ‘chemistry’ of modern relationships now depend not only for their initiation, but in their continuance and longevity.

Application of the above offers a theoretical basis in the analysis of the academy players’ considerations of their cricketing relationships, and their growing appreciation of how their experiences were changing. For the players of the academy, cricket formed a large part of their personal histories and a major influence in the choices they had made up to this point in their lives, and a brief glimpse into the players’ relationship histories with the game revealed some of the ways in which the nature of their romantic union with cricket had matured into something definitively more serious. As Connor had highlighted, no longer was cricket a weekly ‘mistress’ from which he and his teammates could come and go, but a partner with which (for the months of the summer at least) they now cohabited. Cohabitation brought improved understanding for aspects of cricket that they had never experienced before and a transformation in cricket’s complexion from the one they had first known.

Seen through the academy’s cultural framework, the players’ relationship with the game now revolved around three essential criteria: 1) the need to impress, 2) the assessment of their long-term chances, and 3) deciding whether or not cricket maintained its allure as a potential life-partner. The first two were evaluations made on the basis of cricketing capital (runs, wickets, averages) that would help drive the relationship forward regardless of compatibility. The third, however, required a certain amount of continuity between what cricket had once provided them, and what it continued to offer as the players began to look towards the future and explore the chemistry that existed between themselves and the game. Holding on to what had first attracted them to cricket was essential in helping to maintain some of the relationship’s ‘purity’ against the game’s
professional baggage and discovering whether or not their attachment to
the game could extend beyond its emotionally gratifying foundations.

In a tribute to the late broadcaster, writer and cricket correspondent
Christopher Martin-Jenkins (CMJ) recorded live on the BBC’s Test Match
Special (BBC Radio 5Live Sports Extra, 2013), two of CMJ’s friends and
former colleagues Jonathan Agnew and Mike Atherton discussed what it was
that set CMJ apart from the rest. In Atherton’s view, it was CMJ’s ‘love of the
game’, an ‘amateur’s love of the game that never deserted him’, which
separated his late colleague from the ‘gnarled old pros’ that had come to see
the game from an altogether different perspective. This, believed Agnew,
was a key distinction that made CMJ’s outlook on the game ring of ‘the fan
and the enthusiast’ that could so easily be lost when cricket has been your
job. To this effect it is inevitable, claimed Agnew, that a person begins to
‘look at the game differently’ after spending ‘years down at fine leg’, and it
was a certain type of passion, excitement and enthusiasm for cricket which
CMJ had managed to conserve that Atherton asserted most professionals
were at risk of losing ‘too quickly’. The conversation not only expressed
admiration of a man whose love for cricket had remained ‘amateur’ and
untainted, but in doing so it highlighted the changes that could occur as a
matter of course to the attitudes and feelings shown towards the game by
the game’s professional people.

Providing empirical support for the transference of ‘love’ in the
distinction between amateurs and professionals, Roderick (2006) has
assessed the critical convictions that the professional football players in his
research came to hold towards their trade. Where ‘love’ was said to have
once provided the impetus for a young player to commit wholeheartedly to
the profession, with experience, a cynicism was shown to develop as a
means of self-protection against the uncertainties inherent within football’s
workplace culture. This was not to say that players’ no longer ‘loved’ playing
football. Indeed, Roderick (2006, p.172) points to a ‘lucid element’ that
developed in childhood that remained a central part of his respondents
positive workplace experiences, and in keeping with the conception of the
‘gnarled old pro’, Roderick he concludes that footballers’ attachments to the
professional game should be understood from the perspective of a 'distorted labour of love', rather than a simply love-hate dichotomy.

In many ways Coach was a vision of the ‘gnarled old pro’ whose understanding for what professional cricket entailed was far removed from the ideals that may have first accompanied him into the relationship. This was an inference made on the basis of what I understood to be taking place as part of the players’ socialisation into professional cricket that was starting to bring about modifications in the way they identified with the game. Like the changeable nature of love and relationships highlighted above, players’ attitudes and responses towards cricket were transforming in significant ways. Shifts in outlook to a more ‘contorted’ conception of the game if not yet fully skewed, were otherwise in the process of transformation as individuals went about interrogating the foundations of their love for the game, and whether or not they continued to really “enjoy it”.

In the face of new experience and mounting knowledge for the demands and pressures that came with playing the game professionally, whether or not they still “enjoyed” cricket was a pivotal question that the players began to ask of themselves. Was cricket still as joyful, exciting, satisfying and attractive to them now that the relationship wasn’t so casual? Did cricket still hold the same allure to warrant chasing contractual assurances? In the context of the academy, this saw the players making regular trips down Memory Lane as they delved deep into their cricketing history oscillating between the meaning cricket once held as ‘unwary cricket-loving boys’ (Frith, 2001, p.13), to what it now meant to them with one eye placed firmly on the future. By doing so, they became increasingly conscious of cricket’s former role in their lives and cognisant of a period in which their relationship with the game could be deemed ‘pure’.

The ‘pure relationship’, as described by Giddens (1991), is a prototypical relationship that exists solely for its intrinsic value. Forwarded as a theoretical device to explain the rise and role of love in the late modern age as a value and forerunner to identity commitments, Giddens (1991, p.89) regards the pure relationship to be ‘free-floating’ inasmuch as it goes
uncontaminated by external criteria, social or economic anchors. Giddens (1991, p.91) goes on to purport that to maintain itself by definition therefore, the pure relationship is ‘reflexively organised’ to ensure intrinsic gratifications remain at the heart of the union as not only the predecessor, but the mainstay of the attachment between two people. Thus, involved in the maintenance of the pure relationship is a process of self-examination analogous to the soul-searching and naval-gazing that the academy players performed in exploration of their attachment to cricket for its motivational intent, as it was through what had once made the relationship ‘pure’ that cricket’s changing complexion was reflected. Indeed, many conversations shed light on the motivational roots at the origin of players’ emotional connections to the game that memories served as a resource to assess how far the relationship had drifted from its more unsullied beginnings, and what it was that was now driving them to remain committed.

“When I was growing up I loved playing cricket because most of the time I was doing well...” George once said to me as we discussed cricket and his progress. It wasn’t the most profound of statements, but what it helped to clarify was the simple pleasure that playing cricket and “doing well” had once rewarded him with during his early encounters with the game. Enquiring as to whether his experiences of playing cricket had changed since the time cricket had first captured his attention, George’s response suggested that it was in fact the very basis of his initial attachment to the game – the love of playing cricket – that was beginning to get eroded in what he described as the “struggle to get somewhere that maybe I shouldn’t go”. For George, as I took to be the situation for many of his teammates, “the actual process of playing cricket” now that he could no longer just “expect to do well” was making his relationship with the game feel uneasy. This was not to say that he no longer derived any satisfaction from performing, for as far as George was concerned enjoyment in cricket still came from “taking wickets”. However, whereas these moments had once arrived in abundance, they were now starting to be experienced less frequently as his relationship with the game came under the scrutiny of new external conditions. “It’s weird because when I think about it I still really enjoy playing club cricket...”
George said, reminding himself of how it felt to play for leisure “...but I think that’s because I know I will turn up and do alright!” To some degree George believed there was greater certainty in turning up and doing “alright” in club cricket, and in this sense club cricket reflected the cricket of his childhood that he hoped that he might one day be able to recapture as an established county pro. Until then, questions would continue to hover over the foundations of a relationship that continued to be tested.

Nevertheless, despite the new stresses and anxieties the relationship existed under, professional cricket still remained an ambition of George’s, as was the case for Connor who was experiencing the same transformation of cricket’s symbolic representation.

Since I was about six until I was about 18 when I finished school I went down to my local club everyday for the summer! Every day I was down the club doing something whether it was umpiring for the lower teams, scoring for the seconds, playing pool, playing darts, having a net. I remember how I used to sit with the first team before a game and look up to them and I’d be like ‘ahhhh these guys are such legends’. And now looking back it feels like I’ve gone through the system so quickly. I played in all seven teams growing up starting in the sevens when I was about 10 and then I went up to the sixths, and then to the fifth, fourths, thirds, seconds, and then into the firsts by 14. So I know everyone down at the club and everyone knows me, my brothers and my mum and dad who are always down there watching and supporting. Every time I think about it I just love the thought of going home and playing there, and the minute I know I’m not going to make it over here, I’m going to go back to play there and just see where it goes...

(Recorded conversation, 16. 5. 2012)

In Connor’s case, memories of a time in his cricketing past were built around the connection cricket provided him and his family to the local community, with his early experiences on the cricket field synonymous with the comforts of his local club, and the supportive networks available to him at home. As a young boy, just being around the ground watching in admiration for the “legends” in the first team was what cricket had been all about for Connor, and in some ways it still was as he continued to hold on to the memories that anchored him to his cricketing past. However, what had once consisted of an amalgamation between family and his local community, his
relationship with the game was becoming ever more exclusive as he spent summer after summer playing cricket at a distance from the place where it had all started.

Putting Connor’s words into perspective, it was the chance to travel home for the weekend to participate in a game of club cricket for his local team that had sparked thoughts for what his present cricketing relationship meant to him relative to its former context. Like George, that context was one associated with his childhood and playing cricket for the sense of enrichment that accompanied his participation. This, however, deviated somewhat from the outlook supported by the cricket bubble in which Connor and his teammates operated for much of the summer where attention was placed on cricket for its job and lifestyle prospects, and what was required to secure the contractual assurances of a “full-time gig”. Talk of county trials, contracts and playing for “wedge”36 existed as part of the cultural discourse that placed cricket and playing cricket into a motivational category driven by factors external to the relationship’s intrinsic origins. Indeed, in the same conversation Connor reflected how a mind preoccupied with what was required to secure a cricketing future came with a pressure that made every innings feel like an “interview”. In other words, a relationship that had once existed ‘free-floating’ of any external compulsions was beginning to carry new obligations and anxieties that had implications on the emotional dynamic between him and the game. In fact, Connor and his teammates often noted that the cricketing “highs” no longer felt so high, nor did they feel so enduring as personal accomplishments began to be greeted more matter-of-factly and less sentimentally. Cricketing lows, on the other hand, had become deeper and more residual for the need to make a resounding impression made personal failure feel more critical. It could be said that the players’ cricketing experiences were therefore starting to lack the natural counter balance that playing cricket successfully as part of their leisure had once provided. Nevertheless, thoughts of summer days and village greens and memories of the kind presented above had yet to be fully replaced by hardened professional outlooks in the transition of cricket’s

36 A term used by the respondent group in connection with playing cricket for money.
meaning away from its original contextual definition. Consequently, players’ relationships with the game still possessed strong links with formative attachments despite the exertion of new situational influences and pressures, but whilst this helped connect their commitments to cricket to positive emotional states and images of the past, it also created a set of relational ambiguities that the players had to navigate themselves through as they moved between environments that associated cricket with notions of work and leisure. This resulted in an emotive tug of war as players tried to solidify cricket’s meaning out of past, present and future definitions and locate the value of ‘love’ in the process of chasing dreams and securing an adult future with the game.

Part of the ‘working-out’ that took place between individual and cricket was frequently represented in the time players spent theorising about the game. This was often performed in a manner that resembled a group of young men trying to decipher the nature of the opposite sex in their attempts at understanding why one minute they felt loved by Lady Cricket, and the next let down. Finding methods to enhance one’s productivity and cricketing capital was a way of counteracting the emotional uncertainties this caused. Net practice and the accompanied strategizing reflected a battle for possession that saw players get wrapped up in what they were doing right and what they might be doing wrong, and exhaust themselves on the basis of trying to force Lady Cricket’s attention. Hence, an aspect of the players’ considerations when it came to deciding whether cricket was right for them was the extent of the devotion needed to make their relationships with the game successful, and whether or not they had a passion for cricket that could survive the hardships that were likely to occur along the way.

It was in the hotel one evening in June 2012 between consecutive days of cricket when Lewis and I began to discuss the manner in which his relationship with cricket had developed over the course of the two years he had been involved with the academy. Having played since the age of nine, Lewis had become convinced that he no longer “loved the game” as he once had, but nonetheless remained committed to cricket for the sake of attaining
what he described as his “end goal”. For Lewis, his ambition to become a professional cricketer was no longer based on an intrinsic connection with the game. Indeed, he was adamant that his passion for cricket had run out, triggered by the moment his relationship with cricket became serious. Lewis’ sentiments reflected the shift in attitude from enjoyment to a more ‘calculated occupational outlook’ observed by Parker (1996, p.85) in his study on trainee professional footballers. To this end, Parker (1996, p.86-87) writes of an increased ‘sense of seriousness’, ‘commitment’ and vocational ‘responsibility’ that entered into the lives of trainees to replace feelings of relaxation and pleasure playing football had once afforded them.

“This is going to sound strange, but I honestly think that perhaps I lost my love for cricket the day I got contracted” Lewis said, in reference to a source of obligation and external regulation that now accompanied him onto the field. Ever since that time his responsiveness to the game had taken a turn for the worse made recognisable by the fact that he no longer enjoyed the cricket that he played for his leisure. “I don’t even enjoy club cricket anymore...” he told me, finding this to be particularly revealing of the way his relationship with the game had changed.

I go to club cricket and I find the whole thing a bore. I really enjoy the company of the guys, but out on the field I’m just looking at the clock and looking to see how many overs are left and waiting for the whole thing to be over.

(Recorded conversation, 11. 6. 2012)

It seemed that the more time Lewis had spent in the game – time that had increased appreciably since joining the academy and being awarded a summer contract – the more conscious Lewis had become of cricket’s flaws. With an improved understanding of how “static” the game could be, Lewis had begun to harbour some doubts over how well he’d be remunerated by cricket if he was to stick with cricket in the long run both financially and intellectually, as well as emotionally. There were other factors involved in this too including how restrictive he believed his relationship with cricket
had become, rueing the time it was taking away from a period in his life when he could be “setting the foundations” into something new.

His concerns had caused cricket to lose some of its appeal, but the biggest thing affecting his attraction and the nature of his attachment to the game, was that cricket now involved a sense of “career” and a sense of permanency that came with thoughts of Coach and a life wedded to it. Marriage was not what Lewis desired, but at the same time he was not prepared to give the relationship up. Not just yet anyway – and certainly not before he’d achieved what he’d always set out to do. “I won’t quit...” he said, adamantly “...I’m not a quitter”. To this end, Lewis felt that he’d spent too much time in cricket, with his relationship involving too many people, to just “wrack it off”. To do so would feel like he was “erasing so many years” from his life that the thought became frightening and besides, to bring an end to the relationship prematurely, no matter how he felt about the game, would be to terminate the aspirations he retained from his childhood. In many ways, it was easier for him to stay in the relationship, and allow the relationship to run its natural course, than it was to bring it to a close whilst its ends remained open. Cricket for Lewis had become ‘business-like’ and about objectives, reaching them, and moving on and whilst explaining this Lewis made a clear separation between ‘loving the game’ and what was now motivating him to continue.

I think I used to be in love with the game and the way I look at it is how many decisions about my life have revolved around cricket? I would say that most of them have, and still involve cricket. But whereas that was once because I really enjoyed cricket I think the attachment for me now is my goal, which I still have every intention of reaching. I don’t think – in fact I know it’s not a love for the game that is driving me anymore. If it was a love for the game, I think it would involve a different mind-set completely. It’s how I perceive it to be and I truly believe that I see cricket as a goal now and not a passion, and I just have to crack on...

(Recorded conversation, 11. 6. 2012)

Where Lewis was concerned, going on to play first-class cricket was not about forging a life with the game but rather to simply say that he had “done it”, that he’d reached his potential, and that he’d met the expectations that
he had placed upon himself. “If I’m 25 and I’ve been playing three years of first-class cricket I’ll be really happy” he said, acknowledging the point at which he wanted to put a stop to cricket to give himself time to explore and devote himself to something new. In this regard, he felt time was of the essence having reached an age where he needed to get on with the job of completing his cricketing goals if he was to give himself the opportunity. Nevertheless, along with his realisation that he’d lost his “passion” and fallen out of love with the game came an awareness that a lack of “passion” could be detrimental to him reaching his target of playing cricket professionally, for among the perceptions shared between players was the notion that one must “love it” in order “to do it”. In other words, to play professionally cricket had to be done for reasons that made cricket more than just a job, but a love affair kept alight by an intrinsic drive to seek out its pleasures, to enjoy the game despite its imperfections, and to feel satisfied by one’s devotion to it. And like the rest of his teammates, Lewis subscribed to this outlook admitting, that for the sake of his “end goal”, he wished he loved cricket more.

You know what, how’s this for a philosophy? Cricket is a stunning wife but every single aspect of her is awful! She is a show pony. You have her on your arm when you walk into a bar and everyone looks at her, but nobody actually wants to date her for as soon as you take her home and start living with her you realise that she’s not all that she’s cracked up to be!

(Recorded conversation, 11. 6. 2012)

Feeling as though he lacked a passion for cricket, yet remaining committed to it, in the short term at least, Lewis’ cynicism made me question whether he was, to some extent, denying his love for the game as a way of protecting himself from the uncertainties that lay ahead. There were, of course, no guarantees that cricket would warrant him the opportunity to say that he had “done it”, and by fortifying a less romantic attitude towards the game Lewis knew that he might be reducing his chances of ever getting to that point. Lewis, however, sought control over the relationship and the chance
to walk away at a time of his choosing rather than allowing his years of devotion to boil down to a moment of heartbreak.

Like his teammates, Lewis’ relationship with cricket had progressed through a series of stages from which his attachment to the game had grown and transformed. Moving from flirtation to cohabitation, he and his teammates were now reaching a point in their cricketing careers and relationships that saw them questioning whether they wanted to continue within their roles towards ‘marriage’ and a life-long commitment. The notion of enjoyment that accompanied the idea that one had to “love it” in order “to do it”, formed the basis of this reflection as the purity of their once leisurely dalliances become steadily replaced with the obligatory requirements of being a cricketer. Indeed, the closer players got to ‘marriage’, the less freedom they experienced within the relationship’s confines as cricket gradually took control of their lives. Hence to hold a ‘love’ for the game was deemed important, as without it, commitment could appear daunting. In this sense, ‘love’ was apprehended as a vehicle to future happiness and contentment and operated within the environment as both a justification and excuse for making important life-decisions.

