

It's sort of hard to draw the line

Parental influence in the junior Australian football experience:

The voices of children, parents and coaches

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Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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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.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Introduction

News reports (for example, O'Connell, 2011) and international research (Goldstein & Iso-Ahola, 2008) have indicated increasing concerns that parental behaviour at children's sport events may be problematic, yet limited evidence from an Australian context contributes to this discussion. Australia boasts a longstanding and steady rate of children's sport participation, and junior Australian football remains one of the highest sporting preferences for young children across the national landscape (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2012). However, within junior Australian football, there are also concerns that many parents negatively influence children's sport by demonstrating poor attitudes and behaviours. This is problematic for the immediate sport experience, and also for the underpinning philosophy of junior sport in Australia, in which the notions of fun and enjoyment are situated at the heart of the participatory experience. This study is an investigation into parental influence in the junior Australian football experience. This chapter will discuss the background to the study, an introduction to sport in Australia, an introduction to Australian sport policy, and the perpetuation of problematic parental behaviour in junior Australian football from a news media perspective. This chapter will also discuss the aims and purpose of the inquiry, the significance of the study and the thesis outline.

Background to the study

During my childhood, I was fortunate to play a number of sports such as tennis, basketball, and tee-ball (a modified version of baseball), but Australian football was

always my passion. More often than not, my after-school and weekend activities would involve kicking the football with my neighbours, friends, and often my parents. Some of my fondest childhood memories include kicking the football with both my mum and dad at the local oval or even at the front of our house. I can recall numerous occasions when dad would kick the football high into the air, making it extremely difficult to ‘mark’ (a football term for catching), resulting in some amusing game play between us. There were also many times when my mum would kick the football with me in front of the house, highlighting her presence in my early years of sport. At the age of seven, I played my first game of competitive junior Australian football for St Paul’s Primary School in the regional city of Mount Gambier. I remember the excitement of lacing my ‘Lotto’ brand football boots and moulding my mouth guard in hot water for the first time. When I held my first mark and executed my first kick in a competitive game, my love and adoration for the sport was confirmed. I can recall the intrinsic ‘high’ from playing my first game – something I still experience as a player in the senior (adult) competition. As I moved from the under 9s to the under 11s, I began to notice the important role that my mother and father played during games. Often my mother would support my involvement by attending games and watching me play from the comfort of the family car; my father would usually assume a more ‘hands-on’ role and volunteer with goal umpiring, scoring or time-keeping. Other parents would help by coaching or preparing oranges for children to eat during the intermission of play. However, as I moved beyond school football and into the local competition, I began to notice that not all parents were necessarily supportive or encouraging. I can recall a game as a 12 year old involving one parent who openly criticised his son and his teammates for failing to make a good decision within the context of the game. This parent then

proceeded to point fingers, argue with the team coach, and swear at players while pacing up and down the side of the oval, demonstrating his discontent. Although this incident suggested that not all parents positively contribute to an enjoyable sport experience, my passion for the game was undeterred. Nonetheless, I was somewhat concerned for the son of this particular parent.

I soon developed into a leader and age-group representative in South Australia and Victoria, and began to play senior football as a 16 year old. Along the way, I achieved one premiership medal, two league best and fairest awards, and numerous leadership roles, demonstrating my commitment, dedication, and passion for the game. I look back fondly on my parents as a constant source of support, advice, and encouragement throughout what seemed to be a rapid climb in my development in Australian football. They not only fulfilled important parental roles for my own sport development, they also used sport to help me learn from disappointment, respectfully celebrate success, and enjoy sport for more than merely the competitive rhetoric. It was this passion and success in sport that that led me to pursue a career as a physical educator, and subsequently, an academic in the area of sport, health and physical activity.

Toward the end of my undergraduate studies in 2009, I grappled with the choice of pursuing an immediate teaching career in physical education or exploring further postgraduate opportunities. As I contemplated the advantages and disadvantages of both pathways, I came across a newspaper article on ‘ugly’ parental behaviour in junior Australian football. The author stated that many parents were ‘ruining’ children’s enjoyment of junior Australian football by emphasising the importance of individual and team success. I began to question what it is about children’s sport,

particularly junior Australian football, that would lead parents to behave in a way that negatively impacts the overall experience, and how they come to act appropriately or inappropriately in the sport context. I also considered what appeared to be an increase in news media reports around poor parental behaviour despite recent developments in sport policy advocating good behaviour in children's sport. The emergence of this article proved the catalyst for my interest in children's sport and how parents influence the junior Australian football experience. I was unaware at the time how the emergence of this newspaper article would greatly impact my career pathway by allowing me to investigate issues in junior Australian football as a vehicle for Honours and doctoral research.

I come to this research, then, with a background as a trained physical education teacher with a passion for sport, health and physical activity. I have an Honours degree, which received First Class, on self-perceived parental involvement in junior Australian football, which has provided an important platform for pursuing further research around parental influence in the junior Australian football experience. I am a fan, player, and consumer of all things relating to Australian football, with a particular interest in the socio-cultural aspects of sport participation, and have some understanding of the political, economic, and social aspects that impact on engagement. However, I am not a parent, coach, or child in the contemporary sport experience, and therefore have limited understanding, beyond personal experiences from 20 years ago, of parental influence in popular sporting contexts such as junior Australian football.

The benefits of sport participation

An overwhelming body of evidence indicates that sport participation engenders a range of potential benefits (Fraser-Thomas, Côté, & Deakin, 2005). For children in particular, sport offers a multitude of developmental outcomes that may impact on attitudes towards physical activity across the lifespan. While some authors claim that the benefits of sport on positive youth development requires further research from a community civic engagement perspective (Coakley, 2011), the bio-physical, social and psychological outcomes that can result from sport participation are well documented (Hamilton & White, 2010).

