When the managerial merry-go-round stops: An intrinsic case-study into how disconfirming experiences affect the managerial identities of expert football managers

Abstract

Due to the highly competitive nature of top level football (i.e., top domestic league or international standard) expert football managers often undergo several disconfirming experiences throughout their careers. However, little is known about how such experiences impact identity. Narrative constructs reveal that during disconfirming episodes' managers experience feelings of anger, a loss of self-respect, disappointment, and sadness. Further, they also report how confusion regarding their future career prospects leaves them in a state of identity limbo (i.e., identity interference), whereby they were unsure as to how, when or if they should cease their commitment to a valued identity.

Keywords: Self-concept; Identity accumulation theory; Identity erosion; self; Soccer; Coaching.

When the managerial merry-go-round stops: An intrinsic case-study into how perceived career termination affect the identity of expert Premier League football managers.

"Some people believe football is a matter of life and death, I am very disappointed with that attitude. I can assure you it is much, much more important than that." ~ Bill Shankly.

As the aforementioned quote demonstrates, for the likes of former Liverpool Football Club Manager Bill Shankly, football was clearly more than a game. Although there are exceptions, Bridgewater (2010) suggests that to achieve a career in football management, it is likely that managers will have played professionally. Given this pathway into management and the dedication required to have previously achieved a professional playing career, it is feasible that such individuals will have experienced limited opportunities to develop other aspects of their self-concept (i.e., cognitive generalisations about the self that are derived from past experience and represent the way the self has evolved in memory).

Although the likes of Bill Shankly enjoyed a long and relatively stable career at one club, the majority of managers experience a far more tempestuous existence. According to data obtained from the League Managers Association (2016) for the 2015/16 season, more than half of football league clubs changed their manager with 58-sackings and 15-resignations, in total. Further, the average length of managerial tenure across the four professional leagues in England is just 1.47 years. However, although such semantic statistics are abounding in football, to date, little is known as to the impact such frequent disconfirming experiences have on managers (Lavallee, 2006). Given the traditional progression football managers take (see fig 1.) it is likely that the self-concept of such individuals will have been largely shaped by football and as such, managers are likely to possess a particularly strong

42sporting identity. Further, as a narrowed sporting identity is associated with post-career
43vulnerability (see Ronkainen et al., 2016 for a review of the athletic identity literature), it is
44somewhat surprising that more has not been done to explore the experiences of managers
45with the aim of providing support (Lavallee, 2006).
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47[insert figure 1 around here]
48
49**Self-concept and identities**
50 According to Fivush (2011) as people have a lot of experience with themselves, and
51possess a range of self-images and self-feelings, they believe they know themselves.
52However, our awareness of our core self is up for debate (Hahn, 2014). As a subconscious
53process, the generalisations that form an individual's self-concept may not be easily
54accessible (Hofmann and Wilson, 2010). Instead, the primary role of such generalisations is
55to organise and guide the processing of self-related information, acting as a selective
56mechanism which determines how information is structured and ultimately, attended to
57(Strachan et al., 2012). In contrast, identities are formed on the individual's traits and
58characteristics, their social relations and the roles and social group memberships in which
59they occupy; helping us to make meaning and evaluate what is important to us within a
60context (Oyserrman et al., 2012). Although the self-concept includes the cognitive
61generalisations held about a specific role, role-identity refers to the self-descriptive and
62internalised social role an individual occupies (Owens et al., 2010). Like a teacher with a
63student or a police officer with a criminal, each role occupied is accompanied with role
64expectations and reinforces membership (Hogg, 2006).