Once again, Coach’s cricketing history acted as a pivotal cultural symbol to understanding the players’ assessments of their own cricketing futures. In one capacity or another, Coach had managed to nurture a relationship with the game that had served him throughout his working life without ever having played with any great success. Instead he had been prepared to change role from aspiring player, to player-coach, to umpire, to county coach, club coach before finally settling as coach of the academy for the sake of preserving the union, and the sense of gratification it provided. In other words, the academy offered him a sense of chemistry that satisfied a love for the game that had encountered difficulties in previous roles. Where the players were concerned, their search for chemistry meant using the academy to find a context in which they felt their own relationships with the game could work – a context where they could love the game freely and feel loved by it. It demanded not only a trust in cricket, but a trust in themselves and their own abilities as well as a level of self-understanding to
prevent errors of judgment that led to neither happiness nor satisfaction, but regret for their over commitment.
As described in the previous chapter, there was a general impression among members of the academy squad that one had to “love” cricket in order “to do it”. It was an impression associated with enduring life-commitments akin to deciding upon the right partner as players approached a critical phase in their cricketing relationships. For most players, the academy was the start of a potential future with cricket requiring decisions to be made regarding the nature and strength of their commitment to it. Analysed through the concept of romantic attachments, players ‘love’ for the game was discussed in relation to the intrinsic motivational roots that made cricket personally gratifying. Enjoyment was thus deemed a necessary part of their cricketing experiences if cricket was to be considered a suitable life-partner and retain some of the initial allure that first attracted players to it. Trust was also at a premium, for when it came to making ‘intelligent’ life-decisions cricket was understood to be “incredibly inconsistent” requiring a certain amount of confidence that a) cricket would be faithful, and b) a self-belief that they could make the relationship work. The academy introduced players to a new side of cricket and the possibility of a life wedded to the game, leaving it up to individuals to work out the degree of association that they would find personally satisfying. This is what Coach described within the concept of “finding your level” that encapsulated the crises and dilemmas that united a group of young people as they confronted their futures in light of their cricketing experiences, depicted here in a montage of field-based encounters that resulted in my discovery of what the academy, in Coach’s words, was “all about”.
A Two-Year Plan

“And the worst bit...” Patrick said, confident of his teammate’s understanding, “... is that I have to sit and watch this for the rest of the day and then go and chase a ball around a field like a dog.” Josh nodded along in consolation for Patrick was clearly annoyed. Restless, he rose from his seat and turned to face a scattering of plastic garden chairs filled with lacklustre cricketers. “Who fancies a walk?” he beckoned. His audience remained lifeless and unenthused. “H, you coming?” I looked around at the scene and decided to take Patrick up on his offer. Together we charted the steady curve of the outfield, stopping every now and again to watch the cricket. Our laboured exchanges followed the same fragmented pattern, for our relationship with each other and the collective group was still tentative and new. It was April 2011. We were both in our first season with the squad, and both keen to get on with our respective endeavours whilst trying to pinpoint the reasons for what we were doing and why we were doing it.

Away from prying eyes and ears, a rapport developed between that encouraged Patrick to speak candidly about his “life’s ambition” to play cricket up to the end point of his talent. Along the way, he gave me an insight into his social background that was already becoming a source of doubt and a point of resistance to the cricketer trying to emerge from within. He spoke of his schooling, his friends, and his family and in particular his father and his father’s career, and the investment his father had made to provide his children with opportunity. Privately educated, Patrick was aware of a certain rite of passage for young men like him, and despite his scepticism it became clear that he was not without an eye for retaining some of the privileges of the lifestyle with which he was familiar.

Patrick was at the start of what he considered to be a two-year period in his journey towards a career in professional cricket instigated after a failing start to a business and economics degree the year before, at another institution of study. It had led to a summer of trials with a county, a contract, and finally a scrambled decision to continue his education with a place on the academy. Despite this, Patrick was not naively optimistic about achieving what he had since set his sights upon. He knew very well that
forging a successful career in professional cricket would take scores – big scores – on a repeated basis. Our dialogue, as we wandered the boundary that afternoon, was in essence a reflection of what committing to a life in cricket might entail that his initial experiences were already starting to identify. For Patrick, a series of low scores had characterised a month of cricket that had monopolised his time and weekly routine. Outside of his cricketing schedule, he was also dealing with the acute pressures of the university exam period that represented an alternative route to another side of self that he had the full intention of exploring at university after his first failed attempt. As much as he desired cricket, Patrick also wanted to avoid being thwarted by his sporting interest while he took his time to consider whether cricket was what he really wanted to do. Nevertheless, at this stage, cricket, he believed, was a chance to do something out of the ordinary, and a chance to set out on his own course in life rather than treading a path to a destiny already partially mapped out. Our conversation that afternoon saw Patrick at the start of organising and making sense of his own biography and adapting to a cricketing environment in which he found himself a part. Indeed, our conversation that day was all part of what he described as his “two-year plan” which, from that moment on, I followed until its conclusion.

When I’m a First-Class Cricketer

It was raining, the covers were on, and the black clouds that had dogged the 2012 season were marauding ominously once again, and as I slipped into believing the game was ‘never going to be on’, I noticed Mark’s rangy figure sheltering under the pavilion veranda. A graduate from the previous year’s academy squad he was due to be playing in the local league fixture as an ‘allocated pro’ having been signed on a one-year county contract at the end of the previous season. Interested to find out how Mark’s year was panning out since the last time we had met, I went over to say hello. At the beginning of the season I had seen his name in his county’s championship squad, bowling and taking wickets. But it had since vanished. He was prone to injury having spent the majority of his final season with the academy nursing various aches and strains, as his tall frame adjusted to the rigours of
his labour. “I’m thinking about pulling the plug...” he said, catching me by surprise as we began to converse in a quiet corner of the ground. “...I just can’t stand it anymore!”

I had bumped into Mark earlier in the year whilst the academy were training in the shadow of a championship match being played on the pitch next to the indoor school. Sitting alone, on the front row at the bottom of an empty stand, I had spotted Mark dressed in a set of whites with only a cool-box for company, so I decided nets could wait in favour of joining him in the stands. His opponents that day consisted of England’s Alistair Cook, Ravi Bopara and some names from the previous year’s academy circuit. He had been more content then than he was now in reporting how “pleased” his new employers were with the “progress” he had made since joining the club as a member of their full-time playing staff, until a roaring appeal interrupted our conversation. Cook. Out. Trapped L.B.W. (leg before wicket) which caused Mark to leap from his seat, hurdle the advertising boards and rush onto the pitch, cool-box flailing, as England’s imminent Test captain walked from the ground to the unnatural silence of an empty sixteen thousand-seat stadium. It revealed something of the infamous nature of first-class cricket that the players in the indoor school were courting and Mark was now fully embracing on a day-to-day basis from his position at the bottom of the pecking order. Nevertheless, despite his frustrations about being “water boy”, Mark had looked chipper sitting there in his county-cap. He now looked wearier, and somewhat skinnier than before – his complexion awash with anguish pertaining to questions of a future that remained uncertain. Frowning, he continued:

*I’ve got my passport at home. I’ve got my degree. There’s nothing stopping me going to my county and saying ‘Fuck the rest of your contract I’m going to go and try something else for a while’, jumping on a plane and get as close to Australasia as possible. I was just asking myself driving down to the game today ‘What am I doing? Why don’t I go and get a proper job?’. Something in the city. Something that pays well at least. Something that’s a bit more consistent and won’t just bale on you at any time’. Injuries don’t help. Selection neither. Nor does the weather like, but these last couple of weeks I’ve really struggled so much and actually got quite down about it. And the hassle of trying to*
get a new contract with them trying to pay me fuck all, I’m fed up with it! The thing is, I have put so much time into it and now it just feels like I’m wasting my life. I quite liked it at the start but that’s the same isn’t it with anything new? I know I probably sound like just another negative cricketer taking it for granted, but fuck it – trust me. It’s not what it’s cracked up to be I’ll tell ya that now...

(Field-notes, 17. 7. 2012)

Mark’s confession was a tale with which I had become familiar. The doubts it expressed told of the experiences of a group of university-cricketers challenging cricket’s place in the forecast of their lives and in the unification and expression of their adult identities. Sheltering from the rain on the edge of a sodden outfield, the interaction between Mark’s feelings and the context that had become a pillar of his life was an audible part of his self-examination as he strove to take back some control over ‘the cricketer’ (or ex-cricketer) that he was otherwise destined to become. “Passport”, “jump on a plane”, “Australasia” all created notions of distance as he began a process of exiting a relationship that he had become critical of. He was fed-up with cricket and the way that it was treating him, making the sacrifices required for a 2, 3, 5 or 10 year career in professional cricket appear as risks too far when it came to giving up opportunities to alternative life-courses that he had begun to relinquish upon turning professional.

The early career doubts that Mark had conveyed on a rainy day in July 2012, following my final season with the academy team, were merely one step further forward from the doubts disclosed by a former academy teammate of his, Ben, whose story I had been following closely over the preceding months. Ben was in the final year of a county development contract, as Mark had been the year before, and my relationship with Ben had almost certainly sprung out of the blue when he approached me on a winter’s evening in February 2012 whilst I hung around on the balcony of the weights gym watching him and his teammates train. He wanted to pick my brains over a book he had been reading about neuro-linguistic-programming (NLP), a concept that bared all the trademarks of a self-help cognitive-behavioural-therapy under a fancy banner. I nodded along pretending I knew what he was talking about and left the conversation
without further contemplation, for he had shown little signs of the vulnerability I was about to locate within his otherwise abrasive character. His everyday dealings with his teammates and Coach displayed every bit of the tactless insensitivity he was renowned for and yet, in the days that followed, I would receive a phone call with what sounded like an urgent request for help.

Ben had started to write a diary – having been encouraged to do so by the NLP book he was studying – and wanted some reassurance about what to put in it. I agreed to meet and encouraged him to start writing freely. Soon we began to meet regularly with his diary acting as the fulcrum of our developing relationship. During these meetings, Ben used me as a sounding-board on such things as shortening his run-up, restricting his delivery stride, twisting his front arm upon release, having his thumb pressed flat against the ball, his fingers spread wide across the seam, or his thumb raised and his fingers narrow. It was nonsense, but I listened, and did my best to help ‘chew the fat’ aware that something residual might be lurking.

Over the course of our discussions, I discovered that Ben had developed a friendship with Mark that I hadn’t noticed when they had been opening the bowling together for the academy the season before. I had learn that Ben was regularly visiting Mark at his house down the road, and it seemed as though Ben saw something in Mark that complemented his own situation; Mark being an obvious and accessible window into the world that Ben perceived he was on the cusp of stepping into.

Ben’s diary would eventually provide invaluable insight into the emotional world of a young cricketer monitoring himself and his chances of making it, against the minor successes and failures he experienced over the course of a season that he believed would decide his future in the game. But what caught my eye at first glance was the question he asked himself after each initial entry:

“What have I learnt from today for when I am a first-class cricketer?”
It was a question of inevitability rather than choice, and as I got to know Ben more I started to believe that he was in fact as “tangled up in cricket” as he would accuse others of being (see Chapter 4). Indeed, Ben always took great joy in reciting “some funny memories” about teammates, former teammates, or friends of friends and their respective escapades in county cricket. Whether he had witnessed the events or not, it never stopped him from making the connection to the thread that bound each tale to the next; stories of young professional cricketers travelling the country and getting “on the piss”. It was a way of life that he appeared infatuated with, but when I broached the subject, Ben quickly rubbished the idea. His abject rejection, however, was almost as stark as a full-blown confession, for like Coach, the content of his self-narrative gave a glimpse into his cricketing make-up that seemed to virtually consume him. This was only a prelude to gaining a fuller understanding of Ben and his situation as it began to unfold in the context of the academy, and a cricketing relationship that was beginning to fall apart.

**Fear of the Unknown**

“I’ve been writing some interesting stuff in my notebook…” Ben said, as he placed himself next to me at a safe distance. “Oh yeah. Like what? Stuff about your bowling...?” It was an assumption I made based on what we had spoken about many times before in the build up to the 2012 season, leaving me completely unprepared for what he was about to blurt out without a moment’s hesitation: “I’m not sure I want to be a professional cricketer...” The statement almost winded me. It was the start of the new season, and as we sat together staring across the outfield, Ben started to reveal some of what the winter might have really been about. “I was thinking about it the other day and I asked myself that question in my diary ‘Do I really want to be a professional cricketer?’ and I’m not sure I do” he said, nervously massaging the sore shin that had been bugging him since the warm-up. Ben passed me his diary to explain more. In the awkward silence, I started to read.
I’m starting to lose quite a lot of sleep. A lot of thoughts seem to come as my head hits the pillow. I can’t seem to leave cricket at cricket. I feel in a very big hole that I can’t release myself from. It’s something that I feel I can’t turn to anyone with because no one else will truly understand my situation. Others must go through the same thing as me and just keep it to themselves. I know as I write there are other young cricketers lying in their beds wide-awake worried about the future. I wanted to keep this diary cricket specific, but I can’t help but pick up the pen and write how I feel. The ‘unknown’ is something I almost fear – not knowing my future in the game. It’ll be a miracle to have a career from this situation.

(Extract from Ben’s diary, 12. 3. 2012)

I noticed it instantly. Gone was the question ‘What have I learnt from today...’ to be replaced with a “fear” that was keeping him awake at night. He nudged me to make sure I continued reading for there was more inside that he wanted me to see.

It was the first couple of days of county pre-season and I had been in promising spirits on the trip up, looking forward to getting outside and seeing a few mates I hadn’t seen in a while. It was only once I got to Ed’s and Matt’s place [pseudonyms of county teammates] I started to get the feeling. It reminded me of the feelings I had towards the end of last summer – feelings of genuine disinterest – that were now coming back to me. I got back to the house after a long day of training, went for a meal with a few of the guys and I distinctly remember sitting there thinking ‘Do I really want to play professional cricket?’ The answer that kept coming to me was no. I think this is the first time in my life I have experienced these emotions. The next question I was asking myself was ‘What else can I do?’, ‘How can I do it?’, ‘Can I do it??’ and I haven’t come up with an answer. I got back to Ed’s and had to share his bed because there weren’t any spare covers. It was then I found out that he feels the same, that he doesn’t want to play anymore either – ‘I’m so glad I’m in the last year of my contract’ he told me. We had to be up at 6.30am for fitness testing the following morning and I was just thinking, ‘What is the fucking point?’... Driving back, I was struggling to keep my emotions in check. I was thinking of my parents and what they would think. I’ve worked a lot of my life to play cricket and now I was willing to give it all up before it had started. How could I explain that? I got the feeling some of the lads had an inclination that I was struggling and tried to raise my spirits, but nothing would at the moment!

(Extract from Ben’s diary, 20. 3. 2012)
These sudden self-searching questions were the last things I had expected from Ben. Over the winter that followed the 2011 season Ben had convinced me that he was set on the idea of becoming a professional cricketer. Talking about his experiences in the academy over the past two and half years, Ben had told me that his life as a student-cricketer had confirmed that he did not know what else he wanted to do other than cricket. It was the certainty with which he had said it that delivered the greatest impact, and yet despite the certainty he displayed that day, it was a conviction that he would be in the process of reconsidering in the following weeks. At the time, it had caused me some private concerns, but my fears had been projected to September when his development contract was due to end. It was now only March. There was a whole season to be played and a first-class debut in the offing. It seemed too early, too soon and too sudden. It seemed too contradictory.

During the morning session of play, I had taken a stroll around the boundary with Ben’s teammate Ryan, and in the midst of our conversation about Ryan’s hopes for the season Ben’s name had cropped up. “Ben’s an interesting bloke isn’t he?” I prompted Ryan to continue. “I went up to him this morning and asked if he was alright and he just said ‘Nah not really.’ So I said ‘What do you mean?’ to which he replied ‘Everything’…”

A few hours later, I would be sitting next to Ben listening to what “everything” might have meant:

Being around that environment – I’m not sure I really enjoy it. We’ve got a new sponsor at my County so there was a whole lot of new kit that arrived. There was a box in the middle of the changing room and it was literally take what you want. I took a load of stash, sat there and thought ‘I’m not even getting a buzz from this. What am I going to do with all this gear? I’m happy with last year’s kit.’ I’m just out of love with it, and I know that because I used to love kit! I also asked myself ‘What else would I do if I wasn’t thinking, living, breathing cricket all the time?’ I’m not stupid, I know come September I may not even have a choice, the decision might be made for me either way, but it would be nice to have the chance to make the decision for myself instead of having it decided for me. It would be nice to have another option other than having to say ‘Yes I’ll take the contract’. It would be nice to be able to say ‘No I’ve got something I’d much rather do’, I think. But at the moment what else am I going to do? The game itself – it’s a fuckin’
head fuck of a sport that I think ‘Do I really want to live like that and have to deal with all that shit all the time...?’

(Field-notes, 21. 3. 2012)

Out of the self-doubt and self-questioning that formed pervasive features of our conversations that day, I remained unconvinced that Ben no longer wanted to become a professional cricketer. Instead, I received an overriding sense that Ben was preparing himself for the worst in a case of dump or be dumped as he started a process of redefining himself out of fear for what might be round the corner.

So Many Options

Looking slightly dishevelled with the appearance of a man who’d spent his day in a rush, Patrick loosened the collar of his chequered shirt and slumped back in his chair in relief at having reached his final appointment.

The problem with HR people H is that they’re all women, which screws me over because all my experiences are cricket this, or cricket that. Try explaining how coaching cricket to kids in a shantytown is a good example of being logical to someone who has no interest in cricket. I can tell you, it’s difficult!

(Recorded conversation, 9. 12. 2011)

Fresh from his train journey back from London and still handsomely decked in his suit jacket and tie, Patrick had come and joined me for a coffee and a catch-up. I had not seen him for a while and his absence at squad training within recent weeks had not gone unnoticed by either Coach or his fellow team members. From afar, it looked as though Patrick wasn’t pulling his weight, but from up close you could begin to appreciate there may have been good reason. He was now at the mid point of his “two-year plan” and after the day he had had, he was in the mood to talk. A season wiser, Patrick was keen to share some of his feelings on the summer and the months that had since passed. As I was to discover, little had in fact changed for Patrick
other than a mounting appreciation for what lay outside the aspirations of the cricket bubble.

*After just doing it for like four months following the end of the uni season, people think it is glamorous but it’s really not. I was living here wasn’t I, and then I went straight up to [name of county] to live – so you know I didn’t really get to go home at all. I was made to play club cricket on a Saturday as well so I couldn’t exactly get away at any point either. I shouldn’t really be complaining because I was getting paid, but I don’t know, I’m not sure I can see myself doing that for ten years. I’d just get so bored of it.*

(Recorded conversation, 9. 12. 2011)

With knowledge of what a cricketer’s life entailed, Patrick was in the swing of applying for and attending a series of interviews for internships and job placements to take as part of his undergraduate degree. With regular trips to and from London, it was for this reason that Patrick had not been around for a while. The application process was a “job in itself” and besides, having only finished the cricket season in late September, he’d made the decision to “take a break from it all until Christmas” in order, I presumed, to regain some perspective. For Patrick, applying for a year in industry had its motives, which, despite his openness with me, he was keen to keep close to his chest even if that meant pushing Coach and his teammates further into the dark.