Bio-physical health benefits

Despite recent evidence suggesting that the obesity 'epidemic' is plateauing rather than increasing exponentially (Olds, Tomkinson, Ferrar, & Maher, 2010), regular participation in sport and physical activity remains an important aspect of promoting healthy lifestyles. Many parents and children argue that by participating in sport, a desirable level of fitness can be obtained (Hamilton & White, 2010). This perception is supported by studies that have linked regular participation in sport and physical activity with decreased risks of developing preventable lifestyle diseases (Clemmens & Hayman, 2004; Tremblay & Willms, 2003) and the promotion of healthy weight management and control (Hamilton & White, 2010). Such benefits are more easily perceived by active participants rather than non-active participants (Jambor, 1999). Furthermore, Malina (2009) and Fraser-Thomas, Côté, and Deakin (2005) argue that regular sport participation can benefit the maintenance of muscular-skeletal functioning and the development of fundamental motor skills. Active people also benefit from higher levels of health-related fitness and are at lower risk of developing

numerous disabling medical conditions than inactive people (Janssen, 2007). However, beyond these physical health benefits, sport participation may also improve dietary behaviours among youth. For example Taliaferro, Rienzo, and Donovan (2010) found that children participating in sport were more likely to demonstrate healthier eating habits, and more likely to engage in additional vigorous physical activity than children who do not participate in sport. Similarly, sport participation has been linked with improved dietary behaviours and lower levels of drug and other health-harming behaviours (Elliot et al., 2004; Michaud & Suris, 2006).

Psychological and social benefits

While sport participation is commonly associated with a range of biophysical health outcomes, a multitude of psychological and social health benefits can also be gained (Eime, Young, Harvey, Charity, & Payne, 2013). Eime et al. (2013) conducted a systematic review of the psychological and social benefits of participation in sport for children and adolescents, and concluded that greater social competence, confidence, emotional wellbeing and self-esteem were strongly associated with sport participation. This is consistent with previous studies that have linked enhanced self-esteem (Slutzky & Simpkins, 2009), improved confidence (Thompson, Rehman, & Humbert, 2005) and greater emotional wellbeing (Fox, 1999; Snyder & Spreitzer, 1974) with participation in sport and physical activity.

Child and adolescent sport participation has also been associated with fewer depressive symptoms, a decrease in suicidality, enhanced mental health and improved life satisfaction (Bailey, 2006; Eime et al., 2013). Furthermore, there have been numerous studies that have positively associated sport participation with the

concepts of resilience, self-control, character development and connectedness (for example, Bartko & Eccles, 2003; Findlay & Coplan, 2008; Zarrett et al., 2009). Research also suggests that sustained involvement in sport can significantly decrease anxiety in shy children (Findlay & Coplan, 2008). Similarly, Ullrich-French and McDonough (2012) claim that long-term participation in physical activity positively increases self-worth and hope.

From a social health perspective, one of the most widely recognised benefits of sport participation is the development of new and existing friendships (Wright, Brown, Muir, Rossi, & Zilm, 1999). Within team sports in particular, friendship development is a common and widely valued aspect of participation (McCarthy, Jones, & Clark-Carter, 2008), as it provides children with a source of enjoyment and intrinsic motivation, which lead to continuation (Fraser-Thomas, Côté, & Deakin, 2008; Goral, 2010; Kirk & MacPhail, 2003; Ullrich-French & Smith, 2006). For example, Kirk and MacPhail (2003) note that peers exerted a dual influence in establishing and consolidating ‘tight knit’ friendships in addition to encouraging children’s participation in sport. Additionally, Ullrich-French and Smith (2006) studied the influence of parents and peers on sport motivational outcomes of 10- to 14-year old soccer participants, and concluded that children with at least one ‘highly positive social relationship’ in sport experienced greater enjoyment, self-determined motivation and self-perceived competence.

Sport participation can also encourage social interactions between interracial peers, improve attitudes toward interracial and political issues (Hartmann, Sullivan, & Nelson, 2011), and foster positive interactions among children of varying ages and performance abilities (Light, 2010a). Research by Nathan et al. (2013) concurs,

suggesting that children can positively enhance their peer, cross-cultural and pro-social relationships through organised sporting programs. Furthermore, sport can foster the development of moral values such as social connectedness and empathy with peers (Holt, Sehn, Spence, Newton, & Ball, 2011). In addition to the development of peer friendships, sport can also promote the formation of positive relationships with parents and other adults involved in sport (Holt, Kingsley, Tink, & Scherer, 2011; McCarthy & Jones, 2007; Sandford, Duncombe, & Armour, 2008; Wiersma & Fifer, 2008). Involvement in sport has also been shown to develop positive sportsperson behaviours (Dubois, 1986; Wiersma & Fifer, 2008).

Even from an academic perspective, research suggests that sport may be beneficial for youth showing signs of disaffection and antisocial behaviour, and can lead to greater engagement in school and improved academic performance (Sandford et al., 2008). Given that improved physical fitness has been positively associated with improved academic performance in Mathematics and English (Chomitz et al., 2009), sport also appears to be an important variable for student learning. For girls in particular, sport participation has been found to benefit mathematics and reading in primary school (Carlson et al., 2008). Linder (1999) agrees, claiming that self-perceived high achieving students participate in sport and physical activity more frequently than self-perceived low achieving students. Similarly, Fox et al. (2010) recently investigated the relationship between physical activity, team sport and academic performance, and concluded that participation in team sport was positively associated with improved grade-point-averages (GPA) among middle and secondary school students.