65 For McCall and Simmons (1966, p. 67), role-identity encompasses the “character and
66the role that an individual devise for himself as an occupant of a particular social position”,
67which also includes an “imaginative view of himself as he likes to think of himself being and
68acting as an occupant of that position”. Although identity is often discussed in the present
69(i.e., what is true of the individual now), they need not be as identities can also be focused on
70the past (i.e., what used to be true of the individual) and the future (e.g., the person the
71individual expects, hopes or feels obliged to become; or the person one fears one may
72become). Oyserman and James (2011) take this a step further by suggesting that the concept
73of the future self also contains aspects of what we aspire to in terms of our potential self.
74Given the virtually unlimited identities available, however, it is thought that individuals limit
75their aspirations to focus on key identities to avoid disappointment. As such, when a potential
76self proves unattainable, self-esteem is threatened and the identity eroded, the individual may
77choose to let go of said identity to ease cognitive dissonance and regain self-esteem
78(Oyserman and James, 2011; Stets and Burke, 2012). However, willingness to relinquish an
79identity, be it past, present, future or possible, is likely based, in part on the commitment to
80said identity (Stryker, 2007). For managers, who have attained repeated categorisation and
81evaluation of a behaviour by the self or others since childhood, letting go of an identity can
82be particularly problematic (Stryker, 2007).
83 It is important to note, however, that this view of identity described here is one based
84on a nested approach to theories of identity internalisation (i.e., Identity Accumulation
85Theory, Thoits, 1983; Identity Control Theory, Burke, 1991; Identity Theory, Stryker, 2007;
86Role Identity Theory, McCall and Simmons, 1966) rather than those which place greater
87emphasis on social context (i.e., Affect Control Theory, Heise. 2007; Situated Identity
88Theory, Alexander and Knight, 1971; Social Identity Theory, Tajfel and Turner, 1979;

Turner, 1982). Within theories of identity internalisation, individuals may hold multiple identities which make up the self-concept, one's theory of one's personality, and what one believes is true of oneself (Oyserman et al., 2012). As individuals tend to occupy multiple roles and group memberships, identities are used to help summarise one's behaviour within a particular context. Further, the processes described are two-way with individuals also relying on this information to make evaluations, decisions, predictions, and inferences about the self (Fazio and Olsen, 2003).

Although holding multiple identities can offer opportunities for "social interaction, economic mobility, and the accumulation of skills and abilities", combining identities is not without its difficulties (Settles, 2004, p. 487). When two or more identities are perceived to be in conflict, identity interference can occur (Van Sell et al., 1981). An obvious example of this process can be witnessed in the workplace, as new parents attempt to grapple with the often conflicting roles of mother/father and employee. To be clear, the roles themselves do not constitute identity, but rather it is the depth to which the expectations associated with the role are internalised and prioritised by the individual as occupant. For those, like the managers discussed within this manuscript, the role develops more meaning and becomes part of the self (Stryker and Burke, 2000). Therefore, given their propensity to progress into management from a professional playing background, the frequency in which they transition in and out of sport, the internal and external pressures faced, managers within the sport of association football[i] provide a unique sample to explore how disconfirming experiences (i.e., sackings) impact upon the identities such individual hold.

Method

Due to the exploratory nature of the research, the perceived interest in the case itself, and limited population to draw from, an intrinsic case-study design was adopted (Stake,

1995). According to Schwandt (1997, p. 12), a case may be a "person, process, event, group, organization, and so on". Rather than focusing on quantifying information, case-study research seeks to explore the *how* and *why* questions. Within the present study, a critical realist position was adopted with the experiences discussed considered from a single ontological *reality*, but subject to multiple interpretations that are influenced by the way participants, experienced, made sense of, and retold the phenomena discussed (Braun and Clarke, 2006). It is also worth noting that, unlike other forms of case-study, intrinsic case-studies are not interested in extending theory and acknowledge that there may be limited transferability (Baxter and Jack, 2008). Given the specific expertise and homogenous nature of the sample this is particularly relevant as it is unlikely that the experiences presented here are transferable beyond those working in professional sport.

Procedure

Following ethical approval from a UK University Ethics Committee, contact was made with participants via the League Managers Association (LMA). To maintain the confidentiality of contact information, the LMA sent a letter to those who were identified as meeting Abraham, Collins, and Martindale's (2006) criteria of expertise (i.e., at least ten years' top-level management experience and were currently unemployed). The criteria were imposed as it provided a narrow focus and provide the greatest opportunity to recruit those who had dedicated the considerable time and effort to become a manager, were publicly known for their profession, and had experienced a disconfirming experience.