Thinking back on the summer he told me, “The thing is mate, I didn’t really enjoy it…”

*It’s quite a lonely environment cricket, and it was not like I was close to home. I was like a three and half hour drive away. I think initially I didn’t enjoy it because I wasn’t scoring any runs. But then I got to a stage towards the latter end of the season where – and this is going to sound bad to say it – where I really couldn’t give a fuck.*

(Recorded conversation, 9. 12. 2011)

As a matter of fact, his first taste of what it meant ‘to be’ and ‘to live’ like a county ‘pro’ had only gone to reinforce a sense of doubt that perhaps cricket wasn’t the life, or indeed the love of his life that he had thought it once was.
Now entering his second year with the academy, Patrick felt unsettled with serious thoughts of trying something else for a while. That said, when it came to deciding upon his cricketing future, Patrick was hesitant and would remain so until he had considered all his options and was sure that something better had come along.

The difficult thing is that I’m getting different messages the whole time. When I’m here or at my county it’s like cricket is the best thing in the world, because everyone wants to be pros. It is what Coach is striving for us all to become at the end of the day. But then I go home, and my dad is like, ‘Son this is bullshit.’ So I just don’t know mate. I’m starting to think would it just be an easier life having a proper job where you know where you stand the whole time? Do you know what I mean? With cricket you just don’t have any stability. You work for six months then you’re expected to go away for six months and play for someone else during the winter. You could get sacked any minute too, which makes it pretty daunting from where I’m standing.

(Recorded conversation, 9.12.2011)

Restless, Patrick’s deliberations seemed to embody the impatience of a young man who sought to establish himself, quickly. No longer certain that he was suited to cricket, but far from ready to throw in the towel, Patrick was torn between a “life’s ambition” and a growing realisation for where he felt he truly belonged.

When I was younger my dad pushed me – he pushed me hard but I wanted to be pushed. I’d say to him, ‘Dad let’s go for a net’ and he’d come and throw balls at me at the local cricket club. We used to go down there three or four times a week in the summer, and from that I got this sense that maybe it could go somewhere – and he was always telling me as I was growing up at school that you know ‘If you do well you could be a pro and do all this kind of stuff all the time’. But I think he’s realised with me that there’s really not that much of a future in it anymore. I’ve spoken to him about what its like and that I have doubts and he’s said that ‘This is just ridiculous’ and that I can’t go on thinking like that. He said, ‘Unless you play for England it’s not a great lifestyle.’ And I agree with him. I can see that for myself. But the only reason why he can be like that is because he’s done really well for himself – so he knows what can be done. And I don’t think a lot of other people realise this but it’s because I’ve been in a fortunate position that I know what other people can achieve in terms of earning more money and what you’re lifestyle could be like. So he knows that, and I know that which
leaves me two options really. I can do the cricket route, but if I do I have
got to ask myself what am I going to get out of it? Am I going to get the
life that I want, or are there other routes I could take where I’d have a
better life and a more fulfilling life maybe? Would I enjoy myself doing
other things? I think other cricketers who haven’t had the benefits that
I have had, don’t necessarily know what’s out there so cricket becomes
their route to good things, big things! But for me, I really don’t see it
like that. Look at what all my friends outside of cricket want to do. They
all want to work for like J. P. Morgan or Goldman Sachs. That’s what
they’ve grown up thinking...

In Patrick’s case, it was the privileges of his background that seemed to form
the crux of his misgivings, which conversations with his father, and thoughts
for his school friends, only served to amplify. Hence, in comparison to those
less “fortunate”, it was not a fear of the unknown that worried Patrick, but a
fear of making the wrong decision.

One thing I remember is a chat that I had with my dad when I got back
in the summer. I asked him – because he had played second eleven
county cricket but he soon quit – ’Do you ever regret it? Do you ever
think that maybe if you’d done it for a year it would have got better?’
And he was just like, ’No, there is no way. I may sound materialistic, but
there’s no way I could live in the house that I live in now and go on the
holidays that I go on now if I was a county cricketer.’ I said, ’But maybe
you don’t have the life experiences that you would have had?’ He said,
’Well I’ve met some great people in the work that I’ve done.’ I said,
’Yeah, you have, but you don’t have the same camaraderie that maybe
a cricketer has with another cricketer when they win a big game, or a
title, or a cup or something like that.’ to which he said ’Maybe not but I
have other things don’t I?’

(Recorded conversation, 9. 12. 2011)

When it comes to people asserting agentic control over the direction of their
life-course in late modern society, Côté (2000) makes a distinction between
two types of individualisation. He argued individuals may choose to follow a
‘default’ trajectory that is dictated by circumstance and folly, or a
‘developmental’ life-course based on extensive deliberation. Not content
with sitting back and allowing his future to run its own course, Patrick was
one who sought control over what he was to become and where his life was
heading. On the one hand, Patrick’s decision to apply for a year in industry
was about increasing opportunity and opening up his future away from cricket. On the other, it was about whittling down and refining his sense of direction that the cricket season had left a little out of kilter.

But the big thing for me and the thing that is stressing me out is I think if I get a job on a placement year in London, I think I’ll be really happy. And one of the reasons I’ll be really happy is that firstly I’ll be living at home, but the other thing is that for the next six months I know I’ve got a back up for something. I know that all I have to focus on is my cricket and my uni work. And with the cricket, I’m going to care about it because I do care, and I’m going to say to myself ‘Right I’m going to give it a good shot here because I know this is the last opportunity’. And say if I do get a placement right, when I get to the end of next season in September I’ll have four options. One, I get sacked [released from county contract] and I go and do my placement which would start in October. Two, I get offered a contract and get offered a placement – so there will be a decision to make. Three, I don’t get offered a placement and don’t get offered a contract so I’ll just go back to uni to finish my degree without cricket. And four, I don’t get offered a placement but I get offered a contract. So there’s so many options mate and I’d like to have those options narrowed down a bit, because at the moment I’m just sort of meandering, because as it stands everything is so up in the air!

(Recorded conversation, 9.12.2011)

With various possibilities still available, Patrick was preparing himself for another season bound to the cricket bubble primed to address the future of a cricketing relationship that remained unclear. From this perspective, Patrick was no different from his teammates given that the arrival of each season saw every player battle to resolve some of the uncertainties that came in moments of crisis.

The Stage We’re All At

“You try so hard all your life at a sport and I’m starting to think now is it really worth it? I tell you one thing, I don’t want to be here right now”, announced Connor on joining Ben and me in the moments after getting out for another low score. It was late in the afternoon on April 12 2012. Storm clouds rolled in over the treetops behind the pavilion reflecting the mood developing around the ground. In the prolonged silence that followed I
could only imagine what Ben and Connor must have been thinking as they wished away the final hour of the day.

In an attempt to give a reason for his teammate’s lament that cursed cricket, and his decision to pursue it, Ben concluded, “It’s just the stage we’re all at...”. I turned to face him interested by his suggestion. “For some of us anyway...” he said, placing a frame of reference around the idea. “Your average clubby on Saturday wouldn’t give a fuck...” Ben continued, “...they don’t really care do they! I bet it must be the same for anyone like us. I bet they all ask questions of themselves!”

Sat on a bench opposite the pavilion, Ben’s words brought to attention a period in their lives that Ben held responsible for the points of crisis he and his teammates experienced whilst bound to the context of their cricketing pursuits. Infused by Connor’s sense of despair, the scene captured a rudimentary aspect of the social environment characterised by players asking “questions of themselves” as they sought to confirm cricket’s place in the forecast of their adult lives. Ben’s reference to “anyone like us” was thus an important note of distinction. In comparison to “your average clubby”, it separated what Ben perceived to be personally meaningful when circumstances combined to make players doubt the choices they had made to place cricket and their performances for the academy at the heart of their identity explorations. In Connor’s case, it was a loss of form at the start of the 2012 season and an uncertainty for where he was going to be by the end of the summer that was conspiring to make him question the value of his persistence.

Ben’s justification of “the stage we’re all at” was an extension of an idea that had been touted previously by his teammate, Ryan, in an out-of-season conversation I had with him at the beginning of my second year with the squad. During our conversation, Ryan provided some insights into what it was like for people of “our age” in the wider social context of university. He said, “It’s a funny age we’re at isn’t it? People don’t really know where they are going in life at our age, or know what they want to achieve, or who they want to be, do they?” I noted down his sentiments and encouraged him to elaborate further. Ryan believed that the life of an undergraduate – in the
general sense of the term – provided “no security” to support the person they once perceived themselves to be. University, he explained, was finite and only ever a temporary set of life-circumstances that therefore encouraged people to adopt a persona that necessitated their survival. To use Ryan’s examples, whether that was considering oneself to be a “top-lad”\(^{37}\), a “hard-worker”, or a cricketer with some ability, “our age”, claimed Ryan, felt the need to “be somebody” in a short space of time. Whilst he believed this led some on an “upwards trajectory”, others could find themselves on a more “muddled path” that Ryan translated onto his teammates in the academy.

Reflective of the struggles felt by the wider student population, Ryan believed the academy represented “three years of crisis” that saw some players edge closer towards their cricketing goals, whilst others fell by the wayside. Both were equally important outcomes to a process of self-discovery linked directly to the broader university context and their lives as undergraduate students. The academy and the type of cricket it offered provided a scene complete with props, symbols and co-actors to assist the individual to live-up to the notion that they were on the verge of becoming professional cricketers. Whether or not this was true, the cricket bubble acted as a system of self-reference that drew players closer to the idea. Simply by retaining a place on the squad it was implicit that an individual wanted to become a professional cricketer; an identity that players readily consented to in their rush to affiliate themselves with the collective group. For some it meant acting out the role. For others, it was a case of reinforcing a role they were already partially ‘groomed’ to fulfil. But for all of those concerned, entry into the academy was part of a process of self-modulation and self-understanding. Cricket provided a goal, the environment a framework, and Coach a symbol to direct and legitimise their attempts at becoming county cricketers. It was a path to an adult future that players would first inherit and begin to accept, before they started to engage in a process of self-critique as they monitored their progress against the minor

\(^{37}\) An expression used to describe an individual (young male) with a sociable and carefree attitude.
successes and failures they experienced along the way. Thus, until proved by the nature of their performances, all members of the squad found themselves in a false position, acting out their roles as aspirant cricketers, and seeking confirmation that they were indeed more than “your average clubby”. Up until that point, for the young men involved, there were doubts as Connor went on to explain in the months after chastising his commitment to cricket in the company of me and Ben.

_The minute you start to doubt it [cricket], it is probably because you’re not sure you are going to get it [a county contract]. That was certainly the case for me when I’ve found myself doubting it before. But if someone had put a contract right there in front of me and said ‘there you go – sign it’ I would’ve signed without a second thought._

(Field notes, 15. 1. 2013)

**Third Year Syndrome**

In the eyes of the academy manager, Bob, episodes of acute and more chronic self-doubt had a name. He called it “third year syndrome” which he used to describe the unease and a perceptible change in players’ attitudes towards the game and their places on the academy. In a private conversation I had with him around such matters, he’d told me:

_Players seem to outgrow the scheme. Have you noticed it? I call it ‘third year syndrome’. They reach this funny period – this plateau when they realise that they’re coming to the end of their degree and university cricket and they’re starting to think ‘what’s next’ – and they panic almost. You know how it is in third year – you’ve just had enough of the whole uni thing and you feel impatient. You want to move on with your life. You want to go and do something else. I wouldn’t be surprised if the likes of Patrick and others don’t play next year. I already sense he’s had enough of it. He won’t make it will he, if we’re honest about it? People think highly of him, but he went to a good school, he’s at a good university. He’s soon going to want to go and do something else…_

(Field notes, 12. 4. 2012)

I didn’t mention it, but I knew Patrick was in the midst of reaching the same conclusion. Bob had also eloquently summed up his take on what Ben would
cite as “the stage we’re all at” in the hours that followed. Bob’s diagnosis of “third year syndrome” was an accurate observation other than the fact that, from my reckoning, it wasn’t just a “third-year” condition, but a symbolic sub-cultural affliction that pervaded the social-climate. His comments, though, helped place an analytical pretence on the subjective realities and internal conflicts for which I had become a conduit, helping me to make sense of a scene I had encountered in the changing room the previous day:

Preoccupied with the thoughts of my approaching 24th birthday, I asked Patrick how old he was whilst he kept himself busy shadowing cricket shots in the small portrait mirror mounted on the changing room wall.

“22 mate. I know. Old isn’t it...” He replied, still concentrating on his reflection in the mirror.

“Too old for this anyway!” Connor remarked, looking up from the screen of his phone. Standing in the doorway of the changing room with his back to the conversation, blocking the cricket from view, George remained quiet. He was next in. Both Connor and Patrick had had their goes.

“Not long ago it used to be ‘Ahhhh, Patrick, he’s a good young player?...” Connor went on to say as if he was picking his teammate out of crowd of talented cricketers.

“Yeah right. 22. Not young anymore mate!” corrected Patrick. Connor smirked.

“That’s true. We’re quickly moving out of that category aren’t we? In fact, I think we’ve moved out of it already! It’s weird to think like that isn’t it? See that young guy in the paper today? Coach says he’s coming to join us next year. Now he really is a good, young player! You play with him don’t ya? He’s at your county isn’t he?” Connor asked, directing his question at Patrick.

Resting his weight on the handle of the bat he was now bored of swinging, Patrick agreed. “Yeah he’s a gun38 mate. And your point about us – it’s a good point you make!” In light of the developing discussion, I asked, “Do you think about this then?”

“What that we’re already past it?” queried Connor. He smiled and reflecting on his season’s performances he replied.

“I’ll tell you what I’m thinking. I’m thinking that I’m neither a good young player, nor a young player anymore! I’m just a player at the moment! Another one to go through the system and come out of it at the other end hating it!” Connor chuckled before building on his point. “I went from a good young player, to a young player, to just another player. So much for development!” Still standing with his back to the conversation, George suddenly broke into laughter. We all did. It

---

38 Cricket parlance for a cricketer with prodigious talent.
was funny. It made sense. In some way it connected with us all.

(Field notes, 11. 4. 2012)

The one-off changing room encounter between Patrick, Connor and George provided an illustration of the re-evaluation that Bob recognised in his conceptualisation of “third year syndrome”. On the nature of such revision, it has been suggested that in order for the young to work out the basic questions of identity they must first work out who they are not (Erikson, 1968; Giddens, 1991). In this regard, McAdams (1993, p.78) explains that the point of departure for the building of a coherent identity is the dawning realisation that ‘I am no longer what I thought I was’, which Connor and Patrick had felt openly compelled to discuss.

On a different occasion, I asked Lewis and Patrick how their experiences as student-cricketers were influencing their thoughts and feelings towards becoming professional cricketers:

Patrick: Well I think the academy helps because you get to spend time at places like this [international cricket grounds] and get the opportunity to play against professional cricketers, and from that you can kind of gauge what living their life would potentially be like. And to tell you the truth that has sort of lowered my opinion on it if I’m being completely honest!

Lewis: Expand on that mate...

Patrick: Just in terms of their daily routines and the realisation that cricket is not glamorous at all – unless you play in an Ashes Test match...

Lewis: See I completely agree. And I think being at university and being where we are has made us appreciate more lifestyles that are possible. Whereas if I hadn't gone to university – which Patrick you may agree with or not – I might not appreciate that as much because the guys you find at counties they are a lot more in the routine of cricket than I am...

Patrick: Definitely mate. They are locked in...

Lewis: Yeah precisely. They have a schedule and a set of cricket goals for the season, which of course we have as well, but they have even more so. But being at university and being here has made us realise and question whether we like the routines that they have and whether
we want it, especially when we go back and join our counties later in the summer...

(Recorded Conversation, 7. 4. 2012)

Situated in the conventional transformative context of higher education, in an environment designed to emulate that of their professional counterparts, a formative part of players’ holistic development (both as cricketers and as young people) was self-exploratory by nature. For the majority who joined the academy and entered university simultaneously, the notion of ‘professional cricket’ was on the tip of their tongue. Indeed, “the cricket” was often quoted as the principle justification for “being here”, and yet ‘cricket’, having once being quoted as the force behind such decisions, often became the major source of disillusionment echoed within players’ growing discontent with the sporting context in which they were immersed. So consistent was this response, it had not only led Bob to label the condition, it had also led him to question the overriding philosophy of the academy that he perceived had a responsibility for spawning beliefs that made players see themselves as something that they were not.

Searching for some reconciliation, Bob decided to put me on the spot during a conversation we had following my first season in the field. Over the course of our dialogue, it became clear that Bob was in the midst of his own dilemma in light of the status quo he had observed in players’ responses to the academy environment during his tenure. A former employee of secondary and higher education, this moral crisis was set against his continued effort to align himself to the professional values which the academy promoted. Sitting opposite me in the student union bar, he asked:

Bob: I wanted to sort of get some of your thoughts really, just more for my own confirmation of what is happening, because as you know we get so enclosed by it all that it’s difficult sometimes to sort of make an objective analysis. I’m quite interested in the sort of moral aspect of this. Are we giving these players who are coming in false expectations? Are we being dishonest with them really about what this scheme is going to do for them? And do you think perhaps we should be clearer about what exactly is going to happen to them if they do join this scheme?
HB: *I think the players quickly pick up on it if that’s what you are getting at, so I think after a year they realise, certainly…*

Bob: *What do they realise? That they’re not good enough? I mean I talked about the moral aspect of this. Do you think in some ways perhaps we should make things clearer for them? Or do you think they should go through this, you know – this is life, this is reality for professional sport? But obviously as you say most of them are coming here as the best player in their club side or they’ve done particularly well at that level and they think they’re coming into a scheme that’s going to propel them to the next level which is not necessarily the case. You said they come to understand very quickly where they are in the pecking order. And I’m just interested whether you think that morally we should be clearer about what we tell players when they first come here?*

HB: *What do you tell players when they first come here? What’s the brief?*

Bob: *Well, that you’re here as professionals. We’re going to treat you as professionals. So the word ‘professional’ is talked about a lot, and as you know that’s what Coach always talks about all the time, about ‘being a pro’, and what it is to ‘be a pro’. The whole ethos if you like is built up around it.*

(Recorded conversation, 27. 7. 2011)

Bob’s concern for providing players with “false expectations” was to some extent misguided as in most cases the expectations to which he referred were already well established. Of greater relevance was what came of individuals’ expectations during the three years that they spent with the squad when trying to discern what was “happening” as a result of their participation. Players entered the academy with existing hopes and dreams that interacted with the environment’s central question, “do you want to become pros?” It was a question that Coach regularly posed to his players to challenge them on the notion and to this end, what the academy ‘did’ was to help organise personal expectation into some sort of objective reality. Whether the result was a positive or negative outcome for the individual concerned, it was nonetheless a fundamental part of the players’ developmental experiences that culminated in them reaching a point of realisation in their attempts at coming up with an answer.
Bob: So obviously it’s an elite scheme and obviously part of the aims of the scheme as a whole are to promote sub-elite or elite cricketers, to give them the opportunity to become first-class cricketers. In actual fact the sponsors make that their major aim. They see the scheme as a way of getting players into first-class cricket. So basically it’s a mop up isn’t it of those who haven’t got [full-time] contracts but who are the best of the rest if you like which gives them an opportunity. It’s quite clear. It’s black and white in that regard. But you see I disagree with Coach about this. He’s of an opinion that players can develop during their time at university, and my opinion is that if players are good enough they’ll already be identified. If they’re really good enough they won’t come to university, whereas he doesn’t accept that. He thinks that all young players should come to university. Coach thinks that you can take somebody who has got the right attitude and turn them into an elite player. And I say that you can’t do that, that the evidence must already be there by the time they come to us for them to be able to move on. To put it crudely, you can’t make a racehorse out of a donkey sort of thing. I do believe the scheme is incredibly beneficial to cricketers that are at that sub-elite level, but I propose that we begin to just celebrate that instead of endorsing the academy as a means to an end all the time. Perhaps we should begin to see it as an end in itself almost...