Although there are some concerns that the potential benefits of sport participation are not well understood, especially by parents (Velardo, Elliott, Filiault, & Drummond, 2010), the evidence clearly indicates that sport engenders a high potential benefit for children's development and holistic health. These benefits are particularly significant in Australia, where most young children grow up having experienced some degree of exposure to sport (Light, 2008). It is consequently important to provide children with an enjoyable sport experience so that they wish to maintain their involvement throughout childhood and adolescence. The importance of sustained participation in organised sport cannot be underestimated, given that attitudes and behaviours established during childhood are a strong precursor for physical activity in adulthood (Kjonniksen, Fjortoft, & Wold, 2009).

Sport in Australia

Sport is a pervasive and influential aspect of culture and society in Australia. This notion is central to claims that Australians construct personal and national identity in, through and from sport (Stewart, Nicholson, Smith, & Westerbeek, 2004), and underpins the perception that Australians are characteristically 'obsessed' with sport tradition (Drummond & Pill, 2011). This perception is further supported by Australia's successful bids to (co-)host the 2015 Asian Football Confederation 'Asian Cup' and the 2018 Commonwealth Games, underlining this country's international reputation as a sporting nation. Winning the rights to host mass sporting events cannot be underestimated given the potential influence in promoting nationwide involvement in sport and physical activity. Wellings, Datta, Wilkinsion, and Petticrew (2011) claim that global sporting events represent a real potential catalyst for improving population adherence to physical activity by reviving the

social and structural environments that promote participation. Similarly, Shipway (2007) argued that the 2012 London Olympic Games not only provided a potential 'hype' for business, trade and tourism sectors, but also an incentive to modify attitudes toward physical activity, potentially resulting in increased sport participation as part of an active and healthy lifestyle. While some argue that the impact of mass sporting events on sport participation remains largely rhetorical (Murphy & Bauman, 2007; Weed et al., 2009), one study found that novice cyclists significantly increased their number of bicycle rides in the month following a mass community cycling event (Bowles, Rissel, & Bauman, 2006). Given the upcoming sporting calendar, it is not surprising, then, that sport continues to form a prominent aspect of Australian society and culture, particularly at a community level.

This is further reflected in the latest national data indicating that approximately 2.6 million (66%) children aged between five and 14 currently participate in an organised sport or physical leisure time activity (ABS, 2012). While participatory rates have remained steady in recent times, the order of sport preference among boys and girls has shifted marginally. Only five years ago, Olds, Dollman, and Maher (2009) reported that soccer, Australian football, dance and basketball comprise the highest sport preferences among young boys and girls, however the latest national data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics indicate that swimming recorded highest participation, followed by dance, soccer and Australian football (ABS, 2012).

In South Australia, participation in Australian football ranks most highly, closely followed by swimming and netball (Australian Sports Commission, 2011). Recent South Australian data indicated that approximately 30,000 children and youth aged between eight and 18 years were involved in junior Australian football (Hopkins,

2011). This should not be understated given Australian football's historical struggle for survival in the 1940s due to a large European migrant population devoted to soccer (Whimpress & League, 1983). According to Whimpress and League (1983), the turning point for South Australian football occurred in the years between 1945 and 1965 with the introduction and growth of a Saturday morning schoolboys competition. Current participatory trends therefore suggest that Australian football has grown from a social and cultural perspective, symbolises a longstanding and historical tradition for the state. Consequently, Australian football remains a popular sport choice in South Australia and across the national landscape, corroborating Light's (2004) claims that it is a uniquely and culturally Australian.

While active involvement remains the preeminent form of sport participation, there is currently an emerging mode of sport engagement in Australia, evidenced by the growing popularity of 'fantasy' sport participation (an online team-management game) and the rising interest in more extreme sports such as skating, martial arts, rock climbing and variations of surfing and skiing (Hajkowicz, Cook, Wilhelmseder, & Boughen, 2013; Stewart, et al., 2004). In particular, the increasing interest in 'fantasy' sport such as 'Super Coach' – an Australian football-based game where participants create teams based on the performance of 'real' players and compete against each other on a weekly basis – has encouraged some educational settings to integrate fantasy sport participation into the school curriculum as a means for literacy learning (for example, Apperley & Beavis, 2011). Moreover, it is anticipated that the rise of extreme and alternative sports will shape the Australian sport sector over the next 30 years and influence sport policy, participation and retention, and investment in established organised sports (Hajkowicz et al., 2013). Nonetheless, it is clear that sport participation in all forms has a central place in Australian culture and society,

supporting Stewart and colleagues' (2004) assertion that Australians take sport seriously and are emotionally invested in elite and community level participation.

Australian sport policy

It is important to consider the role of sport policy in children's sport, especially given the importance of establishing philosophical boundaries that impact the delivery of a successful sport program. Not only does policy provide a 'blueprint' for an anticipated sport experience, it recognises the critical role of sport providers, including parents, in shaping the overall experience. For example, the National Junior Sport Policy (NJSP) (Australian Sports Commission [ASC], 1994) states that all junior sport activities should be enjoyable and 'free from undue adult pressure and demands' (p. 9). Furthermore, in order for children to receive the greatest benefit from sporting activity, the NJSP states that parents and guardians *should*:

- Encourage children to participate, without forcing them to do so.
- Focus on effort and performance rather than on the outcome. Never ridicule or yell at a child for making a mistake or losing an event.
- Encourage children to always play according to the rules.
- Be models of good sports behaviour for children to copy.
- Be courteous in their communication with players, coaches, officials and administrators.
- Support all efforts to remove verbal and physical violence from sporting activities.