Following verbatim transcription, the author undertook a holistic content analysis using the protocol proposed by Lieblich et al. (1998). This analysis began with the author immersing himself within the participants' stories, before writing the initial narrative summaries for each participant and the collective global impressions. The individual stories

presented were then written and re-written with consideration given to the representation of the individuals behind the narratives. The author examined the stories for contradictions, overlaps, and to understand how they contributed to the emerging narratives, before integrating the analyses around the key events that affected individual's role-specific self-concept (Denzin, 1978).

Credibility

As I, the author and primary researcher, am the instrument through which the data was collected, I have adopted a personal voice within this subsection to express my reflections on the process (Rosenberg, 1979). I do so in order to present information regarding my prior experiences, which may influence the interpretations made (Krane et al., 1997). Therefore, my academic background is in psychology and before entering academia, I had spent a decade working as a coach in amateur, youth and semi-professional football ([redacted]). As such, I have some knowledge of the demands of football management and was aware of much of the technical language used by the participants. It is worth noting that I believe my prior experience assisted when building an initial rapport with the participants as it established me as a cultural insider (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995). In fact, each interview began with the participants interviewing me on my background. Although not how I had planned the interviews, on reflection, I am confident that the process helped to assure the participants of my ability to consider the situations discussed from their viewpoint (Eklund, 1993; Fontana and Frey, 1994). Further, I believe this early interaction put the participants at ease and reassured them that I would handle their stories sensitively, although honouring the complexities of the lived experiences presented (Smith and Sparkes, 2012). However, I am under no illusion that their interviewing me may have also held a secondary purpose. As successful and arguably elite individuals (see Harvey 2011), I suspect their pre-

161 interview of me allowed them the opportunity to reinforce their status before examining
162 whether as Schoenberger (1992, p. 217) states "[I am] an obscure academic who possess, as
163 far as the interviewee is concerned, no threat."

164 **The managers**

165 In the following section I briefly provide context to the playing and management
166 experiences of the three managers. Against this backdrop, the focus is then turned onto the
167 moment in which the managers interviewed lose their respective jobs and the impact this has
168 on both them and their significant others. Finally, the influences of these experiences are
169 analysed in *The end of a job – and possibly a career.*

170 I start with Billy[ii] who is in his 50s and resides in England. He is educated to degree
171 level and played professionally for a wide range of clubs. His playing career spanned nearly
172 two decades and saw him make over 500 first team appearances in league and international
173 football. Towards the end of his playing career, Billy began to plan for a career in
174 management by taking a semi-professional, player-manager position abroad completing his
175 coaching qualifications. He then went on to manage a range of teams, amassing over 400-
176 games as a manager, and culminating in him leading his national team. At the point of the
177 interview his career was on a downward trajectory and he had found himself out of work for
178 four of the past five years. Although currently unemployed, he spends his time preparing for
179 his next position.

180 Like Billy, Alex is also in his 50s and played professionally. However, although Billy
181 competed at the highest level as a player, Alex did not reach the same heights. He did,
182 however, have a respectable career in the lower leagues. Although he had a long career, he
183 was not always a regular (i.e., someone who plays every game) and struggled to make an

184impact as a player. After a number of years playing within a lower league club, Alex was
185presented with an opportunity to coach coming back from injury. He then spent a number of
186years as an assistant manager, before eventually making the step up to first team manager –
187stating that he felt he was ready to make the step up. Despite having arguably the least
188playing impact of the three managers interviewed, Alex had held managerial positions at the
189highest level, continually, for nearly two decades and had accrued over 600-games in
190management. He had also managed internationally and has a global reputation.

191 Lastly, Daniel who, in his late 60s, was the eldest of the three managers interviewed.
192Daniel started his playing career in the 1960s and in his own words he "never fulfilled his
193potential". After a promising start to his playing career Daniel had ended up playing non-
194league football in his late twenties, before getting a telephone call from his former manager
195who had recommended him for a managerial position. Daniel felt at the time that he was too
196young to be a manager (indicating a pre-existing idea of what or who a manager should be),
197citing both his young age (late 20s) and that he was still playing as evidence he was
198unsuitable for the role. This led to Daniel retiring before the age of 30 to take up a coaching
199position. Daniel completed what he termed "his apprenticeship" in non-league football before
200moving on to a full-time coaching position. After a number of years, he then took over as the
201team's manager, where he led the team to the top division of English football. Unlike the
202other two, Daniel did not manage internationally, however, he worked as a manager for
203nearly three decades and amassed nearly a 1000-games as a manager.