(Recorded conversation, 27.7.2011)

From my estimation Bob and Coach actually agreed more on this than Bob cared to realise. Like Bob, Coach was an outspoken proponent of the academy, but he was also a believer that to play cricket you were either “the right person or you weren’t”, which the academy helped individuals to decide. Nevertheless, “third year syndrome” was a tension that sat uncomfortably with Bob who had spent many years dealing with the consequences of false hope and expectation when the guise of professional cricket became temporarily, or worse, permanently disrupted. It was this that Bob was at pains to reconcile, but as Coach repeatedly reminded me “there is only one certainty in cricket H...” and that was that cricket would eventually let you down. In Coach’s eyes, being discarded was part of the natural flow of events, which, in some cases, helped release an individual from a fantasy that had them gripped, regardless of the emotional cost.
A Million Miles Away

“Feeling ok?” I asked the downcast figure sat in front of me. “Nah... devastated!” Tim leaned forward, his elbows resting on the arms of the leather chair. He was still dressed in his full training kit with flip-flops now replacing the boots he was wearing at practice an hour or so before. “Were you expecting it?” I enquired, unsure of where to begin. A text had alerted me to his arrival. A simple “are you free for a chat?” had prompted me to bring a halt to my reflections and ready myself for Tim to come and join me in the conservatory at the back of the coffee shop where I had been writing up my notes. “Yeah, I think I was you know. But still when it came out it hit home how much I do really want it...” I had been there at training and had listened whilst Coach named the side for the opening first-class game of the 2012 season, watching in the moments after as Tim hung around looking for an explanation. We were now sitting three feet apart, his eyes swelling ready to burst. Dropping his head, he stared vacantly at the floor. I knew then that this was going to be one of my trickiest encounters. “I just don’t know what to do – where do I go from here? Do I stick about? Or do I just go home? I have nothing to stay for now have I, really?” I paused to consider a response. “I sense this is a bit more than selection and being in or out of the team isn’t it, Tim?” I asked, holding out for Tim’s reply. “He is the worst Coach I have ever, ever worked with and all the guys think it!” he protested as self-pity turned to anger as he thought about where Coach’s decision had left him. “I mean I go one of two ways don’t I. I either get my head down and get back in the side...” which meant Tim sticking around playing club cricket and repeating his second year exams, “…or I just tell him to ‘do one’ and go home” with Tim giving up on cricket and the degree he began three years ago.

Enquiring as to where it all began, Tim recounted the moment when he decided to take himself off to university following an encounter he’d had with Coach. Playing for his county on his “first team debut”, Tim had scored “fifty odd not-out” whereupon Coach had approached him to discuss the possibility of Tim joining the academy. At the time he was “thinking about university” and the opportunity to pursue cricket in full-time education, but
was unsure of the right thing for him to do. “I was 20 then and that was my make or break year at my county” he described. “Cricket was either going to be my life or I’d go and do something else. And university was part of that”. I sat there trying to envisage the scenario, Tim, still glowing with satisfaction, in conversation with Coach in some quiet recess of the pavilion. “I’d just got 50 odd not-out, played well and he (Coach) obviously thought I was a superstar and tried to butter me up – and that was it”. The following September Tim was at university as a new member of the academy, entering an environment where ‘professional cricket’ was an identifying and commanding aspect of the prevailing culture that served to support an existing ambition. It had never occurred to Tim that three years later he’d be in the same “make or break” situation.

From our conversation he was just telling me things and I was just thinking ‘Is this guy for real?’ He told me ‘You’re not going to make it now...’ Fair comment, I’m probably not going to make it now, but he was like ‘...That is the reason why you are not getting selected’. How is that the basis of selecting your side? There are loads of others in his side that are never going to make it! But that doesn’t mean they’re not vital parts of the team. I could go through the list. I just want to know the real reason why I’m dropped. Not some bullshit about stats that say I’m not good enough with the bat! Well there is more to me than my batting mate! What about my bowling in the longer formats?! He [Coach] was like ‘You’ll have to score runs in league cricket’ and I was like, ‘You talk to me as if I’m an unproven player – as though I haven’t done anything’. It’s just fucking ridiculous! Two years now I’ve performed quite well and played for the combined university side, but he just disregards everything and just quotes my batting average. And I was like ‘What’s Patrick’s batting average?’ I’m pretty sure his is not much better! And he [Coach] was like ‘Don’t bring other people into it, think about yourself’. Well I am – ‘So why me then Coach? Why am I dropped? Why am I the one that has to miss out?’ He was like ‘Patrick, he has played first-class cricket, he’s at a county!’ and it’s like ‘OK – but I was at a county once Coach! I played first team before I did this!’ and what have I got to show for it now? I’ve got absolutely nothing left, have I? All I’ve got left is club cricket. I know a time comes when you have to say ‘enough is enough you are not going to make it’. I admitted that to myself this winter. I was just going to enjoy this season and play as best as I could, and I’m just trying to put it into context looking at where I was three years ago and where I am now. What has this scheme done for me? What have I gained? I don’t know how I got here. I’ve just got nothing! No cricket. No degree! I haven’t even got a bird. I
was close to becoming a pro a few years ago and now I can’t even get in my uni team.

(Recorded conversation, 29. 3. 2012)

It was the culmination of a troubled relationship between Tim and Coach that I had sensed from the very beginning. But there was little point in going over old ground for this was no longer about the tumultuous relationship he had with Coach, but a realisation of time “wasted” at the end of a cricketing romance. Indeed, Coach’s decision had sparked an afternoon and evening of candour for Tim. Rightly or wrongly, justly or unjustly, he was being forced to ask questions of himself to decide whether cricket could continue to serve a self-directory function.

The following day I met up with Tim to check on how he was. Looking brighter and free from all the raw emotion that had followed in the wake of the previous day’s upset, he spoke with clarity as he continued to ponder cricket’s place in the context of his life.

Tim: I got moved up a year at school and now I’m failing a degree!

HB: You got moved up a year?

Tim: Yeah I finished school early

HB: Really!

Tim: Yeah. Bizarre isn’t it. No one believes me now

[We begin to laugh]

Tim: Sometimes I look back on things like cricket in the context of my life and because I haven’t quite made it I think ‘Was it worth it?’ I do think about that sometimes. And obviously I do think it’s worth it because I have gained so much from it. It brought me here and all the friends I’ve made from it, all the skills and qualities you’ve learnt or whatever, plus I’ve been to some amazing places like India, Abu Dhabi, South Africa – it’s given me loads. So I don’t regret it for one second but sometimes I think ‘What if I didn’t have cricket would I have achieved a lot more academically, got a good degree and maybe had more interests in that side of things?’ Cricket has always been such a passion of mine that everything else has always been on the back burner, which is a shame because I wanted to gain so much out of university and the
academy in terms of what it would give me, but I’ve ended up not getting any of it...

HB: And I think you’ve found that hard.

Tim: It’s the frustrating part yeah. And it is a horrible realisation that I’m 23 now and I haven’t quite made it and it’s time to move on and look at other things – and it’s a horrible realisation because I know I was so close. I’m a million miles away now and it’s hitting home! And the disappointment about my degree upsets me even more because I’m like ‘What the hell did you do that for? Idiot!’ But I have to turn it around. And that’s the thing now. It’s where do I go from here? That’s what I’ve got to weigh up.

(Recorded conversation, 30. 3. 2012)

Having arrived at university in the hope of taking advantage of the opportunities available to him, Tim had reached a point of crisis reflective of a permanent identity-disruption that saw the need for him to “weigh up” where his life was going following confirmation of what was now unobtainable.

Fake it Until You Make It

Speaking about the difficulty of telling a young player “you’re not good enough”, Coach once described the responsibility of coaches and administrators alike to a) make a young person aware of “the standard required”, and b) address the balance between “reality” and an individual’s “honesty” with themselves. Coincidently, he used Tim as an example that later read as a forewarning for what was to come:

Tim, he’s going to Abu Dhabi next week with the combined university eleven. Do you know he was the last player selected by performances? At his county he hasn’t quite made it there. He hasn’t quite made it here really, or with the combined university side last summer, so the pattern emerges all the time you see. And what they [players] sometimes do is they go and ask different coaches what is the matter, why isn’t it happening for them. So what are they looking for? A magical answer? So I wonder whether people are sometimes living outside reality and their honesty? But why is that? Is it handed down to you from your parents? Is it your environment? Is it you’ve been influenced by somebody? Because what I should be saying to some of them is, 'Sorry
but you’re not good enough. You haven’t got the standard required here to actually do well. But if you go away and work very hard at something else it might happen.’ Now that’s a difficult thing to tell somebody because what you’re doing is you’re actually telling them they’re not good enough to fulfil their dream. It’s not easy. But it has to be done for their sake. So myself, or you, or anyone else for that matter can’t keep going up to Tim and saying, ‘You’re going to be OK,’ because he hasn’t done what he should have done to put himself in the correct place that will take him forward. You see I think we’ve got a moral obligation. There’s only one certainty in cricket, and that is one day you’re going to get the sack – whether that is after a year or ten years in the game. And you see that is why I don’t believe in academy systems really because what you’re saying to a young guy is ‘Here, you’re going to play first-class cricket’ and few do, few do. They get their names on the back of their shirts and neglect everything else. You see you’re talking about people here and their dreams – their lives even. Don’t take them down that path unless you really think they are good enough…

(Recorded conversation, 11.3.2011)

Coach’s monologue highlighted not only the importance of introspective honesty in an individual’s self-exploration, but also the honesty of significant others to assist young people in arriving at the “right perception” of themselves. It was Coach’s belief that honesty often served to facilitate rather than inhibit future success if it helped guide an individual towards a path to which they were more suited. In other words, closing doors in Coach’s mind was sometimes as important as opening them if it prevented players “living outside reality and their honesty” to the detriment of those individuals.

Writing in his diary on 31 March 2012, Ben noted a word of advice that had been offered to him by his then county coach. It read “fake it until you make it” which, in the context of the rest of his diary, gave an alternative insight into his on-going dilemmas. In fact, the statement disclosed some of the discrepancies between honesty and reality that operated within ‘front’ and ‘back’ stage regions of the social group (Goffman, 1959) that saw players like Ben assimilate to an “ethos” of professional cricket, whilst acknowledging privately their fears that perhaps they did not want to become cricketers after all.

Illustrative of this discrepancy was the cultural use of the word
“clubby”, as referenced previously, which was attributed to teammates who failed to display the right pedigree to warrant their place on the squad. The irony, of course, was that all (bar none) participated regularly in club cricket, many of whom I had played with or against in the local leagues. The term “clubby” thereby designated a certain type of self-conception defined by ambition rather than an actual status among the elite echelons of the game. Nevertheless, it served a purpose in helping players inflate an impression that they were, indeed, on the verge of becoming ‘pros’.

This held similarities to the ‘anticipatory socialisation’ that Parker (1996, 2001) noted in his ethnographic investigation into the lives of apprentice professional footballers in reporting that ‘club-life’ carried a latent understanding that to succeed as a professional player one had to think and act like a professional player. What Ben’s diary unveiled, however, was what existed behind this façade at a point in an individual’s development when their crucial concern became whether an ‘act of self’ would be credited or discredited (Goffman, 1959). This is why George believed that young cricketers, like himself, were so “up and down all the time” until they reached a point of validation that enabled them to embrace an authentic view of themselves and their relationships with the game. Speaking to me at the end of his first season as a full-time professional cricketer having signed a two-year county contract after graduating following the 2012 season, he said:

[Young players] they have a good day and they’re buzzing about it because they start to believe it. And then they have a bad day and they start to doubt that again. That is why you find more experienced players tend to be more level headed until they get to a stage, perhaps towards the end of their careers, when they begin to ask themselves the same questions as they did at the start of it.

(Field notes, 25.9.2013)

George provided a take on a cricketer’s ‘life-cycle’ that saw young players struggle to validate themselves as professional cricketers and then return, over the course of a career, to a point of concern once their performances began to wane. But it was not for the seasoned professional that Coach held
much sympathy. Rather it was the investments made by the young in pursuit of their childhood aspirations that were the focus of Coach’s vigilance as he guided his players to points of settlement in their cricketing identities. However, whilst some needed ushering towards the end of the story, others were more adept at coming to their own conclusions.

**I Don't Know What I Am But I Know I’m Not One of These**

It was late April (2012) in one of the wettest starts to the county season on record Cricket matches from the village green to the international arena were being abandoned on a weekly basis testing even the most hardy of cricketing souls (see *Life Inside Cricket Bubble*, Chapter 4). Batting averages were low. Overs in the middle were of a bare minimum, and for the young hopefuls eager to find some form, it was starting to get a little bit desperate

To fill the final hour before the team’s evening meal, I went and joined Patrick in his bedroom who was biding his time in front of the television. I wanted to check on how he was doing as well as to see what impact spending another day cooped up in a hotel was having on his feelings towards becoming a professional cricketer. “Seriously, if you were to tell someone about what we have done this week they just wouldn’t understand it would they...?” he said, shaking his head with a slightly deranged look in his eye. “…They just wouldn't believe you! I mean what type of person is happy to waste away their lives in shitty hotel rooms and cricket grounds whilst it rains, doing nothing whatsoever?” I prepared myself for the answer. “Cricketers!” he blurted. Patrick rose from his bed, grabbed a bottle of water from the fridge, and then collapsed into a heap once again.

*This kind of thing would drive most people insane, wouldn’t it? Can you imagine a businessman spending a whole week at work with absolutely nothing to do, but choosing to sit at his desk regardless? I mean what’s the point in all this, eh? We could literally go the entire trip without playing here you know*

(Field notes, 25. 4. 2012)
Held suspended by the elements, Patrick and his teammates lay stationary in their bedrooms caught between their student and cricketing lives without pursuing either to any great effect. “It’s demoralising though isn’t it?” Patrick said, reflecting on the situation.

See mate this is what I hate, just doing nothing with your day. I know you can’t do anything about it because it’s the weather but I don’t actually like the cricket environment and all the ‘laddy’ general banter shit, and having to deal with other people’s problems whilst dealing with your own. You know what I mean? It’s just so in your face the whole time and especially when you’re a youngster in a dressing room and you’re the bottom of the bottom. Staying in shitty hotels, eating shitty hotel food, and being stuck with people that you wouldn’t otherwise choose to be stuck with – it’s quite overwhelming. Even scoring runs mate. It doesn’t make me happy anymore.

(Field notes, 25. 4. 2012)

I looked at Patrick and thought about everything I had come to understand about his struggles to adapt to the characteristics of the cricketer’s lifestyle. The relative comforts of his physical surroundings offered him little by way of satisfaction, nor did the basic pleasures of scoring runs anymore, and it seemed the longer he spent around cricket the less appealing it was becoming. He disliked the routine and the isolation that came with being locked away on tour and with an opportunity now available to him outside the cricket bubble, for the sake of a ten or fifteen year career in county cricket, he didn’t want to let it pass him by.

To be honest with you, how many decent jobs can you get at the age of 30, 35 even with a degree if you are starting a new career at that age? I mean who is going to offer you a job say with my degree in accounting? No one is going to offer you a job at the age of 35 to join their graduate scheme and become a graduate accountant – they’d just say ‘no, you are too old’. You see there aren’t a lot of doors open for cricketers mate, unless you just stay in cricket – that is.

(Field notes, 25. 4. 2012)

Having once expressed a joint motivation to follow his cricketing talents whilst continuing with his education, Patrick was at an advanced stage of
making a distinction between what was now of paramount importance. Having impressed the HR people at his interview for a business management and financial consultancy internship in the City of London before Christmas, the academy, and the sacrifices that came with playing this sort of cricket had started to lose its meaning. For Patrick, cricket was now simply a distraction to the sights he had set elsewhere but an obligation, nonetheless, he felt duty-bound to fulfil.

Glancing down at my watch I realised that we were running late for dinner. Rushing to our feet, we continued our conversation as we walked hastily down the hotel corridor towards the lift. Waiting for its arrival, Patrick appraised the value of his experiences in the academy in light of what he now appreciated about himself. “The one thing I’ve learnt and taken from all this is that I’d never play cricket just on its own. No way. Too risky mate!” he said, before muttering one final piece on the topic. “I don’t know what I am yet mate, but I know I’m not one of these”, he concluded as we stepped into the lift. I was convinced from that moment on that his decision was all but made. It was now just a case of keeping up appearances.