(ASC, 1994, p. 16)

The NJSP is consistent with other sport policies that advocate the importance of children's safety in sport. For example, from a child protection perspective, policy states that junior sport and recreation should foster 'an environment where every child has the right to be safe from harm at all times ... free of bullying, harassment and abuse' (Department for Families and Communities, 2008, p. 4). Similarly, from an organised sport perspective, junior sport should be characterised by a safe physical, social, and cultural environment for children, parents and coaches to benefit (ASC, 2003). The emphasis on children's safety and wellbeing is also evident in sport-specific policies such as the junior Australian football policy entitled 'AFL Kids First'. The AFL Kids First framework is essentially an instructional code for parental involvement in children's sport, encouraging parents to:

- Remember that children play sport for their enjoyment, not yours.
- Encourage children to participate – do not force upon them.
- Focus on the child's efforts and self-esteem rather than whether they win or lose.
- Encourage children to always participate according to the rules.
- Never ridicule or yell at a child for making a mistake or for the team losing a game.
- Remember that children learn best by example – applaud the efforts of all players in both teams.
- Support all efforts to remove verbal and physical abuse from sporting activities.

- Show appreciation of volunteer coaches, officials and administrators, without whom your child could not participate.
- Respect umpires' decisions and teach children to do likewise.
- Remember that smoking and the consumption of alcohol are unacceptable at junior sport.

(Australian Football League, 2010)

Although the broad focus of all junior sport policies are consistent, by design, sport policy is founded on the assumption that there is a collective understanding of what constitutes appropriate and inappropriate behaviour. The terms 'support' and 'encourage' are regularly used in sport policy, yet varying degrees of support may exist within different sport activities. For example, it is common etiquette in tennis to avoid 'cheering' during a point, while 'cheering' in junior Australian football is socially constructed as appropriate spectator behaviour during competition. It may therefore be problematic that some parental behaviours are not universally appropriate across the wide suite of children's sport. Furthermore, reviewing sport policy provokes questions around its effectiveness. While sport policy is arguably an important mechanism for promoting positive behaviour during competition, current media reports from an Australian context suggest that there is a clear disconnect between sport policy and the actual sport experience.

The Australian news media

Lindstrom Bremer (2012) states that while most parents support children and do not exert a negative influence, evidence of problematic parental behaviour in children's sport persists in the media. Such claims are consistent with the Australian context, in

which the media have played a significant role in highlighting issues associated with parents in children's sport. This attention has revolved around the axes of poor parental behaviour and its negative impact on children's participatory experience. Indeed, the media has often been a catalyst for scholarly research into parents in children's sport (for example, Omli & Wiese-Bjornstal, 2011), yet it remains an understudied area from an Australian perspective. In the absence of adequate research, and despite the sensationalistic nature of news media, it is important to acknowledge that the Australian media has played a crucial role in bringing to light potential issues surrounding parents in sport. However, it must also be noted that these reports have long gone unchallenged in attempting to understand parental influence in children's sport in Australia (Elliott & Drummond, 2013), thereby highlighting the importance of the current study and its contribution to broader discussions surrounding the sport-parenting phenomenon. For these reasons, and to locate the research problem embedded at the heart of this inquiry, it is important to consider the way that the media portrays parents in sport.

The term 'ugly parent syndrome' is now a standard reference point in the media to describe negative parental behaviour in children's sport (for example, Gill, 2007; Lyon, 2003; van den Nieuwenhof, 2005). Although concerns around parents in children's sport have endured for over a decade (for example, Lyon, 2003), media interest in this issue arguably peaked in 2009 following successive reports of 'ugly parenting' in the junior Australian football context. For example, Cooper (2009) and Strong (2009) both reported 'violent brawls' involving parents during games of under 12 Australian football. Cooper (2009) claimed that the parents involved were 'punching, kicking, screaming and pulling hair' of other parents and children. Mitchell and Harris (2009) also reported that a group of 'furious' parents entered the

playing field and confronted a junior footballer in reaction to a previous incident between opposing players. Moreover, Buttler and Flower (2009) reported a case involving parental assault and abuse toward other parents in the context of junior Australian football. Similarly, in under 12 rugby, Haynes and Campion (2009) reported violence and sideline ‘fighting’ among ‘30’ parents in which it was alleged that a parent lost consciousness and a child suffered ‘severe’ physical injuries as a result. Significantly, however, reports of parental abuse toward umpires and spectators in junior Australian football have continued to emerge (Dole, 2011; Flower, 2010; Millar, 2010; Spence, 2012), incidents of parental violence appear to have increased (Anonymous, 2011; Beck, 2011; Chambers, 2010; Dowsley & Harris, 2010; Fuller, 2010), and claims of parental aggression toward children (O’Connell, 2011; Wilson, 2011) have contributed to a growing perception that many parents are negatively influencing the junior sport experience. While a level of circumspection is warranted, it is clear that sport-parenting from an Australian perspective warrants academic attention.

Purpose of the study

This study will focus on parental influence in children’s sport from an Australian, socio-cultural perspective. While the notion of ‘sport-parenting’ has been investigated internationally, little scholarly evidence from an Australian context exists (Elliott & Drummond, 2013). Junior Australian football remains one of the most popular sport activities among boys and girls, but is ubiquitously linked to negative parental behaviour in the media. Given the importance of early sport experiences for lifelong motivation and continuation in sport and physical activity, it is critical to address issues surrounding parents in sport to ensure that sport is viewed

as a positive endeavour and not a negative experience for children. The purpose of this study is therefore to explore how parents influence the junior Australian football experience.