204**The end of a job – and possibly a career.**

205 At the time of interview, the managers had been out of managerial employment for
206differing lengths of time. Alex had been in high profile employment until very recently and as

such his identity as a manager was less threatened than the other two participants. Throughout the interview he appeared very confident that he would find employment again shortly, stating that, “I always know what I am going to do next”. Further, since being interviewed for this study he has taken on another full-time managerial position. In contrast, Billy had been out of management for nearly four out of the previous five years and Daniel nearly nine years [at the time of interview]. They both recalled the difficulty in losing their respective positions and the impact this had on their family’s:

> ‘Researcher: How do you react to being asked to leave a club?
>
> Billy: I was angry, I was disappointed that I didn’t see it through and to be honest we would have probably survived with me in charge… You feel angry and disappointed. At Rovers, I felt more aggrieved to be fair because I’d been there for a long time. You’ve got to be angry. At United I was gutted too… I mean I had a safe job at Albion. I was loved and was doing well. That was soul destroying that.’

Daniel spoke of how his losing a high-profile managerial position impacted upon his self-esteem, family, and feelings that the public perceived him to be a bad person' based on his team's performance:

> ‘Losing a job is a terrible experience. It must be for anybody in any job not just football. The difference with football is it’s the profile, it’s the press, the children at school, the accusation of failure. It’s hard to take publicly you have failed. You’ve also lost respect.’

Both Daniel and Billy also demonstrated signs of identity foreclosure (i.e., a firm commitment to an identity with limited self-exploration) and stated that they still thought of themselves as managers; this despite not being actively employed within the profession for some time (Berzonsky and Papini, 2014; Douglas, 2009). Given their lack of ability to fulfil

231their ideal identity image, it is likely that both Daniel and Billy are suffering from a degree of
232cognitive dissonance (Leary and Tangney, 2003). Within theories of identity internalisation,
233the core of an identity is the categorisation of the self as an occupant of a role, and the
234incorporation, into the self, of the meanings and expectations associated with that role and its
235performance (Burke and Tully, 1977; Thoits, 1986). As such, the inability to fulfil this role is
236likely to negatively impact upon such individual's self-worth and self-efficacy (Cast and
237Burke, 2002). At the time of interview Billy's identity is intertwined with the role of football
238manager. When trying to emphasise this point he draws the following analogy:

239 'I always say to people managers are a bit like priests, Catholic priests, you can never
240 be defrocked as a Catholic priest unless you get involved in something dodgy but
241 you're always a priest and although you retire you're still a priest, it's just you haven't
242 got a parish. Managers are like that. We're managers all our lives just we haven't got a
243 football club. You're not anything else. We're priests without parishes till the day we
244 die.'

245 Similarly, Daniel still considers himself a manager despite being out of management
246for the longest period of time. He does doubt, however, whether anyone else still sees him
247this way, "I just think of myself as a football manager, but I think in the eyes of everyone
248else, of course my identity's definitely changed, of course." These narratives reflect the
249participant's membership to the role of football manager. As Oyserman et al. (2012) state,
250role identity is a two-way process that requires others to play a complementary role. Like a
251teacher without a student or a parent without a child, the managers within the present study
252felt dissonance in their position as a manager/coach without others (i.e., a team/players) to
253confirm their identity within the role of football manager:

254 ‘Daniel: It’s very difficult to come to terms with it [leaving the game]. I just think of
255 myself as a football manager, but I think in the eyes of everyone else of course my
256 identity’s definitely changed. As I’ve been out of the game for a few years yes I can
257 go into a supermarket now, even locally people have forgotten who I am. I’m sure it
258 happens to other people in other walks of life whether in films or television or
259 whatever, they’re a B star now, they’re not at the top of the list anymore.’