Teach Yourself About Yourself

It was not uncommon for Coach to recite the topsy-turvy career he had as a young professional player (see Chapter 3), and one of his favourite ways of describing his experiences was depicting how the game used to “get on top” of him, which he once expressed to me in detail:

> You must never let the game get on top of you as a player Harry, because it can, and it will if you’re not careful. It’s very time consuming this game you see, and that [playing, travelling, staying in hotels] places demands on your character. So it can get on top of you very easily you see. And that’s when it’s dangerous – that’s when the game controls you. It happened to me as a player. I never felt like I was actually on top of the game. At times it felt like the game was up around my throat making it hard for me to breathe almost. So I was always stretching myself just to keep my head above the water, and that was uncomfortable. You can’t live like that. So it was controlling me almost if that makes any sense and I never actually got to a point where I could actually say that I enjoyed it. And that, Harry, is what is important otherwise you can’t do this and expect to do well – and I’m
talking 10-15 years of regular first-class cricket not five or six games over two or three seasons – unless you can enjoy it. But it's tough – I appreciate that. And that's why you've got to keep on top of the game and not let the game get on top of you. If it does, well then you're in trouble then because it's hard to get back up after that and that's when there's got to come a point when you realise you're not good enough. You can't keep on torturing yourself with this game otherwise it just gets deeper. Like I've said, I've experienced it myself when I was young. I've seen so many guys get locked up in themselves because they're fearful of it [the game]. I was a bad one for that. I suppose the game is littered with failure for players every day and I suffered a lot from that when I was young – kept doubting myself, doubting myself, doubting myself and in the end I decided I wasn't good enough.

(Recorded Conversation, 6. 4. 2012)

Whilst Coach and I spoke I was conscious of George who was sitting quietly in the corner of the changing room. My awareness of him was stimulated by the fact that Coach was talking about everything George represented. I knew George would be listening and I knew there was a chance he would be relating Coach's words to his own situation.

The following day, I found myself floating around in the same changing room witnessing a related scene. The changing room was busier than the day before, as players dipped in and out of a series of interconnecting rooms in an effort to occupy themselves during the rain delay. Unsure of what to do, I went and joined Ryan and George who were lying on the table in the middle of the room and began to listen to them talk, readying myself to start punching notes into my phone:

“Ryan...” George asked “...do you like playing cricket?”
“Yeah, do you?”

George paused to think of an answer. He could be a rather hesitant character at the best of times. “I don't know...” He paused again. “I must like it because I play it, but I don't know what I enjoy about it...”

George sat up, picked up a tennis ball, and began throwing it against the wall. “What do you want to do with your life?” he asked Ryan, who remained supine.

“I don't know, but whatever I do I want to do it successfully...”
“Would you be happy being a bin man, if you did it successfully?” Ryan smiled at his teammate's facetious question.

“Well yeah, as long as there's potential for some progress. What about you?”
“I don’t know – I’m so up and down. Sometimes I think I’m really good and I’m like ‘this [cricket] is it!’ And then there are times when I’m like ‘I’m really shit’. I hate not knowing what’s happening. I’d like someone to just tell me whether they think I’m good enough. I sometimes look at myself from outside of myself – me looking in on me sort of thing – and think what would I think of me? Am I good enough from a coach’s perspective? It’s all very well telling yourself you’re good enough. I bullshit myself all the time, but it’s tiring…”

“And the feeling is so temporary isn’t it…” Ryan interjected.

“…Yeah it is. You heard Coach yesterday didn’t you Harry? I agree that players need to know if they’re good enough to make it. I need to know, but nobody will tell me. Coaches bullshit you as much as you bullshit yourself sometimes and I’m starting to think is it worth the effort?”

“Is it worth what?” Ryan asked seeking clarification.

“To keep bullshit yourself and listening to the bullshit. Since 11 I have played cricket thinking this is going somewhere and since then I have always played thinking on the lines of ‘where is this taking me?’ – in terms of a career and that. Everyone says spinners develop late so sometimes I think perhaps I still could be good enough if I kept on going trying to make it. It’s harder because we’ve played since we were so young so our careers are theoretically already ten years in. That’s quite a long time isn’t it…”

(Field notes, 7.4.2012)

George’s deliberations were in many respects a reflection of Coach’s own story that saw George grappling with cricket in his search for some truth about himself and his capabilities. Speaking to George later that season in May 2012, he told me how his experience playing the game had changed since his early years until now, at the age of 21 playing cricket for the academy. In doing so, he explained:

George: It’s just this difficult stage where we’re trying to get to the next level and for quite a lot of it we’re out of our comfort zones. We used to enjoy it so much when we were youngsters and then now we’re going through this difficult period and it’s almost like we’re trying to get ourselves the other side of that, whether it means taking a step down and just saying ‘Right I’m going to just enjoy club cricket’ or something like that...

Me: Almost accepting your lot then?

George: Yeah, which maybe Tim has done to a certain extent. He’s only playing for his club side now and he says he’s really enjoying it. Because
you see we’re trying really hard to push ourselves to get somewhere that maybe we shouldn’t go...

(Recorded conversation, 16. 5. 2012)

As George highlighted, it was a “stage” that he and his teammates had entered and through a process of trial and error were trying to surmount with each handling it in their own particular ways. Once again, it was Coach who helped put this into perspective whilst sitting next to me one evening in the driver’s cabin of the team’s minibus:

You see Harry, by the age of 21, 22 you should know whether or not you are good enough really to move on into the professional game and the professional environment. The difficult part from there is to move from second-team cricket into first-team cricket, and then to establish yourself at that level. And it is only then, once you’ve found your level, that you can really start to enjoy playing the game for what it is and that is when you can start to make a proper career and a proper living out of the game. It’s like I said before – you must control the game. You mustn’t let the game control you. Tim is a case in point for that isn’t he? You see he won’t accept that over the three years he’s been involved with us he’s not put in the performances to say that he’s really good enough to go on to make it further. Yet he won’t let it go will he – he won’t accept that he’ll never be much more than a good club cricketer.

(Field notes, 18. 4. 2012)

I looked up into the rear view mirror and caught Ben’s stony reflection sitting at the back of the bus with his head phones perched over the top of his academy cap, staring out of the rain spattered window. Aware of the questions Ben had been asking himself over the winter and early part of the summer, I replied:

HB: I suppose that is exactly what these guys sitting behind me are doing – trying to find their level...?

Coach: Yeah, that’s right. That’s why I’m a believer in the university system to help blokes do that. Most of these fellas won’t make it, but over the three years they spend involved in the scheme they should realise whether or not they are good enough to pursue it further...
...It’s teaching yourself about yourself. That’s what all this stuff is about.

(Field notes, 18. 4. 2012)

Golf Clubs and Goal Keeping Gloves

A few weeks before the start of the new university year (2012/2013), I had a visit from Ryan at home who was at a loose end. There was plenty to discuss with the last month having seen a handful of Ryan’s academy teammates featuring in their county sides. There was Connor, George and Patrick too, all of whom had been awarded a taste of first XI county cricket, but just as Ryan and I relaxed into conversation my phone rang. It was Patrick. “What’s he ringing me for?” I briefly considered not answering, but I had, in some respects, been expecting the call. After a series of rings I excused myself from the room to listen to what Patrick had to say.

“So mate, I’ve got a bit of an issue...” he began. “I might as well tell you the whole story – you’re not busy are you?” I shook off the question, and for the next 30 minutes I immersed myself in his tale.

So basically, after the uni season I went back to my county and I was all over the place with my game, technically. I mean I’m not making excuses but I haven’t scored a run for uni in two years and to make matters worse, I got a few low scores for the 2’s and at this point I was like ‘fuck this’. Honestly mate, I was dreadful. But then the county employed a new batting coach to work with us guys and he’s good mate, seriously, and with him I began working hard on my game to correct a few things and I started to score some big runs in the 2’s, and last month I started to feature in the 1’s – and have done ever since! But even though I’m opening the batting in the 1’s I’m still not enjoying it! What’s the date now mate do you know?

(Field notes, 31. 8. 2012)

I looked at my watch. It was the 31st August.

Right so as you know I have that job in London starting in a month. So the issue now is that last week the head coach pulled me into his office – and I mean it was completely out of the blue right – he hadn’t uttered a word to me all season – and he literally said straight out ‘Here’s another two year deal’ to start life as a full-time professional. As you
can imagine, it was a bit unexpected, so I was like ‘Thanks very much but if I’m being totally honest with you I have really struggled with it, and I haven’t really enjoyed it’. I didn’t want to turn it down flatly so I said ‘Thanks for the offer, it’s flattering but I’ll need a little time to think about it. I don’t want to make a rash decision about this. Is it OK if I go away and talk to my family about it?’ And to be fair, he was pretty understanding about it and we kind of left it at that. So I have bought a little time basically, but we are due to speak again next week. The thing is I need to try and formulate an explanation as to why I don’t want to accept the contract and it’s kind of hard to think of an appropriate thing to say. I’ve been thinking about it for a while now as you know, but the thing I’m finding a bit tricky is that I’m essentially going to be saying to him ‘I don’t want to do what you have done for the last 30 years’, aren’t I? That’s what I am saying isn’t it? And I’m not just saying that to him. The worst bit is that I’m also saying that to all the guys in the dressing room that ‘I don’t want to lead the life you lead’. The thing is I wouldn’t want to do it half-heartedly. I don’t think you can. But I know that it’s not going to make me happy! And the thing is as well, I don’t want to leave the club looking like the dick-head who turned his nose up at cricket because he thought he could do something better, or he had a better option. I want to try and leave with my head held high.

(Field notes, 31. 8. 2012)

I thought back to the news I had heard within recent weeks about Ben who, having graduated from university with only the remnants of the degree he had started, had parted company with his county too, who had chosen not to extend his deal. What a contrast Patrick’s story now presented. Over the summer of 2012 I had come to appreciate that Ben shared some of Patrick’s doubts, but whose misgivings I felt welled from an entirely different place. Unlike Patrick, Ben had few other options readily available, and besides, his infatuation was still clearly apparent bubbling up fears of being rejected by the game that Patrick was in the process of rejecting. It appeared so lopsided, almost unfair that one could not have what the other did not want, and yet it seemed so completely natural where ‘love’ is concerned.

I might just tell them that I am unhappy and that pro cricket is just not for me. Initially I thought I wasn’t enjoying it because I knew I had another option, but I have realised now it’s not that at all. I scored 169 and 70 the other week for the 2s but, and this is going to sound awful, I just didn’t really care. It’s not like it made me happy. And I think I
realised then that ‘What am I doing this for?’ if scoring runs, the thing I am paid to do, doesn’t give me a buzz.

(Field notes, 31. 8. 2012)

Instead of cricket capturing his imagination and desire to pursue it as a career, the idea of being contracted to a world in which cricket was the single most fought over attraction, dragged Patrick down. The spirit of the game affected him in ways that no longer strengthened his emotive attachment, but doused the flames that kept his cravings alight. Without the fire burning, it left Patrick under-resourced and ill-equipped to tackle the constant ups and downs of life in the professional game. Consequently, Patrick had given up on a relationship that now failed to complement the best of his character. Cricket, for Patrick, was no longer a question of love but merely a labour absent of positive feelings and motivations that would suggest he’d found his natural fit. Thus, spending “days in the dirt” no longer seemed fulfilling in his quest to construct a gratifying sense of self.

I tell you, to play this sport for 10 – 15 years is a contract to a life in it, mate. I know they say you can take things from sport like teamwork and communication and apply it to other areas, but you and I know that is a little naïve to think an employer really gives a shit about that. What is he going to want from a 30 year old ex-professional cricketer? And it’s not as if the money you earn justifies the sacrifice. I mean it’s not a bad living, don’t get me wrong, but I can’t help feeling I could be doing so much more with my time than this. And to think of the sacrifices a guy like Josh has made just to be here! I find him unbelievable mate! He’ll say to you openly that his number one priority for being in the UK is cricket and being at the academy to take advantage of the opportunities to train and to play first-class cricket. He happily says his degree comes second. He’s incredible. I have so much respect for him that he is prepared to spend three years of his life to potentially go back and have a small chance at becoming a pro back home. That’s dedication. That’s having a love for it mate. That’s what it takes.

(Field notes, 31. 8. 2012)

Despite his admiration for others, Patrick had had enough of living up to the role cricket demanded. He was no longer prepared to “fake it”, for when it came to his plans for the future, Patrick had decided that he was not
prepared to compromise. It left no room for further trial and tribulation. This was it. His faith and trust in cricket had gone, and subsequently his readiness to take the risk. What started as a “two-year plan” had ended in the rejection of cricket on his terms, and with his mind made up, he was now ready and able to invest in something new. But what of regret? After all, this was not a decision he had taken lightly.

I think there will always be a few regrets. The thing is, and without sounding arrogant or big headed, since playing for the first team I haven’t once felt out of my depth. I know I could do it. But the question is do I really want to do it? Do I want to spend 10-15 years in county cricket and by the end come out with nothing other than my county cap, a few stories and a profile on CricInfo?39 Anyway, I’ve done my thinking. I have to tell them all this next week, which is going to create a few problems – it’s going to be a little bit tricky telling people that basically ‘I don’t want what you have got’. I might write something down – what do you think?

(Field notes, 31. 8. 2012)

In one final question, I asked Patrick what this meant in relation to passing the cricket mantle onto his son in the future. “No way mate...” he said, “…golf clubs, and goal keeping gloves only!” Patrick went silent. “OK, I’ll buy him a cricket bat if he wants one – but for enjoyment only!” and on that note our phone call came to an end.

Returning to Ryan, I took up a seat next to him on the sofa running the conversation back over in my head. “How’s Patrick?” Ryan enquired out of interest. “Don’t tell me, they have offered him a four-year deal?”

"Not quite" I replied.

“But something along those lines right? Feeling compromised, I smiled. “I knew it...!” Ryan said excitedly. “…That kid – he is SO good!”

---

39 A website and archive containing statistical information on the careers of current and former professional cricketers.
CHAPTER 7

Summary of Research

Following in a tradition of ethnographic enquiry exploring the lives and lifestyles of various ‘youth’ populations (Furlong et al., 2011), this study has provided an insight into the lived transitional experiences of a group of young men bound to the cultural milieu of a university cricket academy. With cricket and the academy acting as an illustrative social context, at a local level the research project contributes an ethnographic case-study of an enacted period of identity-exploration, and the cultural practices operational in the development of players’ reflexive self-awareness in their passage towards professional cricket. Additionally, the research findings offer a detailed account of the deliberations of an ‘emerging’ age group and provide a basis for discussing the problematic nature of selfhood in the contexts within which young people build their lives. To this end, emphasis is placed on the role of contextual interaction as the means through which young people might construct a sense of ‘authenticity’ and align themselves with the future *en route* to the unification and expression of their adult identities.

As well as providing a detailed description of this process as it occurred in the context of a university cricket academy, applying the findings to aspects of social and psychological theory, the study offers a conceptual model for understanding how a group of young men assembled knowledge about themselves in relation to a culturally projected outcome. This chapter begins with an overview of the conceptual model (see Figure 4 below) before moving on to evaluate the key points of interaction that impinged on players reaching a level of self-understanding upon which they could base prospective identity-decisions.

The purpose of Figure 4 is to provide a synthesis of the process of identity-exploration that has been analysed and described in the preceding empirical chapters. In this regard, Figure 4 helps to cut through the textual reporting of ‘lived’ experience, complementing the narrative accounts
offered within the thesis with a visual representation of the players’ transitional pathway through the academy.
Figure 4: Conceptual model of players’ transitional pathway through the academy.
Overview of Conceptual Model

Divided into four segments, Figure 4 provides a conceptual demonstration of players' transitional experiences upon entering tertiary education and taking their place in the academy. Central to players' reflexive journeys was the accumulation of self-knowledge and self-understanding that developed in accordance with the magnification and transformation of their cricketing experiences. This is illustrated diagrammatically in the expanding arrow that represents the focal point of the research project. Couched in the broader transformative context of higher education (rectangular box), the arrow is demonstrative of the academy environment and the players' enacted transitions through time. Reflected by the arrow's shape and location is the manner in which the academy, and cricket more generally, gradually encroached on the players' lives as student-cricketers to become a more 'permanent' and predominant feature of their everyday existence. Contact and exposure to the cricketer's 'lifestyle' played a principal role in this regard that not only drew players closer to the professional game and the cricketer's way of life, but also stimulated a proactive engagement with the environment's central question “do you want to become pros?”

Representing all factors that preceded cultural immersion into the academy environment, antecedents included features that existed as part of the individual’s ‘make-up’, as well as what existed as part of cricket’s ‘existential’ characteristics. Specifically, this refers to cricket’s long days and drawn out routines, the inherent performance uncertainties and the absorbing, introspective nature of the game that bring cricketers to question their commitment to it (Brearley, 2012; Frith, 2001). Placed within a social-developmental framework, the problematic nature of self in late modernity offers a structural backdrop (zeitgeist) to players’ identity-explorations as ‘emerging adults’ to connect cricket, its characteristics, and the players’ experiences of a cricketing culture, to a contour of modern social life. That is to say, cricket and the academy provided a set of conditions to structure and prompt players’ identity-explorations that were linked to their lives as students and young people in society.
Merging within the conception of the ‘young person’ at the start of their journey with the academy were a) players’ personal histories that incorporated individuals’ social and educational backgrounds and supporting networks, b) the strength of their established cricketing identities and ‘love’ for the game, c) alternative interests and self-representations that formed parts of players’ more holistic self-concepts, and d) a cultural reference point that constituted the sum total of an individual’s cricketing experiences. Combined, these personal attributes gave rise to the initial attitudes, perceptions and expectations held by individuals towards their prospective experiences as student-cricketers, and provided the foundations to the manner in which players interacted with their cricketing environment. Indeed, these factors were active components of players’ explorations that modified in accordance with the transformation of their cricketing experiences and developing self-understanding through time. Players’ attitudes at point of entry generally consisted of making the most of their cricketing opportunities. Thus there was a preliminary internalisation of positive identifications with the academy and cricket in general that became subject to change. In the first instance, the academy supported and often accentuated players’ existing cricketing identities, but did not necessarily ‘create’ them. Rather, it went some way in confirming or discarding cricketing aspiration within its orientating framework.

With clearly defined start and end points, the academy was an intermediary experience of varying, yet definitive length. During this period, however, players moved fluidly between contexts displayed by the waved dashed line that weaves a thread throughout the time-course. Not only does this represent players’ physical movements, but also their psychological oscillation between past, present and future representations of cricket and their lives. Although enacted within a cultural milieu, players’ transitional experiences with the academy were not isolated to their university cricketing context. They involved multiple settings and adopted roles of competing value that came together at points along the academy's developmental path. These points of convergence are one example of a number of key points of interaction plotted inside the central arrow in a
non-sequential order. Contact with symbolic others, peer socialisation, positive and negative cricket related experience, emotional gratification and episodes of doubt, dilemma and crisis are displayed as features of players’ academy involvement that had a bearing on the results of their transitional experiences. Combined, they played a decisive role in the objectification, clarification and authentication of the players’ cricketing identities as the means through which ‘self’, in a reflexive sense, became ‘visible’ to the individual and assisted players in ‘finding their level’ with the game.