Aims

The aim of the study is to explore parental influence in the junior Australian football experience from the perspectives of those most intimately involved.

Research objectives

1. To develop an understanding of the ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ aspects of parental involvement in the junior Australian football experience.
2. To explore the ‘multiple perspectives’ and meanings attached to junior Australian football participation.
3. To understand how socially constructed parental behaviours are developed, maintained and perpetuated within the junior Australian football experience.
4. To identify key issues and challenges currently pervading the junior Australian football experience.

Significance

Research and scholarly commentary on parents in children’s sport can be traced back to the 1970s (i.e., Brower, 1979), however, there remains a limited contribution to this discussion from an Australian perspective (Elliott & Drummond, 2013). This oversight is important and is central to the argument posited by Wheeler (2011) and Wiersma and Fifer (2008) for a wider cultural and contextual exploration of the sport-parenting paradigm. In this way, the current study makes an important

contribution to the literature by generating insight into the nature of parental influence in an understudied context, and thus entering the broader debate on sport-parenting.

This study is also significant because it employs a social constructionist theoretical perspective to view the nature of parental influence. Although social constructionism has been used in the field of sport and masculinity (Drummond, 2001; Drummond, 2002), it has only recently been employed in the field of sport-parenting research (Elliott & Drummond, 2011, 2013). Indeed, most of the sport-parenting literature emerges from a psychological discipline (for example, Côté & Fraser-Thomas, 2007; Fry & Gano-Overway, 2010; Holt, Tamminen, Black, Mandigo, & Fox, 2009). However, this study may offer new perspective for understanding the social, cultural and historical constructions of children's sport, which may help illuminate the ways in which parents shape the junior Australian football experience.

After exhausting the major academic databases for sport research, including Informit, Scopus, AUSPORT, and SPORTDiscus, it is also important to note that very few qualitative inquiries have accounted for the collective views of parents, children, and coaches on the topic of parental influence in sport. Wolfenden and Holt (2005) examined players', parents' and coaches' perceptions of talent development in elite junior tennis within a qualitative research design, but included only nine participants in the study. It is important for additional research to canvass multiple perspectives on the topic of sport-parenting given that parents and children's views are not always congruent (Kanters, Bocarro, & Casper, 2008). The same can be argued for coaches who are uniquely positioned at the heart of children's sport. The findings from this study may therefore renew dialogue around the nature and quality of parental

involvement in children's sport and provide a necessary impetus for conceiving, building and implementing contextually appropriate sport policy that advocates positive parental engagement. In this way, policy makers, sport providers and educators may be better positioned to enhance the aspects of participation that encourage positive experience, while minimising those aspects that negatively impact children's sport.

Thesis outline

This chapter has provided a background of the important factors relating to the research, as well as the purpose and significance of the study. The ensuing chapters will examine the current literature surrounding the factors that impact children's sport, including a thematic review of the current research on sport-parenting. The theoretical framework chapter will detail the methodological underpinnings of this study, including the theory of social constructionism. A conceptual framework will also be discussed in order to further situate this investigation. Following a discussion of the theoretical and conceptual aspects of the research, the research methods will also be described. The findings of this research are organised into themes, each with several subthemes in relation to the parental influence in the junior Australian football experience. Following the themes is a discussion relating to the current literature and theoretical framework underpinning the study. Finally, based on the findings of the study, conclusions and recommendations will be offered.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature review

Introduction

This chapter will review the main influential factors that impact the junior sport experience (see Figure 1 over). Specifically, it will discuss socioeconomic status, demographic location, peers and coaches, and how these factors impact the immediate and longer-term experience of children's sport. While it is beyond the scope of the study itself to explore the influence of each variable, it is important to understand the range of factors that influence sport participation, enjoyment, and potential withdrawal. This chapter will review the literature on parents as the most significant influence in the junior sport experience. Specifically, this chapter will highlight some conceptual concerns in the literature relating to sport-parenting in order to situate the current study. Based on the notions of role models, verbal reinforcement, the competitive sport climate, and investment, a thematic approach for analysing the literature is proposed. Finally this chapter will demonstrate the lack of evidence surrounding parental influence in sport from an Australian perspective by drawing on the limited scholarly evidence available and highlight some key areas within the sport-parenting literature that lack coherence.

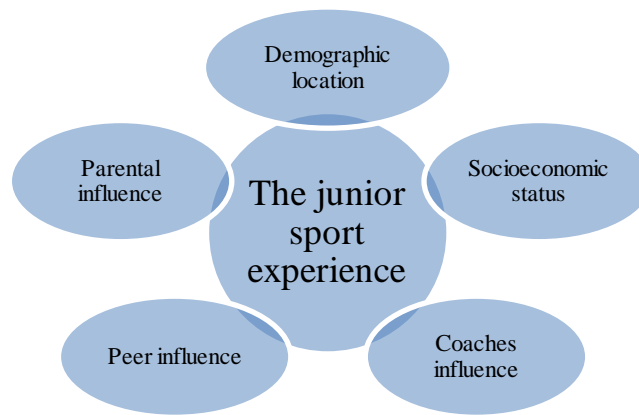


Figure 1: The chief factors influencing the junior sport experience.