260 Both Billy and Daniel appear to have experienced a form of identity foreclosure,
261whereby their managerial identity is so firmly rooted that they find it difficult to consider
262themselves working in any other capacity (Kroger and Marcia, 2013) or adopting alternate
263identities (Cosh et al., 2013). This is consistent with the participants interviewed by Agnew
264and Drummond (2015, p. 83) who concluded “that one does not stop being a footballer
265simply because they have retired from the sport”:

266 ‘Billy: I was asked the other day “what are you going to do now?” and I thought
267 nothing of it at the time. But what he meant was, his impression was, well what are
268 you going to do for a job now that you’re no longer a manager. Erm so it’s a tough
269 one. You’re out of work 2-years and then its 3-years, then it’s 4-years and before you
270 know it, you’re thinking well am I working again or not. It’s not a nice process. The
271 longer it goes on the more you think well, should I retire, I’m not sure, I don’t know
272 whether I’ve been retired or not.’

273 In addition to still holding a managerial identity, Daniel discussed that he was
274‘addicted’ to football as a player. They concluded that such comments likely reflect an
275individual having devoted so much of their time to their chosen sport, that they had become
276defined by it. When asked if he would manage again, Daniel said that he would, but it was
277unlikely he would be able to do so in the same capacity as he had done in the past. “I could

278just about do it or I think I could, but maybe my health wouldn't allow me to." He is also at a
279stage in his career where many of his peers are in a similar situation. Erikson's (1968) theory
280of psychosocial development posits that it is preferable for individuals to experience
281transitions at a similar stage of their life to their peers. Daniel's peers also find themselves at a
282similar phase and as such are able to support one another through the process. Despite his
283desire to manage again, Daniel has shown flexibility, is realistic about his capabilities and
284feels that he was 'lucky' that he had always been offered some form of employment within
285football, "I think I have to be sensible and you have to come to terms with it [no longer being
286a manager]." Furthermore, his transition out of the game has been gradual, with involvement
287in media work relating to the sport, which has allowed him time to incorporate new roles into
288his existing identity. This is consistent with Krane et al. (1997) who identified that the
289development of new roles into an individual's existing identity was a critical factor in
290managing key life transitions and periods of unemployment.
291 In contrast, Billy found himself without employment at a time in his life when many
292of his peers are employed. Despite a perceived lack of alternative options, Billy appeared to
293be considering the point that he would need to find alternative employment: "it's a tough one
294and the longer it goes on, the longer you think well how do I retire or have I not retired, I'm
295not sure I don't know whether I've been retired or not". Although there is evidence that future
296planning assists players with their transition from the game (see Grove et al., 1997; Sinclair
297and Orlick, 1993) none of the managers involved in the present study reported any
298encouragement to look beyond a career in management. Unlike players, managers do not
299necessarily know whether their career has ended, which appeared to cause distress to the
300managers involved within the present study. Although Daniel and Alex showed some
301flexibility in their career choices, Billy appeared to wear his commitment to his unfulfilled

identity as a football manager as a badge of honour. Although Billy has found it difficult to come to terms with his professional decline, he finds himself in a conflicted position whereby he takes comfort from the emotional turmoil he faces when trying to stay in the game, also acknowledging the discomfort this creates for those around him:

> 'Researcher: Do you think your experiences of leaving football clubs has affected you as a person?
>
> Billy: Erm, you'll have to ask my partner that to be fair.
>
> Researcher: What do you think she'd say?
>
> Billy: I don't know erm, you're more susceptible to feeling sorry for yourself because you get up every day saying what are you going to do today… I mean I don't. I go to matches, because you're supposed to keep involved. I go to matches, but she says why do you go, why do you bother going to games anymore? It's like self-harming. You go because you're a manager, you're an ex-manager, but you're not involved and watching other people do your job is like self-harming. She says why do you go to games, why do you self-harm yourself, but it's something you've always done – I've always gone to games on Saturday since I was playing, managing, scouting, I've always gone to games and I continue to do it because that's what I think I should do. I take my son with me now and he enjoys football, so to an extent, it takes a little bit of the edge off. But there are times that you're sat there thinking about whether you'll ever be able to do that again, you know. You have more time and there is more time to feel sorry for yourself.'