Signifying a point of conclusion in a culturally embedded period of transition, “finding your level” represented the culmination of players’ university cricketing experiences. As an outcome, it consisted of alterations in players’ attitudes and identifications towards the game based on what they had come to appreciate about themselves in relation to cricket and possible alternatives. In most cases, exiting the academy meant exiting university simultaneously, which was then followed by players reaching a point of settlement with regards to their immediate cricketing futures. Cricket, in a professional sense, either accepted players as ‘good enough’ or rejected them as ‘not good enough’ based on their relative successes and failures as represented by the two diverging branches leading from players’ academy exits. The securing of a ‘full-time’ professional contract (top branch) was, in other words, confirmation of a player’s ability in their adopted cricketing role, with the reverse (bottom branch) being of equal value in a process of authentication. This process consisted of three levels with the first being cricket’s ‘objective’ assessment of the individual from which players took forward their experiences as student-cricketers to make a decision to either accept or reject cricket’s evaluation before acting in accordance with how they wished to (re)align themselves with the game. Choosing whether or not to take cricket forward into their lives, and importantly at what participatory level, is then inferred within the diagram to denote either a positive step towards young adulthood and the unification and expression of an adult identity, or to lead into a continued period of moratorium for those who chose to persevere in their pursuit of cricket following rejection.
In sum, the purpose of Figure 4 is to provide a visual representation of a period of 'youth' transition as it manifested in the context of a university cricket academy. Its intention as a visual overview is to extend a simplified portrayal of a process of cultural interaction through which a group of young men explored their identities to arrive at a conception of themselves as 'cricketers'. However, the complexity of the interactions that took place as well as the emotional content involved in individuals’ personal relationships with the social context should not be disconnected from the model's interpretation. Indeed, this research project provides a 'lived' description of the experiences of a group of young men during a period of exploration and change, with Figure 4 assisting in the delineation of the factors that impinged on their transitional experiences that will be discussed henceforth in an interpretative review of the project’s contribution to a field of youth studies.

**Research Contribution and Review**

In response to the issues of self and identity that surfaced during the course of this investigation, the aim of the research was to portray a culturally embedded process of identity-exploration through which a group of ‘emerging adults’ arrived at a conception of themselves in relation to a particular identity-goal. Conceptualised as a ‘new’ stage of the human life-course, emerging adulthood is thought of as a period of protracted transition between adolescence and young adulthood during which young people interrogate their lives in clarification of their identities (Arnett, 2000, 2004). Through a process of identity-exploration emerging adults are said to learn about who they are and what they want to achieve prior to making enduring identity-decisions and adult commitments. Despite identity-exploration being proposed as the central characteristic of the ‘age’, Arnett (2004, 2007) highlights that due to the nascent nature of emerging adulthood as a conceptual framework, a lack of research currently exists examining how the young come to know themselves during this period. By providing an account of the lived transitions of a group of student-cricketers, this study has gone some way to addressing the issue of identity construction by
highlighting the way in which a group of student-cricketers came to recognise and relate the contours of their cricketing experiences to future adult identity and role commitments. Synthesis of the student-cricket experience provides an important and original contribution to a field of youth study by charting the transitional pathway through which academy players travelled, and the key points of interaction that impinged on a process of identity-exploration relative to a particular social context. It is a synthesis that could be taken and applied to other youth populations – both in and outside of sport – to further understandings of how the young people arrive at a level of self and situational knowledge on which to base prospective identity-decisions.

Having outlined the central contribution of the research, the remainder of this chapter provides an interpretation and review of the model’s main components in relation to some of the extant literature on identity and youth transition.

Role Experimentation and Adaptation

For the players featured in this study, their involvement with the academy resulted in more than the advancement and acquisition of technical proficiency and skill. On top of the improvements they made as cricketers, their participation with the academy’s cricketing schedule and commensurate culture provided the foundations of a reflexive engagement with their lives as student-cricketers and the ‘cricket bubble’ they inhabited. Representing both a physical and abstract world, the cricket bubble consisted of a series of cricketing locales, behaviours, discourses and orientations that together formed a system of self-reference used by the players to assess what it might be like to be a professional cricketer. Indeed, exposure to a cricketing lifestyle consumptive of individuals’ time and resources was a formative component of players’ interactions with their cricketing environment as their relationships with cricket started to intensify and transform. This occurred in parallel with an increase in situational-knowledge and self-understanding belonging both to their immersion in university cricket, as well as their wider experiences as
students and as cricketers as they strove to ‘find their level’ in the game amid their transitions as ‘emerging adults’.

In the case of the academy players, a decisive factor among their wider explorations as young people was their experimentation with their adopted cricketing role. Role experimentation is highlighted by Erikson (1968) as a heuristic component of identity-development and a means through which the young may find their niche in some section of society. This is supported by the tenets of role theory that suggest that it is through the adoption and enactment of specific roles that the internal structures of self are connected to local systems of interaction and the wider social world (Biddle, 1986). Indeed, social roles are thought to act as an interface between self and society with the concept of role mediating the relation between the person and his or her relational context (Adler and Adler, 1991).

Comprising of a set of cricketing commitments above and beyond what most of the players concerned had experienced previously in club and representative cricket, their adopted cricketing role denoted that of a ‘professional’ that players embraced as an extension to their pre-existing cricketing identities. Indeed, cultural acceptance demanded individuals identifying with a ‘professional’ ethos that carried with it its own identity-framework to orientate and guide behaviour not only as cricketers, but as students too. At a local level, selection in the team required players making themselves available to the academy’s schedule of training and playing. And, further to ‘displaying’ the requisite levels of cricketing/sporting ability, players needed to demonstrate the drive and “tenacity” to want to become professional cricketers to warrant their place in the side. This meant committing themselves to university cricket as well as demonstrating a commitment to the game that went beyond the cultural bounds of the academy and into the wider cricketing world. In other words, following adoption, players’ enactment of their cricketing role was regulated by the need to ‘impress’ upon their cricketing audience (peers, Coach and significant others) who they claimed themselves to be. Important though this was in binding players to a set of behavioural expectations, expression
of the role was not as fundamental to players’ identity-explorations as just occupying the role itself, as it was through its occupation that individuals’ were able to develop an understanding for what a cricketer’s life might entail and judge whether or not the role of ‘cricketer’ was an identity to which they were suited.

The players’ enactment of their adopted cricketing role was thus an elementary part of their identity-explorations that involved a reflexive engagement with their university cricketing experiences. Cricket encroached on their lives as students and as young people to place pressure on exterior relationships as it squeezed upon their time and resources. As they were to discover, the cricketer’s lifestyle could be dislocating and structurally insular. Thus, to operate amidst its framework required physical adjustment and social adaptation. But over and above becoming accustomed to the physical demands of playing, training and travelling, was the need for players to make an internal calibration of their social situation as individuals.

According to Baumeister and Muraven (1996), identity might be understood as an adaptation to a social context. That is to say, people modify their identities in a manner that enables them to get along best in the environments in which their roles and identities exist. Players’ ability to adapt to the cricketing lifestyle may therefore be seen primarily in terms of an appropriation of personal identity to the cultural properties of the ‘cricket bubble’ from which the cricketer equates his or her sense of self. To derive feelings of belonging and connectedness with the communality and structural features of the cricketer’s way of life was an indication of individual adjustment and coping, which players took into account in approximating whether they could see themselves as ‘cricketers’ in the long run. For when it comes to formation of personal identity, there is a need for identity to serve both an individual and a social function by imparting a sense of personal uniqueness alongside a sense of integration and fellowship among others (Adams and Marshall, 1996; Erikson, 1968; McAdams, 1993; McLeod, 2002; Schwartz, 2001).
Contact with Symbolic Others

One of the most significant factors in players’ inspection of their adopted cricketing identities was the part played by ‘symbolic others’. Literature looking at the role of the ‘mentor’ in youth development has suggested that by acting as advocates to ‘possible selves’, such figures play a functional part in young peoples’ lives and identity-development (Rhodes, Spencer, Keller, Laing and Noam, 2006). Commenting on this relationship from a Meadian perspective on selfhood (see Adams, 2003; Blumer, 1986; Mead, 1934), Rhodes et al. (2006) refer to the potential ‘looking glass’ effect wherein significant people become social mirrors in helping the young navigate their identity-transitions from adolescence to adulthood. Coach was one specific example of a symbolic figure, but others included any current or former professional cricketer that players came in direct contact with. They were ‘symbolic’ in as much as they were ‘windows into the world’ in which the academy players were heading offering authentic, biographical insight into a chosen life-path. To this end, their biographies provided a comparative scaffold to guide the construction of players’ own identity-stories by reflecting what the future might hold in either a positive or negative light. Via their weight of authenticity, they also possessed the authority to impart value judgements that could ‘credit’ or ‘discredit’ (Goffman, 1959) players’ attempts at becoming professional cricketers that served to help players develop a bona fide view about themselves as cricketers by closing the gap between aspiration and ‘reality’.

Contact with symbolic figures was an essential component of the dialectic transference between players and their cricketing environment. Alongside peer interaction, interaction with symbolic others provided a measure of ‘human reference’ within the otherwise inanimate structures of the cricket bubble. As people, they represented the embodiment of the cricketing lifestyle and identity-commitments the academy exposed its student-cricketers to, and afforded a further element of realism to the choices the players were in the process of making about their futures as young people. Commenting on the vocational transitions of apprentice footballers, Parker (2001, p.77) makes note of a process of ‘occupational
‘Inheritance’ whereby trainees used their professional seniors as behavioural advocates in construction and development of their masculine identities. Images of the ‘hyper-masculine practices’ displayed in the lifestyles of professional players were said to pervade youth team culture by representing the ‘epitome of trainee desire and expectation’. In many ways, for the student-cricketers at the centre of this study, it was not so much a case of ‘looking up to’ these figures, as it was a case of looking critically into their lives for insights into the realities of the cricketing profession. Where Coach was concerned, players were quick to pick up on the fact that cricket had shaped his character to such an extent that cricket infused everything he expressed about himself. As it happened, not once did I ever hear Coach being referred to as an inspiration. Rather, his storied-self acted as a warning for what might happen should the academy players allow the game to “get on top” of them, and where there might have been a generation gap between Coach’s life and the life of the modern professional, players simply used contemporary players to fill in the picture of what the future had in store. But importantly, where Coach was concerned, his identity was performed in the context of the academy environment, which made it meaningful to the players’ explorations of cricket and self.

**Peer Socialisation**

Supplementing the identity guidance offered biographically by symbolic figures like Coach were the relationships players held with each other. As fellow ‘emerging adults’, commonalities in players’ personal and collective situations meant that they sought each other out for counsel and support in order to make sense of their experiences. Their relationships with each other were augmented by the nature of their cricketing environment that drew players together for extended periods of time whilst travelling, playing and staying away. As a result, during the season, players’ primary social reference group consisted of their teammates with whom they underwent the intensive and collective process of being exposed and socialised to a cricketing way of life.
In consideration of the part played by peers and friends in the socialisation of emerging adults, Arnett (2007b) made a number of assertions overlooking the peer group cultures in which some young people invest large amounts of time during this period of their development. With peer interaction increasing during adolescence (Coleman, 2011), Arnett (2007b) suggests that peers and friends play a less prominent role in the lives of emerging adults than they do for adolescents. To this end, Arnett (2007b) claims that after leaving the peer-centred context of secondary education, emerging adults are no longer party to a peer culture on a daily basis as they begin to spend more time alone and detached from their friends and peer networks.

The findings of this study, however, provide evidence to suggest that regular peer interaction was a significant influence in shaping the identity-explorations of a group of student-cricketers amid their transitions towards adulthood. Indeed, having suggested that the volume of peer interaction may decrease from adolescence into emerging adulthood, Arnett (2007b) also notes that the peer relationships that develop during this period tend to be characterised by greater complexity, emotional depth and communication about topics of personal importance. Consequently, although experiencing a reduction in the frequency and/or quantity of peer relations, the socialisation influences of those maintained are likely to be of greater significance in helping to resolve issues of self and identity.

Discussing the role and impact of peer socialisation on the transitional experiences of the academy players, peer contact was not only imposed by the nature of their cricketing experiences, but purposefully sought. Unique to the academy players’ particular transitional situations were the pressures associated with juggling their student and cricketing lives. Only their teammates, therefore, could fully identify with the nature of this duality and its application to the life choices they would eventually need to make. Hence, it was to their peers that they turned to vent their feelings towards cricket and its relation to the rest of their lives, with peer consultation acting as a means of constructing a sense of shared reality (Adler and Adler, 1991). In turn, the exchange of information between one
another and the collective group helped to form and change individuals’ attitudes and responses to the cricketing role they dedicated much of their lives to in the summer months.

Further to sharing their thoughts and feelings with each other, in conjunction with Coach and the structures of their cricketing schedule, players were also the manufacturers of the cricketing culture to which they were bound. This drew them into contact with another set of ‘peer influences’ in the form of the values, beliefs and behaviour expectations that they drew from a range of cricket and non-cricketing experiences and applied to the academy’s social environment. As a result, in the process of their cricketing socialisation, peer interaction happened not only at a face-to-face level, but at a cultural level too with individual attitudes toward cricket forming part of a collective discourse shared by the group. Added to this, was the way in which players used each other as social barometers to judge their progress. Teammates were in many respects their closest rivals (see Cowan, 2011; Roebuck, 1985; Smith, 2004), and similar to the way in which players took reference from symbolic figures, their teammates provided a means of direct social and technical comparison to evaluate how well they perceived themselves to be doing.

**Role Convergence and Movement Between Contexts**

So far this discussion has outlined some of the key points of interaction that formed part of the players identity-explorations in their adopted cricketing role. Exposure to a cricketing lifestyle, contact with symbolic others and association with their peers were all components of players’ transitional experiences from which they acquired knowledge and self-understanding and began to model their impressions about themselves, the game and their futures within it. As student-cricketers, however, their transitions as young people were not strictly isolated to their university cricketing milieu. They were as a matter of definition part of a wider student body, and despite being frequently detached from it as a consequence of their cricketing commitments, their student role was an unavoidable aspect of their lives that forced players to oscillate between the two. In addition to their student
commitments, players arrived at university as members of club and ‘minor’ representative sides, with some already attached to professional county squads, whilst others later procured similar county connections. For all players the academy also meant competing in club cricket simultaneously, and for certain individuals their participation with the academy was also accompanied by their separate involvement in levels of professional cricket. And so, over the length of their student-cricket experiences, players moved between a multitude of roles and contexts that converged to form part of their transitional experiences.

Movement in and out of the academy environment, and between different role commitments and cricketing settings meant that players had a number of platforms from which to reflect on their chosen developmental path, rather than being restricted to the ‘totality’ of a single cultural situation (Parker, 1996). Players’ student lives were often in contrast and in conflict with their lives as cricketers that saw some retreat into their cricketing role as a means of coping (Adler and Adler, 1991). But for those who maintained a sense of their student identities, university offered a range of possible alternatives and opportunities for personal growth outside of the rigid identity-framework players were subject to in the academy. It was a tension between freedom and constraint, agency and structure that was particularly relevant to the players’ experiences and explorations as young people. The freedoms associated with their student lifestyles aided their recognition of the narrow and restrictive nature of the cricket bubble they were contemplating pledging their lives to. This was accompanied by the contrasts and contradictions they encountered within cricket as a result of their concurrent involvement at different levels of the game.

Moving between the platforms of club (amateur), university (academy) and professional cricket allowed for comparison across varying sets of external conditions to which their relationships with cricket were connected. Each came with their own set of values and pressures and associations with different stages of the players’ lives, hence players’ movements between cricketing environments went hand-in-hand with their psychological fluctuations forward and back in time that resulted in a play
off between their positive childhood memories, their present anxieties, and players' perceptions of their personal futures.

Combined, these factors converged to create tension within their adopted cricketing roles to have an influence on the way in which players interacted with the academy environment in their assessment of to what extent they remained attached and attracted to the game. Therefore, the findings of this study differ from previous ethnographic research in the context of education and sport (Adler and Adler, 1991; de Rond, 2008; Manley, 2012; Parker, 1996, 2000, 2001) in as much as they incorporate the polarities and tensions caused by the unique characteristics of the student-cricket experience into a process of deliberation that was developmentally significant. Although consumptive of players' time and resources, players' cricketing role-commitments didn't completely ‘engulf’ their student identities (see Adler and Adler, 1991). Nor did the academy players collectively succumb to the cultural expectations and lifestyle priorities of their cricketing environment (see Parker, 2000). Rather, the nature of players' student-cricket experiences encouraged them to challenge their cricketing outlooks in relation to those they encountered (cricket related or otherwise) elsewhere emphasising the influence of multiple social-contexts on the identity-explorations of young people.

**Positive and Negative Experiences and Performance**

While passing between various roles and contexts in the examination of cricket and self through time, the present was implicated in the players' identity-explorations most strongly by the positive or negative cricketing experiences they were encountering as members of the academy. Whether performance related or otherwise, cricketing highs and lows were fundamental to, and part of the emotional content of players' interactions with their cricketing surroundings. Analysed plainly, positive cricketing experiences that provided individuals with a sense of fulfilment, competency and gratification helped to cement players' alignment to their cricketing pursuits, whilst negative cricketing experiences worked antagonistically to the manner in which players identified with cricket and
their futures within the game. Both, however, could lead to ultimately positive outcomes if they assisted individuals at arriving at a more ‘authentic’ view of self. In other words, although distressing at the time, negative cricket related experiences had the potential to lead to positive developmental outcomes if they helped the individual to understand himself relative to the academy context.

The uncertainties they faced as young people in trying to construct and verify a sense of who they were both internally and in the eyes of significant others meant players were sensitive to what constituted their value. Operating under the guise of ‘professional cricket’ in their roles as university cricketers, meant personal performance, in terms of runs, wickets and averages, was the single biggest factor in providing reinforcement to the players’ cricketing aspirations as an objective measure of their capacity and potential to turn ‘pro’. Through performance players were able to cultivate capital that was expressive of their individual abilities and essential to their progress that they used to compare themselves against their peers and against the ‘professional’ standards of the academy environment.

In context of the problematic nature of self in late modern society, Côté (1996, 2000) highlights ‘capital’ as a key component of contemporary self-definition, identity-formation and future management. According to Côté, culture and identity are linked at both the macro social and micro interactional levels. The increasing individualisation of the human-life course caused by the more diffuse structures of late modernity require individuals to assume more control over the direction of their lives (Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1991), and continuously develop the personal resources necessary to chart a way through the social contexts governing their development. The key to this, argues Côté (1996, p.425), is for individuals to ‘invest in who they are’ by building a profile of skills and self-presentations for bargaining and exchange in the ‘identity-markets’ of late modern societies. To this end, Côté (1996, 2000) uses the term ‘identity-capital’ to denote the accruing of social and psychological assets necessary for attaining membership and securing validation in the circles and groups to which one aspires. When it came to players turning themselves into
professional cricketers, on top of the internalisation of patterns of occupational behaviour and career outlooks affiliated with the professional cricket community, nothing served players more than the visible currency of runs and wickets that was essential for gaining acceptance from the ‘gatekeepers’ of the profession.