Main influences on the junior sport experience

Socioeconomic status

Socioeconomic status (SES), or socioeconomic position (SEP), is widely recognised as a chief determining factor on sport participation (Hardy, Kelly, Chapman, King, & Farrell, 2010; Holt, Kingsley, et al., 2011; Humbert et al., 2006; Olds et al., 2009; Searle & Jackson, 1985). Indeed, early research suggests that while low socioeconomic status may not necessarily be a deterrent, it can be a barrier for many families and children in accessing and maintaining involvement in organised sport (Kirk et al., 1997a; Kremarik, 2000; Searle & Jackson, 1985). Although SES may not be a salient issue among affluent, high-income families, recent research has found that parents in low-income families are less likely to spend money on footwear, uniforms and coaching lessons associated with children's sport (Hardy et al., 2010). Research has also found that sporting expenses can influence parental decision making in favour of sport activities that are accessible and thus affordable for families (Hardy et al., 2010). In some high-cost sports such as youth hockey, the financial demands associated with children's sport can even contribute to permanent

attrition (Armentrout & Kamphoff, 2011), further highlighting the limiting influence of SES on sport participation.

Further studies have revealed that children from low SES backgrounds place a greater emphasis on and exhibit greater concern for sport expenses than children from high SES backgrounds (Humbert et al., 2006). This is consistent with Olds et al. (2009), who identify strong gradients between decreasing participation in sport and decreasing household income, suggesting that opportunities and experiences in children's sport are strongly determined by family socioeconomic status. Holt et al. (2011) also note that financial barriers restrict the capacity of children from low-income families to maintain long-term involvement in sport because many parents work multiple jobs and are therefore unable to meet travel and time commitments. This is significant given that early sport experiences lay an important experiential foundation for attitudes toward sport and physical activity into adulthood (Hirvensalo & Lintunen, 2011). Furthermore, in contrast to high educational attainment, low levels of educational attainment as an indicator of socioeconomic status is a strong predictor for low levels of exercise during adolescence and adulthood (Makinen et al., 2010). In this way, SES may not only influence the variety of sports accessible to children and the extent to which they can participate, but may also have broader health consequences that extend across the lifespan.

Wagner et al. (2004) and Raudsepp (2006) however, attempt to debunk the notion that SES influences sport participation, arguing that the junior sport experience is shaped by parental involvement more than, and sometimes regardless of socioeconomic status. This perspective echoes previous research that claims that children's participation in sport and physical activity is more strongly associated with

parental involvement rather than education and socioeconomic status (Yang, Telama, & Laakso, 1996). Furthermore, conjecture remains surrounding the universal influence of socioeconomic status as a determining factor for sport participation, particularly concerning gender. Despite overwhelming evidence from Canada (for example, Humbert et al., 2006; O'Loughlin, Paradis, Kishchuk, Barnett, & Renaud, 1999), the United States of America (Gordon-Larsen, McMurray, & Popkin, 2000), the United Kingdom (Henning Brodersen, Steptoe, Williamson, & Wardle, 2005), Germany (Lammle, Worth, & Bos, 2012), and Australia (Kavanagh et al., 2005), which establishes a strong correlation between socioeconomic status and participation in sport and physical activity, some studies have found that SES is a barrier for girls but not necessarily for boys (Dollman & Lewis, 2010; Goral, 2010; Hasbrook, 1986; Hirvensalo & Lintunen, 2011; Toftegaard-Stockel, Nielson, Ibsen, & Andersen, 2010). Hasbrook (1986) speculates that although sport participation is not associated with womanhood, it has become a societal expectation for boys regardless of background and social class. Similarly, Drummond (2002) claims that the sporting domain represents a site for the construction of masculine identity – a socio-cultural perspective which may explain why girls' sport participation is more strongly influenced by SES than boys (Dollman & Lewis, 2010). Nonetheless, it is important to recognise the role of socioeconomic status as an influential factor in some sport contexts with regards to immediate and ongoing participatory opportunities. It is therefore arguable that while a range of other factors can impact motivation and enjoyment, socioeconomic status has a clear potential to impact initial and ongoing sport opportunities for children.

Demographic location

The literature identifies demographic factors as an influential aspect in determining children's expertise, socialisation and development in sport. Despite evidence indicating that sport participation is greater among children living in capital cities than in regional and remote areas (Australian Sports Commission, 2011; Campagna et al., 2002; Olds et al., 2009), the literature also suggests that more favourable outcomes including sport socialisation, sport expertise and positive health-related attitudes are more prevalent among children living in smaller cities and rural areas. Carlson (1988) examined the role of demographic location on sport socialisation among a group of Swedish children involved in tennis and the impact of location on sport development. Retrospectively, Carlson found that more rural children achieved elite tennis status than children from urban areas, despite clear contextual differences in the junior sport experience. Furthermore, while a greater variety of sport activities were offered in urban areas, access to these sports was often very highly restricted. Although sport variety was limited in rural areas, greater opportunities existed for children to spontaneously engage in sport, which was posited as a chief factor that determined sport development and eventual expertise among urban and rural children.

More recently, Côté, MacDonald, Baker, and Abernethy (2006) assessed the significance of birth place on sport expertise in elite level American hockey, basketball, baseball and golf, and agreed that achieving high level sport expertise favours children from smaller cities and rural areas than larger cities. Specifically, they claim that smaller cities provide early sport experiences that are not matched by large cities, thereby explaining the clear over-representation of children from smaller cities in 'top flight' sport.