In many ways, Billy's story follows a similar path to the restitution narrative discussed by Frank (1995). Although Frank (1995, p.77) outlines the restitution narrative with those experiencing illness (e.g., "Yesterday I was healthy, today I'm sick, but tomorrow

I'll be healthy again" (p. 77). Billy's story focuses on renewing his former identity as a football manager (i.e., "Yesterday I was a manager, today I am not, but tomorrow I will be a manager again"). Like the individuals in (Smith and Sparkes, 2003), Billy refuses to move beyond his weekly routine (i.e., going to football matches) or accept the possibility that he may not manage again. As the present fails to meet his expectations, his identity is fixed in both the future and the past (Oyserman et al., 2012), which creates an unfulfilled present. For Billy, living in the present would mean abandoning his aspirations of returning to management and fulfilling his idealised image of self (Leary and Tangney, 2003). Billy sees little choice in his attempts at regaining his former identity, after all, football is the only profession he has ever known. He is trapped and worse still, the longer his foreclosed position is maintained, the greater the attendant shame he is likely to experience (Kroger and Marcia, 2013).

Conclusion

The purpose of the present study was to examine the career histories of expert football managers and explore how disconfirming experiences affect identities. The findings suggest that expert football managers may extend an athletic identity beyond their playing careers into their management roles, which on occasion, may result in acute identity narrowing. The results presented here also suggest that, during disconfirming experiences, like athletes, managers experience psychological discomfort (e.g., feelings of anger, a loss of self-respect, disappointment, and sadness). During these episodes, expert football managers face personal feelings of dejection and loss (i.e., separation from the group), and often experience public denigration that greatly impacts upon them as individuals and also their family. Unlike players, managers are often held solely responsible for team failure. However, rather than experiencing support, the findings suggest that managers are often cast aside and left to

350experience these personal stressors, identity threats (i.e., no longer being employed as a
351manager), media intrusion, and financial concerns without organisational assistance. When
352experiencing such processes, Steele, Spencer, and Aronson (2002) suggest individuals may
353trigger behaviours, which seek to cognitively resolve the stressor. This is also applicable to
354identity, whereby identity threat often results in the threatened individual adopting behaviours
355that attempt to prove one's membership (Bosson, Vandello, Burnaford, Weaver, & Wasti,
3562009). Billy's compulsion to attend matches is perhaps an example of such behaviour.
357However, it is worth noting that group membership need not be limited in this instance to that
358of a football manager. In finding alternative and arguably age-appropriate employment within
359football (i.e., Director, Pundit, and Scout), Daniel may have attempted to resolve threats to
360his identity by maintaining his self-view as a 'football man'.

361 Depending on the length of time away from the game, managers may experience such
362threats for a prolonged period of time, which appears to have an eroding effect that may be
363mediated by strength of identity (i.e., hierarchical identity salience, length of time, and
364frequency of confirming experiences) and societal expectations (e.g., it is more social
365acceptability for a 65-year old manager to be long-term unemployed than it is a 45-year old).
366Although identity resolution approaches may provide short-term comfort, they are not a long-
367term strategy. Without external identity reinforcement, prolonged attempts to resolve identity
368threat may result in cognitive dissonance (Oyserman and James, 2011; Stets and Burke,
3692012). Oyserman and James (2011) suggest that when a potential self proves unattainable,
370individuals may select to discard such an identity, however, the findings of the present study
371do not appear support this. At the time of interview, the managers demonstrated an
372unwillingness to relinquish identities associated with that of fulfilling the role of football
373manager. It is worth noting, however, that Oyserman and James (2011) do not state the length

of time or the frequency of identity of erosion required to let go of an identity. As such, it is likely a highly subjective process that may be largely reliant on the strength of association towards said identity (Stryker, 2007).