With personal performance entwined within a process of cricketing self-creation, there was a need for players to adopt a framework applicable to their location at the foot of cricket’s meritocracy. If they were to move forward into the professional game it was important that they were especially focused on increasing their individual chances, even if that meant placing their personal relationships with cricket above their loyalties to the team and their teammates. Cricket demanded it, but so too did the instabilities and uncertainties associated with their developmental stage. Indeed, Arnett (2004, p.13) describes emerging adulthood as a ‘self-focused time’ as the young go about building the foundations to their adult futures. Arnett (2004) goes as far as to say that being self-focused was a ‘normal’ and ‘healthy’ characteristic of this stage of the life-course where the goal is to develop the skills for living self-sufficiently. To add to this concept, and of relevance to the population of student-cricketers in this study, being self-focused also involved a strong preoccupation with performance in an environment that equated personal progress and prospects with how well the individual was doing on the pitch.

**Doubt, Dilemma and Crisis**

Players’ reliance on levels of personal performance in construction and maintenance of positive self-conceptions and the building of ‘identity-capital’ was another facet of their cricketing ‘education’ that they experienced from inside the cricket bubble. However, as each player was to find out, when it came to cricket, performance was a habitually hazardous variable on which to pin one’s hopes. Transitory dips in form alongside other negative cricketing experiences frequently resulted in moments of doubt, dilemma and crisis that brought players to question directly whether they wanted to play cricket at all. With cricket occupying an increasingly
dominant place in each of their lives, the doubts they experienced on the cricket field or whilst holed-up inside the minibus or team hotels often translated into a more encompassing form of ‘identity-crisis’ that Erikson (1968, p.16) ascribes to the inner conflicts experienced by the young in the process of adolescent identity-development. Erikson’s use of the word ‘crisis’ does not connote impending catastrophe, but signifies a ‘necessary turning point, a crucial moment, when development must turn one way or the other’. According to Erikson’s definition, the causality of an identity-crisis is the impending necessity to make choices when one’s felt commitments are interrupted or become situationally irreconcilable (Baumeister, Shapiro and Tice, 1985). This was displayed most vividly in the case of Tim (see A Million Miles Away, Chapter 6) where the traumatic experience of being dropped from the team forced him to confront his entire life’s direction and organise his resources for future growth and recovery.

Tim’s case provides an example of the more acute fluctuations he and his teammates encountered as part of their cricketing experiences with the academy. Each bump in the road that challenged players’ ‘love for the game’ formed part of a process of reflexive self-engagement by inducing a set of inner conditions (doubt, dilemma, crisis) that caused individuals to become conscious of their commitments to cricket, and to what end any further commitment might serve. The accumulation of doubt and crises referred to by Bob as “third year syndrome” (see Chapter 6) represented a more refined and critical state of ‘identity-consciousness’ (Erikson, 1968, p.23) where individuals started to evaluate their available options and look for resolutions to overcome their growing concerns as to whether cricket was right for them. It led some to invest more into the pursuit of obtaining a “full-time gig”, when out of their self-searching they came to realise it was cricket that they really wanted, whilst it caused others on the opposite end of the spectrum to withdraw some of their devotion to the game in realisation of the futility of their cricketing aspirations. As Erikson (1958, 1968) reflects, in individual life ‘youth’ stands between the past and the future and between alternative ways of life. Arnett (2000, 2004) later referred to this as a state of being ‘in-between’ that implies that the young
are beset by the need to make a decision about who they are and what they want to achieve – decisions that are imposed upon them by the structures of late modernity. In this study, the experience of doubt, dilemma and crisis provided the academy players with the emotive impetus to tackle these questions head on by acting as ‘turning points’ in a process of vocational decision-making (Mortimer et al., 2002).

‘Love’ and Gratification as Motivation for Commitment

All things considered, when it came to making decisions about the future there was a need for a founding principle to guide players’ identity-choices and to focus their attention on one thing over another. Indeed, as it has already been suggested and depicted in Figure 4, players’ passage towards professional cricket was not a completely clear and sheltered path, but one that involved movement and the convergence of confounding experiences in points of conflict and tension. Faced with a series of possibilities, whether imagined or real, having the option to choose was both a freedom and a pressure characteristic of modern life and identity-construction (Côte, 2000; Giddens, 1991) that is said to be at its peak in the transition between adolescence and adulthood (Arnett, 2004; Baumeister and Muraven, 1996). Baumeister and Muraven (1996) argue that this pressure is particularly acute for those still involved in education, which allows young people to experience and prepare for a broad range of occupations prior to specialisation. Furthermore, it may provide individuals with the opportunity to change direction, and whilst this might be largely beneficial for those who remain unsure, the temporary moratorium offered to them by their educational contexts is likely to be followed by a crossroads where the young must decide on which course they wish to take.

By design, university and the academy was a transient period in the players’ lives that was always set to conclude in this way, and in dealing with the pressure of having to negotiate the construction of their adult identities, players sought satisfaction in what they would ultimately choose to commit to. Alongside a person’s work and lifestyle choices, ‘love’ has been conceptualised as a motivational ideal and source of meaning in the late
modern age (Baumeister, 1987; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995; Giddens, 1991). Thus, players deciphering what they found most gratifying about cricket could be viewed as part of their broader ideological development that aggrandised a need to feel emotionally fulfilled.

Although frequently discussed as separate ‘identity-pillars’ or ‘identity-domains’ (see Schwartz, 2001), visible in the academy players’ interactions with their cricketing environment was how work and lifestyle merged with the notion of ‘love’ in their explorations of their adopted cricketing role. As a consequence of cricket’s biographical significance to each of their lives, players were emotionally attached to the game that “Lady Cricket” served as a metaphor to describe. The metaphor outlined not only the romantic nature of players’ attachments to cricket, but also the manner in which players’ cricketing experiences were changing as they progressed towards the ‘permanency’ of a professional contract. Through contact and exposure with a cricketing way of life, players came to the conclusion that in order to pursue cricket as a full-time professional, one had to “love it to do it”. In other words, cricket and its commensurate lifestyle had to represent more than ‘just a job’ but something that individuals could be proud of, and a commitment driven not least by the emotional gratification it brought to their lives as compared to other potential ‘life’ domains. To this end, Arnett (2007a, p.71) draws attention to the ‘extraordinarily high expectations’ that accompany emerging adults into the workplace, driven by aspirations to find work that not only pays well, but employment that will satisfy them in the long term via an enjoyable identity-fit (Arnett, 2000, 2004, 2007a). Not only is emotional gratification a value that can be applied to occupational choices, but when confronted with questions of moral behaviour, Smith et al. (2011, p.51) reported ‘doing what would make you feel happy’ as the most frequently used justification for moral decision making in their study of transitional behaviour in emerging adulthood. Therefore, it might be said that there was an idealism attached to players’ interactions with the cricket bubble made apparent by a reflexive preoccupation with enjoyment and how gratifying cricket remained as their relationships with the game developed and transformed.
Rather than being viewed as an issue of ‘secondary importance’ (Parker, 1996, p.85) notions of love and ‘enjoyment’ existed as a central motivating force and rationale for further commitment. To love cricket meant to relate closely with all that came with it and to find fulfilment in overcoming the demands associated with their new relationship context (the academy), while retaining some of their childhood passion for playing the game. Love and its associated pleasures were thus a lens through which players identified with cricket as they looked back at their pasts and into their futures, and over their time and experiences with the academy, players would arrive at a conviction as to whether or not they still ‘loved’ cricket and to what situational context (amateur/professional) this could be ascribed. It was a conviction that relied on a self-awareness that players developed relative to the academy’s social environment and the processes of self-discovery that eventually helped them to ‘find their level’ in the game.

**Identity and the Application of Self and Situational Knowledge**

Representing a point of conclusion in a culturally embedded period of transition, “finding your level” was a phrase that encapsulated players’ establishing some ‘truth’ about self in relation to cricket and its particular identity-course. “Finding your level” was thus a product of the academy’s developmental context and the players’ transitional experiences that saw individuals arrive at some kind of identity-fit between cricket and their developing self-conceptions both in terms of skill and character. As a developmental outcome, “finding your level” revolved around the authentication of their adopted cricketing role whereby players were either confirmed in their identities as professional cricketers, or rejected by the game based on their ‘objective’ value. Indeed, players were deemed either good enough or not good enough by virtue of their achievements and what they had displayed of their potential to symbolic figures like Coach.

Although an important step in the clarification of their cricketing identities, it was what happened on a subjective level regarding the interpretation and use of personal experience that held the greatest significance post-academy. For it was at this point, in the face of acceptance
or rejection, that it became about the transference of self and situational knowledge to an on going process of identity-formation and self-creation that was dependent on how ‘well’ individuals had come to know themselves in context of their university cricketing experiences. Indeed, Mortimer et al. (2002) points to the situated nature of transitional decision-making, and where the academy players were concerned, there was the risk for a potential mismatch to emerge between what individuals had come to appreciate about themselves and how they were conceived in the eyes of others. Using the story of Patrick to illustrate the point, his final rejection of cricket was a decision that was negotiated successfully based on what he had come to appreciate about cricket, but more importantly what he had come to appreciate about himself. In this sense, Patrick may be seen to have made a positive step towards identity-achievement that was facilitated by a culturally embedded process of identity-exploration through which self-knowledge was reflexively made and applied relative to a specific set of developmental experiences. Patrick was of course not the only one to ‘benefit’ in this way but his story provides a point of reference on the function of cultural practice in shaping the transitional experiences and developmental outcomes of emerging adulthood in societies that demand youth to find its own way.
CHAPTER 8

Conclusion

In this study, among the many phrases used in the depiction of culturally significant events, a “day in the dirt” was one expression that captured the nature of the student-cricket experience as it related to a group of young men in a transitional period of their lives. On the surface, a ‘day’ in the dirt suggested something of the long hours invested for the sake of cricketing aspiration hinting at cricket’s capacity to totalise and consume. Taken further, its emotive connotations reflected a critical state of mind that accompanied players’ cricketing pursuits as their attitudes and outlooks began to shift and change in accordance with the transformation of their cricketing experiences. Dig deeper and the expression’s meaning began to bear the questions cricket posed to a group of student-cricketers in their passage towards adult role and identity-commitments. What follows is a contextual account of a process of identity-exploration as it related to a particular lifestyle and the enactment of a specific role, with the study mapping out how a group of young men arrived at a conception of themselves as ‘cricketers’ through a reflexive engagement with what it meant to spend their “days in the dirt”.

As an ethnography the study has attempted to capture and report on some of the real-life situations and encounters faced by a group of aspiring young cricketers on their path towards professional cricket. From the standpoint of participant observation, this insider’s account contributes a lived description of how a group of young men used the cultural location of a university cricket academy as a system of self-reference to develop a clearer sense of who they were and what they wanted to achieve relative to cricket and its particular identity-course. The investigation has also illustrated how the characteristics of a cricketing environment provided a frame of interaction that guided players towards a specific developmental outcome. In doing so, the study places emphasis on the structural role of formalised peer-group cultures in the developmental transitions of emerging adults,
with the academy's cricketing environment having provided a set of social conditions that encouraged players to engage consciously with the 'project' of their cricketing self-creation. Indeed, questions over 'cricket', 'identity', 'what else' and 'what next', were all part of a developmental equation that saw players begin to appropriate, challenge and in some cases resist the notion of becoming professional cricketers.

The methodological approach adopted in this study enabled me to observe, partake and analyse the cultural practices of a sporting population from a position of access and privilege that permitted insight into a world that no other social research method would have allowed (Pryce, 1986). Hence, what I have been able to achieve in relation to the subject matter is to gather information for a contextual representation of transition from the points of view and emotions of the actors involved. The evidence presented is intended, therefore, to be illustrative rather than documentary and systematic to achieve the aim of conveying a situated and interactive process of identity-exploration and authentication as it occurred in the transformative context of a university cricket academy.

To add to the backdrop of ethnographic description offered within this thesis, I have formulated the principal findings within a conceptual model to a) impose some order on the complexity of the data, and b) assist in the application of the research outside of its micro-analytical setting. Indeed, the conceptual model presented in Chapter 7 of this thesis could be applied and adapted to fit alternative contexts to establish a broader picture of how emerging adults construct a sense of who they are in relation to specific work, love and lifestyle domains. To this end, the study offers important insight into the way in which young people come to know and make decisions about the trajectory of their lives and future identities that further research could supplement to build understanding on the intricacies of identity-formation at this critical phase of the life-course.

There are, however, a series of in-built drawbacks to research of this nature. Despite ethnographers invariably touting 'group access' as a strength of their research, ethnography is performed within boundaries and can only ever produce a finite look into peoples' lives as they experience
them. For me to have made an attempt to explore every facet of each of the players’ student-cricketing experiences would have been impractical and unfeasible. It was never my right or place, for example, to follow them into lectures or pursue them on nights out. These are examples of what I considered to be back stage regions (Goffman, 1959) of the players’ lives and the research context that I left alone in order to centre the focus of my investigations on a limited set of cultural locations. Whilst operating from inside these locations, I also had to be constantly selective in the pursuit of information up to the point of choosing who I was going to sit next to at the dinner table. By definition, then, this research is but a partial reflection of the student-cricket experience as a whole yet comprehensive within the limits of the day-to-day experiences I shared as part of the collective group.

Away from the operational constraints of fieldwork, are the epistemological limitations of a subjective, interpretivist research paradigm that falls under the guise of ethnography. As an ‘insider to the context’ (see Dandelion, 1997), my biases and identity as a “cricketer and not some weird anthropologist guy”, and as a young (18-25), able bodied, white, middle-class male, was unashamedly a driving force behind not only my choice of research ‘field’, but behind the relationships I made and the ‘conceptual hunches’ (see Willis, 1978) I chose to pursue. Like others that have gone before me (Karp, 1996, 2009; Pryce, 1986; Wacquant, 2004) I made the conscious decision to follow my subjectivity in the spirit of Mills (1959) by connecting personal troubles to public issues. To mark this point, on might argue that the apprenticeship I have served as a neophyte ethnographer has, to some degree, mirrored the cricketing apprenticeships undergone by the players of the academy that my proximity to them in age and experience secured on a basic human level. Consequently, a biographical trace runs throughout the empirical foundations of this study that might be highlighted in critique of the robustness of the research venture from positivist positions of ‘objectivity’ and ‘truth’. Ethnography, however, is a process of research that is dependent on the senses (Coffey, 1999; Sparkes, 2009), requiring a blend of compassion and criticality in the synthesis of theory and cultural practice. What this research might lack in ‘experimental’ rigour
therefore, it makes up for in the sensitivity I had as a researcher to the topic and population being researched that has strengthened a product that is ultimately the result of the type and quality of my field-based interactions. This was enhanced primarily by my prolonged engagement with the researched group out of which an intimacy and familiarity with the research context developed that enabled me to get ‘up close’ and personal in a variety of situated encounters.

One avenue that this study has picked up on but has been unable to methodically probe is the manner in which antecedent ‘variables’, particularly in terms of social demographics, are implicated in the course of young peoples’ identity-explorations. It is widely accepted that the conditions facing young people differ considerably from past generations as a consequence of societal de-structuring and the growing individualisation of the modern life-course that have made the question of identity (Giddens, 1991) and the transition to adulthood increasingly problematic (Arnett, 2004; Côté, 2000; Smith et al., 2011). However, Furlong and Cartmel (1997, 2007) have made the allegation that the notion of personal agency has been largely overemphasised to claim that the structural foundations of social life continue to provide a powerful framework to constrain personal growth and direct individual action. In their opinion, instead of modern society having become ‘open’ for all, societal structures have become gradually more obscure that serves only to distort individuals’ perceptions of reality and sense of place within in the world.

What this research has provided in glimpses within the narrative of Patrick, for example, future research could dissect in detail regarding the impact of class, family and educational socialisation on the choices young people make in their efforts to find a ‘self’ that fits. This should be done in a way that attempts to reconcile the person in-context with ‘distal’ components of social influence (Furlong et al., 2011) in order to understand the process of identity-formation and youth development more completely. Alternatively, future research may seek to investigate how the young take their experiences forward following a structured period of identity-exploration, such as the one featured in this research, and apply their
knowledge and self-awareness to the identity-commitments (or non-commitments) they make thereafter. For those individuals who were confirmed in their identities as cricketers post-academy, and who subsequently entered professional cricket, follow up research might consider how their student-cricket experiences retrospectively prepared them for the adoption of a new cricketing persona, and what their previous experiences may serve to transmit on the development of their professional identities within a new set of social structures.

In sum this thesis can be regarded as an ethnography of the embedded cultural interactions of a group of student-cricketers in their developmental transitions towards adult role and identity-commitments. The body of research provides an original contribution to the field of youth studies by providing a contextualised portrayal of young peoples' receptivity and emotionality toward their social situations as they endeavoured to align, construct and authenticate a sense of who they were in relation to a projected future. Amid an emancipatory scope of freedoms and choices, whether imagined or real, modernity has brought with it its own emotional challenges and pressures to the design of one's self-identity (Giddens, 1991). Arguably, the burden is felt most strongly by the young as they take on the responsibility of piecing together a conception of their own potentiality into an inner synthesis (personal identity) that organises experiences and guides action (Baumeister and Maraven, 1996; Erikson, 1964). Urged by society to go and search for what is right for them via a modern penchant for self-governance and fulfilment, a binding aim for prospective investigative agendas on identity and youth should be to implement research designs that provide further understanding of how to equip young people with the identity-skills that enable them to negotiate possibility and uncertainty without undue tribulation and discord.
References


Lou Vincent: ‘My depression is an on going battle. day to day it’s there.’ (2011, June 13). *The Independent*. Retrieved from [http://www.independent.co.uk](http://www.independent.co.uk)


APPENDIX A

Extracts from Season Handbook (2012)

Appendix A presents five extracts taken from the 2012 Season Handbook that was given to each member of the academy squad prior to the start of the season. It contained information pertaining to fixtures, squad and 'staff' contact details, travel, hotel and match day arrangements, disciplinary procedures, and a sample letter for players to use when applying to their universities for (cricket related) mitigating circumstances. The following extracts have been selected to provide a flavour of the kind of information that was contained.