In addition to the development of expert sporting athletes, there is also an argument that smaller communities and remote areas are more conducive for promoting general sport participation. General engagement in physical activity and sport is significant given that most children will never reach the elite level of sport. However, it is likely that they will maintain some involvement in the physical culture of society through community sport. Casey, Eime, Payne, and Harvey (2009) support this view, suggesting that while the variety of sport options is limited in rural areas, most children develop a 'focused' understanding of the health and social benefits associated with sport participation, which therefore encourages the idea of sport and physical activity in their lives. This argument is consistent with research indicating that smaller communities may foster a more conducive context for youth sport participation, which can help lay the foundation for athlete development (Turnnidge, Hancock, & Côté, 2012). It is therefore conceivable that the junior Australian football experience in a metropolitan city may be distinct from a regional or rural community. This is significant, given that demographic location sport participation and family involvement remains an understudied area for academics, particularly in rural and non-metropolitan cities (Casey et al., 2009). Importantly however, it should be acknowledged that demographic location or 'place of development' certainly plays some role in children's sport development and participation.

Peer influence

Early research acknowledges that parents play an important role in shaping the early sporting experience, but names peers as equally significant (Greendorfer & Lewko, 1978). Over the last two decades, the literature has further reinforced the perspective that peers are a significant influence on children's enjoyment (or dissatisfaction) and

continuation (or discontinuation) in organised sport. For example, peer support was identified by Anderssen and Wold (1992) as a major factor in children's continued involvement in sport and leisure time physical activity. Similarly, in the school sport context, peer support (or a lack thereof) was found to strongly influence children's decisions to maintain or terminate participation in interscholastic sport (Martin, 1997).

More recently, research has indicated that positive peer relationships in the early years of sport impact fun, enjoyment and the formation of friendships, all of which provide participants with the intrinsic motivation necessary for continuation (McCarthy & Jones, 2007; McCarthy et al., 2008; Ullrich-French & Smith, 2006). Research has also shown that social peers, including friends, classmates and boyfriend/girlfriend relationships particularly influence sport-related behaviours during early adolescence (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2008; Keresztes, Piko, Pluhar, & Page, 2008).

Longitudinal studies (for example, Thompson, Humbert, & Mirwald, 2003) have also found that peer influence not only impacts short term participatory behaviours, but also physical activity behaviours in adulthood. However, a lack of understanding has surrounded the idea of 'peer support' and how peers specifically impact continuation behaviour. To some extent, McCarthy et al. (2008) addressed this paucity, claiming that 'team affiliation' and 'competitive excitement' were central to sport enjoyment among children, which in turn serves as a form of intrinsic motivation for sport continuation. Similarly, Fraser-Thomas and Côté (2009) interviewed 22 competitive youth swimmers and concluded that meaningful relationships among peers, consisting of sharing common goals and work ethics, were central to a positive sport

experience. Strachan, Côté and Deakin (2009) also found that small, but diverse groups of peer interactions through children's sport may not only enhance the experience, but may also lead to increased enjoyment and persistence in sport. Research also indicates that children's sport motivation is influenced by a range of competitive behaviours, collaborative behaviours, evaluative communications, and social relationships stemming from peer influence (Keegan, Spray, Harwood, & Lavalley, 2010).

It is also important to note that peers are not always a positive and supportive influence in the junior sport experience. For example, Goral (2010) reports that while most children recognise the importance of developing friendships through sport, often many children experience negative peer pressure leading to forced participation in, or dropout from sport. Vazou, Ntoumanis, and Duda (2005) also found that although peers can positively impact sport motivation by providing feedback, support for improvement, encouragement, and a sense of belonging and identity, peers can also form an entangled intra-team in conflict such as blaming others for poor performances, making negative comments, and undermining other interpersonal relationships between teammates. Similarly, Keegan et al. (2010) noted that peers can positively contribute to social relationships leading to heightened motivation, but also found that peers can exhibit highly competitive behaviours, contributing to a negative sport experience for many children. There are also concerns that peers can negatively influence sport behaviour and attitudes. Shields, LaVoi, Bredemeier, and Power (2007) surveyed 676 young male and female athletes involved in basketball, soccer, football, hockey, baseball, softball and lacrosse and found that peer relationships in children's sport can negatively influence poor sport behaviour such as making fun of an opponent. Specifically, it was purported that poor self-reported

sport behaviour was ‘significantly associated’ with what participants believed about the likelihood of teammates engaging in similar behaviour, further reinforcing the magnitude of peer influence in children’s sport. Again, this is concerning, especially given that underwhelming childhood experiences in sport can have implications for physical activity across the lifespan (Thompson, Rehman, & Humbert, 2005).

It is evident, then, that peers can positively and negatively impact sport behaviour, participation and enjoyment in children’s sport. While it is beyond the scope of the current study to explore the exclusive influence of peers in the junior Australian football experience, it is important to at least acknowledge peers as a critical factor in shaping the overall sport experience. However, it is also important to acknowledge that peers are a necessary voice in understanding the socio-cultural dimensions of organised sport, and particularly when exploring the role of parents in junior Australian football.

Coach influence

A recent AFL-commissioned research project exploring youth retention revealed that coaches play a vital role in the junior sport experience (Drummond, Agnew, Pill, & Dollman, 2013). As Kirk and MacPhail (2003) noted, coaches invariably position themselves at the sharp end of the club because they interact directly with children, parents, other club officials, and with each other. This role is not without its benefits. Indeed, research indicates that the most enjoyable aspect of being a coach in children’s sport is the reward or satisfaction associated with witnessing children’s development (Drummond et al., 2013; Kirk & MacPhail, 2003). For parents who are involved in coaching their own children, they experience the additional benefits of heightened social interactions and quality time with their children as well as

enjoyment derived from coaching new skills and values relating to sport (Weiss & Fretwell, 2005). Yet, being a sport coach is not always a positive endeavour. Hellstedt (1987) first intimated that conflict can emerge within the parent-coach-child triad where parents who are under- or over-involved in children's sport represent the highest conflict risk for coaches. Wiersma and Sherman (2005) have since supported this view, identifying a range of challenges for coaches relating to pedagogy, training and development, and dealing with negative parents. Research has also shown that many coaches experience difficulty negotiating negative emotional responses, conflict, pressure, high expectations, criticism for mistakes and unfair behaviour with children (Weiss & Fretwell, 2005). Furthermore, in a study of 13 USA swimming coaches, it was revealed that parents represent a significant difficulty for coaches by becoming overinvolved as a 'second coach' and by acting as a source of pressure toward children (Raedeke, Lunney, & Venables, 2002).