Given the psychological discomfort felt and the ambiguity in the length of time in which such feelings may be experienced, understanding the influence role-identity has on managers during disconfirming experiences is critical in supporting the psychological well being of managers. Further research is therefore needed to examine the ramifications of disconfirming experiences based on the strength of managerial identity at different time-points. Longitudinal research that assesses the impact of identity erosion on the strength of association towards said identity is also warranted. Finally, research examining whether the psychological discomfort discussed within the present study can be reduced is also required. Currently, managers are treated in the same way or worse than as those who, in most other industries, have committed the most serious of gross misconduct. Given that managers usually lose their jobs based on the team's performance alone, treating individuals in such a way is unacceptable and likely in breach of employment law. Therefore, football should consider the present culture adopted and aim to provide a more supportive and sympathetic environment. In the short-term, psychological support should be offered during disconfirming experiences to both managers and if appropriate, their family. None of the managers discussed any encouragement to plan for the end of their career, which given the precarious nature of their employment seems particularly reckless. Providing managers with support to expand their identities beyond football may also prove beneficial to those both at the end of their careers or who find themselves in a perpetual state of cognitive dissonance.

In sum, the present study is the first to explore how disconfirming experiences affect the identities of expert football managers. The findings also suggest that expert football

managers may have extended an athletic identity beyond their playing careers into their management roles. Despite experiencing disconfirming experiences each of the managers interviewed still considered themselves to be managers, with two in particular stating that they would always be managers and were addicted to the game. This suggests that football management and at least for the individuals interviewed, has become part of the self and more than a job. Further, during dis-confirming transitional experiences, like athletes, managers experience psychological discomfort (e.g., feelings of anger, a loss of self-respect, disappointment, and sadness). Unsurprisingly, expert football managers also face personal feelings of dejection and loss (i.e., separation from the group) during periods of unemployment, while both they and their family may experience public denigration. Depending on the length of time away from the game, managers may also experience cognitive identity-related dissonance due to the inability to fulfil a role that has become synonymous with their narrowed identity. As such, understanding the influence role-identity has on managers during periods of change and transition is critical in supporting their psychological wellbeing. Therefore, further research is needed to examine the ramifications of career transitions based on the strength of managerial identity at different time-points, and whether the psychological discomfort discussed within the present study can be reduced via the proposed interventions.

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Appendix: Interview guide

1. How did you get into sport?
2. How did you get into management?
3. Describe a typical day at a football club you've managed.
4. Tell me about your experiences of leaving football clubs throughout your career?
5. If the opportunity arose, would you go back into the game and if so, would you change the way you lead at the next club? If so how?
6. How have you changed throughout your career?
7. Has this period away from the game changed the way you see your self?
8. How do you believe your players perceive you as a person?
9. Is this different from the way you perceive yourself and if so, which is the real you?
10. Has this changed since you were last in a managerial position?
11. Do you still see yourself as a football manager/coach? Do you think this may change and if so what would make you change this perception of yourself?
12. Do you think your experiences of leaving football clubs has affected you as a person?

When the managerial merry-go-round stops.

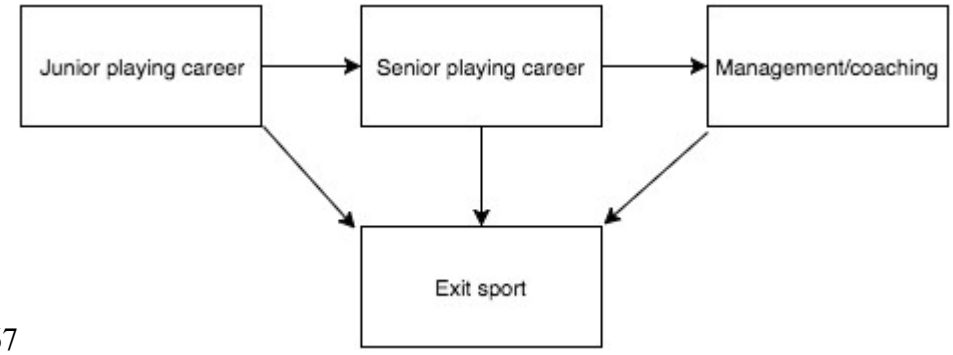

Fig. 1: Typical exit points in sport.

[i] From herein referred to simply as football.
[ii] Pseudonyms are used throughout and some details are kept purposefully vague to maintain confidentiality.