

It's sort of hard to draw the line

Parental influence in the junior Australian football experience:

The voices of children, parents and coaches

Sam Elliott

Bachelor of Health Science/Bachelor of Secondary Education

Bachelor of Education (Honours 1A)

Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

School of Education

Faculty of Education, Humanities and Law

Flinders University

March 2014

Declaration of authorship

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

Signed Date

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my parents, Margaret and Christopher, who were the most supportive and encouraging sport-parents.

Acknowledgements

In completing this thesis I have had unconditional support and encouragement from many people, for which I am forever grateful. This has been a challenging and often difficult journey and without the support of the following people I would not have completed my PhD.

It goes without saying that the first person I wish to acknowledge and thank is my supervisor Professor Murray Drummond. Since meeting Murray in 2009 as a prospective Honours candidate, he has been an inspiring mentor, teacher and colleague. Murray's support, advice and guidance as a supervisor and friend have been invaluable.

I would also like to thank my associate supervisor, Dr Claire Drummond, for her support and encouragement over the past five years. In addition to providing me with the confidence to pursue a PhD, Claire has always been a supportive influence in my development as a teacher and researcher.

I am also grateful for the advice, guidance and support of fellow academics Dr Lynda Norton, Dr Shane Pill, Dr Kate Ridley and Russell Brown. From character references for scholarship applications to teaching opportunities within their topics, they have each made a significant contribution, both personally and professionally, during my time in the doctoral program.

Thanks also to my current and former postgraduate colleagues whom I have shared this journey with. In particular, Stefania, you have been an outstanding colleague and friend from the beginning and I am truly grateful for your support and encouragement along the way.

I would also like to thank my fiancée, Emily, for her patience, understanding and willingness to ride the highs and lows of this journey with me.

To my Mum and Dad, my sister Jessica, my Pop and late Nan, who have each in their own way given me the strength and courage to persevere with this thesis, I thank you.

Lastly, but certainly by no means least, to the many children, parents and coaches whose experiences are reflected in this thesis, I am truly grateful for your willingness to participate in the research and share your stories about sport with me.

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List of key words and abbreviations

Abbreviation	Definition
ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
GPA	Grade Point Average
NJSP	National Junior Sport Policy
ASC	Australian Sports Commission
SES	Socioeconomic Status
AFL	Australian Football League
DMSP	Developmental Model of Sport Participation
AGT	Achievement-Goal Theory
SDT	Self-Determination Theory
CAQDAS	Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software
U12	Under 12
U14	Under 14
U15	Under 15
U16	Under 16
U18	Under 18
SANFL	South Australian National Football League
Junior sport	The organisation and management of sport (and pre-sport activities) for young people aged from five to 19 years
Australian Football	A contact sport played between two teams of eighteen players on a grassed field, typically played in Australia

Abstract

In Australia, sport remains a popular vehicle for physical activity accumulation and a culturally significant aspect of our nation's identity. Sport is widely associated with a range of physical, social and psychological health benefits in children. The importance of keeping children involved in sport is therefore imperative to encouraging physically active lifestyles throughout childhood and into young adulthood. Among other influential factors such as coaches and peers, the role of parents in this regard is crucial. However, a persistent litany of poor parental behaviour in the Australia news media has contributed to growing discussions about the influence of parents in children's sport. According to a majority of these largely unchallenged reports, junior Australian football represents a central context for the emergence of what has been coined by the media as the 'ugly parent syndrome.' In spite of this, few studies have investigated this socio-cultural aspect of children's sport in the junior Australian football setting. Furthermore, there is very little evidence in the literature of research that has explored this issue from the perspectives of those most intimately involved in the sport experience; that is, parents, children and coaches. Using a collective-case study research design and a sociological framework (social constructionism), the primary aim of this inquiry was to understand how parents influence the junior Australian football experience. Twenty focus groups and 11 individual interviews with 102 participants were conducted to explore the contemporary influence of parents across remote, regional and metropolitan South Australia. Four dominant themes emerged, including 'promoting participation', 'game day', 'the contemporary coach' and 'football culture'. The findings from this study provide a rich account of the sport-parenting concept in junior Australian football, revealing that numerous examples of positive

parental influence exist. However, the findings also indicate that beyond merely inappropriate behaviour during competition, parents also have a high potential to negatively influence the overall sport experience. Drawing upon social constructionism, an analysis of the findings indicates that there are clear social and cultural imperatives that play a role in reinforcing, maintaining and perpetuating various levels of parental influence in the junior Australian football context. The influence of broader society and culture, as well as the historical construction of Australian football, plays a role in normalising and acculturating sport-oriented behaviours and attitudes that do not necessarily enhance the participatory experience. The findings of this thesis have clear implications for sport policy, professional development, and the delivery of organised sport programs.