Extract 1: Opening Communication from Coach

As we approach the season and when we are playing it is important for you to remember that your performance in match and practices will influence your position in the squad and selection for matches. There is flexibility built into the scheme to allow students who are performing well to progress into the main playing squad and ultimately into the best starting eleven. Equally the reverse can apply. Therefore at all times your commitment to the scheme will be closely monitored to ensure that only students who are prepared to organize and dedicate time to improve performance will retain their position. There will be many benefits for all squad members including individual support to enable you to fulfill your potential and develop your technique, fitness and playing standard.

Please ensure you are fully conversant with all the information and arrangements, most of this will be in the playing season handbook. Good communication is vital to ensure the scheme can provide you with the maximum support so please make certain you keep me fully informed at all times.

In conclusion, we have a talented squad of players who together can produce winning performances in all competitions we play in. We all need to work together and support each other to enable us to reach our full potential. There will be times when the going is tough and we will need to dig deep to succeed. You have all followed an intensive pre season programme and demonstrated significant improvements in technique, strength and conditioning which I am certain will give us the edge during the season. Remember the scheme is in place to develop you as a player and enable you to achieve higher standards and improved consistency in all aspects of your game.

If at any time you are not happy about your progress or any aspect of the scheme it is important that you inform me immediately. I want you to enjoy all cricketing experiences as this is important at all times.

I am looking forward to an enjoyable and successful season and hope you all succeed as individuals and as a team.

Director of Cricket
Playing Regulations 2012

1. **Match Day**

Players are advised to individually prepare themselves before the start of the pre match routine.

1.1 **Pre Match Preparations**

- **For 2 and 3 day games**
  - 0900: Arrive at ground
  - 0915 - 0935: Individual and small group practice
  - 0935 - 0945: Team Warm up
  - 0945 - 10:05: Team Fielding drills and practice
  - 10:05 - 10:30: Batting and Bowling practice
  - 10:30 - 10:45: Individual preparation changing room / pavilion
  - 10:45 - 10:55: Team meeting changing room
  - **End of day’s play**: Whole team warm down (all players)

Drills and organization of practice to be agreed with capt and representatives of the players’ committee

For each day’s play 2 players from the selected squad will be responsible for assisting in setting out and collect all equipment for warm-ups and practice.

All other team meetings: 5 mins before players take the field.

**For 1 day games**

The same time allocations for preparation and meeting will apply for 11:00am and 12:30pm (arrive at ground 10:30) scheduled starts of play
1.2 **Dressing room**

At all times throughout the duration of the match a clean, tidy and orderly dressing room should be maintained. On many grounds dressing rooms will be small and cramped therefore order and tidiness are particularly important.

1.3 **Mobile phones**

Mobile phones are not to be used in the dressing room, during preparation periods, meetings and training sessions

1.4 **A Pro-Active 12th man duties**

- ready and changed to take the field as required
- collect team valuables before each day’s play, leave with and collect from scorer or team manager at the end of each day’s play.
- responsible for providing drinks during play.
- when required provide food for players who remain in dressing room during breaks
- take bowling mitt for seam bowlers prior to start of fielding sessions
- assist with collection of any equipment and clothing used during the day’s play
- any other duties as directed by the coach.

1.5 **Meetings**

There will be a team meeting held immediately after the Warm Down period at the end of the day’s play. Additional meetings with and representatives from the players’ committee will be held prior to the next day’s play to discuss focus for preparation and practice (this will be in hotels during away fixtures or at an appropriate time/venue after home games)

2. **Dress code**

When representing, official kit and clothing should be worn. A high standard of appearance is expected at all times.

- **Traveling** — away games, ...choice
- **Traveling** — home games, from hotel – tracksuits except for County games where Number 1s (Blue polo shirt, cream chinos, Fleece (not hoodie)- smart footwear should be worn.
- **Training** — Training kit (kit only)
- **Warm up** — Warm up kit, as appropriate (kit only)
- **Meal times** — Lunch and tea breaks (kit only) - no hats

Delayed start / inclement weather: kit for training or appropriate practice activities.
3. **Players’ Committee**

The players’ committee has been convened to represent the players and to assist in maintaining high standards at all times. They are responsible for maintaining agreed procedures during preparation, practice and throughout the day’s play. They are also the players’ representatives in raising issues with the coach and manager and in liaising with the coach on playing and tactical policy.

4. **Availability**

In accordance with the Player Agreement which has been completed by all eligible squad members, any player planning to play any cricket for another team must seek permission from the coach. The fixture list for 2012 is congested and involves many days of travel as well as playing. Players’ academic responsibilities are paramount and time must be carefully planned and managed to enable academic and cricket commitments to be fulfilled. All players who intend to take opportunities to play club cricket are advised to inform their clubs of their commitments for 2012.

5. **Injury**

All players are expected to maintain appropriate fitness levels throughout the season. Conditioning programmes have been provided for all players who should follow these as advised. The strength and conditioning advisers are available for consultation, however the coach and manager should be kept informed at all times of any changes to levels of fitness, injury or additional programmes that are allocated including physiotherapy and massage sessions.

5.1 **Physiotherapy**

Physiotherapy is available free of charge for all players. Players must ensure that the coach and manager are informed of intention to make an appointment and subsequent attendance at physiotherapy sessions. Outcomes of any session attended must be immediately discussed with the coach and manager. Players should also ensure that they are particularly pro-active in following advice on warming up, warming down and recovery as well as following recommended, sleep, nutrition and hydration guidelines.

5.2 **Massage**

Sports Massage is available to players provided they have made a request to the coach and manager. A form must be completed which will be provided by the cricket manager. As the centre will have to pay for this service it is important that the system is used when appropriate.

5.3 **Medical cover**

There will be no medical personnel at home games.
6. Selection

[Redacted] coach, and [Redacted] Cricket Manager, will be solely responsible for the selection of all teams.

Teams will be picked and presented to the captain, these in turn will be announced in good time whenever possible. All players in the squad should ensure the coach and cricket manager are aware of any fitness or availability problems. All squad players are expected to be available for all games unless otherwise informed by the coach. There might be occasions when players are required at short notice; again it is vital that players keep the coach fully informed at all times.

If players are unhappy about the fairness of selection or other playing matters they have a right of appeal through the players’ committee and cricket manager. Issues will be considered through this process and the management committee informed of any decisions taken.

7. Travel

Mini buses will be used as the mode of transport to all away games and home games. Players can use cars only when agreed with [Redacted] and [Redacted] on an individual basis.

7.1 Departure Times

It is vital that all players are punctual at all times. Departure times from Cardiff, the ground and hotels are calculated to ensure safe travel and arrival at destination in good time.

7.2 Mini bus care

It is the responsibility of players to keep the Mini buses clean and tidy at all times. Failure to do so will jeopardise use of the mini buses (which are subsidised) and result in players incurring the costs for the hire of commercial transport.

8. Accommodation

Hotel accommodation has been arranged for all away games except for some 1 day games. Players will be expected to share twin rooms and these pairings will be allocated prior to departure. Players will be provided with a two course evening meal. All other purchases will be chargeable and bills must be settled by players on an individual basis on the day of departure.

Players are expected to be in the hotel and vacate bars and lounges at a responsible time.

NB. This professional expectation will become an instruction if this is abused.
Following our narrow defeat away to [name of university team] in the one-day championship we have since beaten [name of university team] by ten wickets, [name of university team] by nine, and [name of university team] by seven in our last three home fixtures. The win against [name of university team] was especially pleasing given that they are one of our fellow university academy centres and our main rivals for this year's one-day competition. Two players are worth mentioning in particular for their contributions to the team's recent match winning run. First, [name of player] who has notched up over 150 runs and who has yet to be dismissed in his last three innings, and second [name of player] who has taken 10 for 65 off 29.1 overs. [Name of player] was also named Coach's 'player of the month' for April and we hope for much more of the same from him and the rest of the team throughout May and June. Regardless of our form of late, we are aware of the stiff challenge that awaits us in the northeast starting on Monday. [Name of university team] are our next opponents, and notwithstanding the six-hour drive that awaits us on Sunday, we're looking forward to the trip that promises another three days of hard fought cricket. First though, a chance to play for our clubs on Saturday that will provide a refreshing change of scene and some valuable practice for those of us who could do with spending some more time in the middle. Fingers crossed there are no more injuries - we seem to have plenty of those at the moment.
APPENDIX C
The Evolution of a Research Title

John Van Maanen (1995, p.2) once described ethnography as ‘something akin to an intense epistemological trial by fire’. Reflecting on the path I have taken in the development of this programme of research, it is a statement with which I can identify for reasons that I shall recount in this short section. My intention here is not to provide another account of the ethnographic research process – although I will refer once again to ethnography’s fundamentals. Rather, my aim is to provide a reflexive stance on ‘epistemological trial by fire’ to which Van Maanen referred by outlining the journey I have taken as a researcher over the course of my doctoral studies – a journey that is best illustrated with reference to the evolution of my research title.

Days in the Dirt: An Ethnography on Cricket and Self is a product of intellectual endeavour that is intimately connected to my progression as a researcher and neophyte ethnographer. As with all research titles, Days in the Dirt... is my deliberate attempt at trying to encapsulate, at a glance, what is contained within the pages of this thesis. It is also an expression of how I wish the body of work to be received that has departed somewhat from the theoretical platform upon which the project was first conceived. In analysis of the project’s original working title – Stress and Emotion in Academy Cricketers: An Ethnographic Approach – of note is the way it places an emphasis on the conceptual focus of the study rather than the process of investigation that would later become the driving force behind what I aimed to produce. Its phrasing provides insight into the mentality of the budding sport psychology Ph.D. student that I was as I made the step from undergraduate to postgraduate research. I refer to it as a step, but in reality it was more of a leap – a leap that I wasn’t quite ready for at the onset of fieldwork as I entered an environment primed with a conceptual orientation that quickly seemed at odds with my adopted research strategy (see Chapter 2).
To place this transition in context, as an undergraduate sport and exercise science student I had developed a keen interest in sport psychology and chosen to write my final year dissertation on the experience of competition stress and emotion in a sample of club cricketers. My interests were largely performance related and informed by the dominant theoretical perspective used in the literature. I had studied Lazarus’ (1999) ‘transactional’ theory on stress and emotion diligently, and was familiar with its application to research and applied practice in sport psychology. As a result, I had gone away, collected some data, and analysed it accordingly. The process had followed a procedure consistent with the qualitative approaches used within the sport psychology discipline and was underpinned by a particular way of understanding human experience. Hence, embarking on a Ph.D. programme on ‘stress and emotion in academy cricketers’ seemed like a manageable extension to the research I had already conducted. Only on this occasion, I would be adopting an approach that would allow me to ‘observe stress’ first-hand instead of relying on retrospective reports.

This, of course, was true. I would indeed find myself in a position where I could lay witness to individual and group responses to the demands and challenges they faced as members of a university cricket academy. However, at the start of fieldwork, my understanding of what ethnography entailed as both a process and product of research was very much limited to the techniques ethnographers use to capture information, and consequently I failed to recognise ethnography as it denotes to a certain way of looking at the world.

Broadly speaking, ethnography is the study of people and culture that sees the ethnographer step into a field of cultural practice, draw close to the events in the lives of those studied, and write about what was learned in situ (Van Maanen, 1995). Emphasis is placed on the deliberate ‘witness-cum-recording’ of natural phenomena (Willis and Trondman, 2000, p.5) and the meanings people ascribe to the world within which they are socially and contextually bound (Brewer, 2000). Methodologically, it is rooted in a philosophy of naturalism that carries with it a number of ontological and
epistemological assumptions. According to Brewer (2000, p.34), the theory of knowledge within naturalism holds three central tenets:

1) The social world is not reducible to that which can be externally observed, but is something that is created and recreated, perceived and interpreted by people themselves;

2) Knowledge of the social world must give access to actors’ own accounts of it, among other things, at least as a starting point, and sometimes as the sole point;

3) People live in a bounded social context and are best studied in, and their meanings are best revealed in, the natural settings of the real world in which they live.

Ethnography is thus an inductive, discovery-based research pursuit where the context of human interaction takes precedence in a process of knowledge creation. But no matter how much I read about ethnography prior to entering the field, it wasn’t until I began to experience the epistemology of fieldwork that I could start to assimilate ethnography with its outlook and purpose as a research venture. To do so, I had to start thinking critically with regards to the school of cognitive-behaviourism from which I had come, and how this was potentially constraining me from attending to the task of generating ‘creative, dynamic concepts’ through the ‘lived experience of ethnographic work’ (Puddephatt, Shaffir and Klienknecht, 2009, p.3). To this end, stress theory acted as a ‘straightjacket’ that was ultimately preventing me from fully appreciating the context at the centre of my studies, and how it related to a group of young men engaging with the culture of which they were a part.

Letting go of my theoretical starting point, however, was not an instant but a gradual process involving the acquisition of a new set of perspectives related to the ethnographer’s craft. Like the lives and lifestyles of those the ethnographer sets out to study, ethnography – as it constitutes a certain ‘style’ of research – is learned best in situ. Indeed, no content in a textbook or journal article had adequately prepared me for what I was to
encounter in the field with only my eyes and ears and previous research experience for guidance. Fetterman (1989, p.129) observed that conducting fieldwork is ‘initially like adolescence’, adding that it is ‘a period marked by tremendous excitement, frustration and confusion’ as the newly initiated fieldworker struggles to find his or her feet amidst a wealth of new cultural information.

As an undergraduate student, my research training had consisted of a set of generic principles belonging to a specific model of researching. I had been taught to research within a discipline that had its own (recent) history and traditions, and established ways of doing things (particularly with regards to qualitative research), and to me, ethnography constituted just another method of collecting data taken from the same methodological toolbox from which all research methods came and were applied, neutrally. Certainly, upon entering the field, my understanding of research per se was not sufficient to grasp the various paradigms through which knowledge is created, especially in relation to ethnography. ‘Imagination’ and ‘creativity’ were terms that, in my mind, belonged to neither science nor research. ‘Intuition’ was not part of my research vocabulary, let alone a resource upon which to lean. And yet it was intuition that told me that ethnographic fieldwork required me to adopt a research perspective that was open to possibility, compassion and sensitivity and free of deductive constraint in order to unpack and piece together aspects of a cultural scene as it related to a research problem that began to emerge. In other words, it was not until I started to think like an ethnographer that I found a degree of congruence with the ‘type’ of research I was trying to perform.

The point is that ethnography is not an approach to research that the neophyte can read about one day, and simply do the next. The naturalism upon which it is founded requires the ethnographer to put him or herself into a vulnerable position not only as an insider, but as a scholar too. Indeed, it is a philosophy that encourages the researcher to ‘let go’ of preconceived ideas, and allow the story to be revealed through the actions and words of the researched group (Hammersley, 2006). That is not to say ethnography is atheoretical, as it is theory that is said to distinguish ethnography from
other investigative practices that sees the ethnographer at pains to explain what he or she has come to know (Sudgen, 2005; Walcott, 1995; Willis and Trondman, 2000). It is an analytical process that is both personally and professionally challenging for reasons that go beyond the hours one must invest just to be ‘in the field’, but what it takes to translate the meaning of everyday events and cultural phenomena into formative research insights. For the novice, though, ethnography is a research venture that not only encapsulates a process of fieldwork and analysis that stretches one intellectually, but also a process of maturation that witnesses the coevolution of the researcher and research project as part of the holistic learning experience (Fetterman, 1989). From Stress and Emotion... to Days in the Dirt... is an expression of this notion as it related to the ‘trial by fire’ through which I travelled on my journey towards becoming an ethnographer.
APPENDIX D

Informed Consent and Participant Information

Ethical approval was gained from the University’s Research Ethics Committee. Appendix D contains an example informed consent and participant information sheet. These forms were presented to individuals prior to the start of the investigation.

Informed Consent Form:

---

Voluntary Informed Consent

Title of Project:

Please tick each box.

1. I confirm that I have been informed about the purpose of the study, and have had the opportunity to ask questions and have them answered satisfactorily.

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am able to withdraw free of will.

3. I understand that if I choose to withdraw my legal rights will go unaffected.

4. I understand that information from this study will be used for reporting purposes, but my identity will remain anonymous.

5. I agree to take part in the above study.

Participant name: ___________________________ Date: __________

Participant signature: ___________________________ Date: __________

Name of person taking consent: ___________________________ Date: __________

Signature of person taking consent: ___________________________ Date: __________
Participant Information Sheet:

Participants informa

Project Title: Stress and Emotion in Academy Cricketers: An Ethnographic Approach.

This document provides a run through of the aims of the research, my role as the researcher, your role as a member of the researched group, benefits of taking part, methods of data collection, and how the research will be used. The purpose of this is to assist you in making an informed decision as to whether you wish to be included in the project and to promote transparency in the research process.

Background:
It is understood that competitive sport brings with it a number of demands that athletes must manage to respond effectively to the pressures of performing. The aim of this project is to gain an insight into the academy environment and your experiences as an academy cricketer to further understanding on the experience of stress and emotion in sport.

The researcher’s role:
The project involves I (Harry Bowles), the researcher, observing and interacting with you and your teammates in the remaining weeks of pre-season training, and during the playing season. My intention is not to spy, but to ensure that I am open in my research approach with you and your teammates.

Your Participation:
The requirements of the study on you will be minimal and will remain so throughout the study’s course. As the project progresses, I may invite you to attend one-to-one or small group interviews to gain a better understanding of your experiences. However, your attendance will not compulsory.

Are there any benefits from taking part?
The central focus of the project is to help you and your teammates develop as individuals and as cricketers by analysing how you react and respond to certain situations. In my role as a researcher, I will also be available to help support and contribute positively to the team environment.

Are there any risks?
There are no foreseeable risks associated with your participation in this study, and your participation will not necessitate for you to go beyond what is otherwise required of you by the academy’s training and playing schedule.

How will the information be used?
By agreeing to take part in this study, you will be allowing me to use and report information that I have acquired over the duration of the research project that may directly or indirectly relate to you. This information will be used solely to inform the aims of the research project, and not as an assessment of your ability as a cricketer. It will not be open for use in team selection or for player evaluations, and careful steps will be taken to make sure you cannot be identified from any information held about you.
Your rights:
Your right as a voluntary participant is that you are free to enter or withdraw from the study at any time. This simply means that you are in control of the part you play and what information about you is used in its reporting.

How I will protect your privacy:
All information will be stored securely and a concerted effort will be made to respect your rights to privacy. Any personal information (name, date of birth, contact details) will remain confidential and kept in accordance with the guidelines of the Data Protection Act (1998).

Contact:
If you require any further details, or have any outstanding queries, feel free to contact me on the details provided below.

Harry Bowles
M.phil/Ph.D Student
Research House
Cardiff School of Sport
University of Wales Institute, Cardiff
CF236XD, United Kingdom
P: [Redacted]
E: [Redacted]