While the coaching role is undoubtedly as challenging as it is rewarding, coaches are also an influential factor on children's sport. Within the literature, there are particular concerns that coaches often place an excessive emphasis on winning through competitive behaviours and by creating a competitively-driven 'sport climate' (LaVoi & Stellino, 2008) or 'moral atmosphere' (Shields et al., 2007). Brower (1979) first expressed concerns that coaches have de-emphasised notions of fun and enjoyment for a greater focus on competitive success, contributing to the 'professionalisation' of children's sport. Siegenthaler and Leticia-Gonzalez (1997) state that this is especially problematic among coaches who experience difficulty in making the distinction between children's need for patience, acceptance and sensitivity, and their own need to emulate a professional coach. Despite children preferring sport climates in which improvement and equal treatment is most valued

(Vazou et al., 2005), the winning ideology has been central to research exploring the ways that coaches positively and negatively impact children's sport experience. For example, research has found that coaches who are perceived to encourage an 'ego-oriented' sport climate (i.e., a focus on winning and performance) are more likely to have children engage in illegitimate, dangerous and amoral behaviours toward opponents (Ommundsen, Roberts, Lemyre, & Treasure, 2003). Conversely, coaches who are perceived to encourage a mastery climate (i.e., self-referenced satisfaction) are more likely to have children demonstrate higher levels of moral functioning and are therefore less likely to intimidate an opponent, fake an injury or risk injuring an opponent (Ommundsen et al., 2003). This provides some insight toward understanding how coaches influence children's sport, and reaffirms previous research linking decreased enjoyment, poor sport performance and lower team morale with performance criticism and punitive coaching behaviours (Curtis, Smith, & Smoll, 1979; Gould, Feltz, Horn, & Weiss, 1982).

More recently, Shields, Bredemeier, LaVoi, and Power (2005) surveyed over 1000 parents, children and coaches from 10 sports across the United States and found that 8% of children were encouraged to cheat or hurt an opponent by coaches, while 4% of children also reported being kicked, hit, or slapped by a coach. Significantly, 8% of coaches admitted to making fun of children in their team. These findings corroborate previous research that has indicated that many parents and children are concerned with coach behaviour and the perception that they are 'too' focused on winning (Hastie, 1991). This perspective is further reinforced by a recent observational study of coaches' sideline behaviour, which reveals that approximately 21% of all coaches comments are negative, while 43% are instructional in nature (Walters, Schluter, Oldham, Thomson, & Payne, 2012).

The literature, however, also suggests that many coaches can exert a positive influence in children's sport. According to Fraser-Thomas, Côté, and Deakin (2005), coaches among parents and sport providers play an important role in delivering sport programs designed to promote positive youth development. Not only are coaches involved in the delivery of sport programs, they also model values and behaviours that are aligned with supporting children's holistic development. Furthermore, Casper (2006) noted that coaches are not only perceived to be a positive influence on enjoyment in youth tennis, but comprise an important influence in discouraging cheating performance behaviours. This adds some balance to understanding the influential role of coaches in junior sport, and underlines the potentially positive role they can play in children's sport experience.

Parental influence on the junior sport experience

Parents

While socioeconomic status, demographic factors, peers and coaches each make a substantive contribution to the overall sport experience, parents arguably comprise the major influence in children's sport. Early research identified parents as chief 'agents' in socialising children into sport (Greendorfer & Lewko, 1978; Sage, 1980; Snyder & Spreitzer, 1973; Spreitzer & Snyder, 1976). The influence of fathers was particularly noteworthy given the perception that they were more involved in children's sport than mothers. Greendorfer and Lewko (1978) were among the first authors to investigate the role of family, siblings and teachers on children's sport socialisation and conclude that fathers, but not mothers, are a significant predictor of children's sport involvement. Subsequent research has since supported this contention (for example, Kanters et al., 2008; Power & Woolger, 1994; Sage, 1980).

This may be explained from a historical and socio-cultural perspective given that the sporting domain represents a site for the construction of masculinity (Drummond, 2002; Trussell & Shaw, 2012). It is arguable that most fathers are familiar with sport culture and tradition, and may therefore feel more comfortable with child rearing practices in the sporting domain (Coakley, 2006).

While fathers are clearly a central aspect of understanding parental influence in children's sport, the importance of mothers should not be underestimated. Indeed, research has found that mothers not only influence children's self-perceived competence in sport (Jacobs & Eccles, 1992), but strongly influence motivation and continuation behaviour (Ullrich-French & Smith, 2006). A study conducted by Woolger and Power (2000) into children's intrinsic motivation in swimming reiterated the influential role of mothers in the junior sport experience, concluding that mothers' parenting practices, but not those of fathers, predicted children's intrinsic motivation for swimming continuation. Research has also found that mothers, but not fathers, comprise a crucial source of praise, feedback and emotional support in the junior sport experience (Wuerth, Lee, & Alfermann, 2004). Another study also revealed that children were dissatisfied with their mother's level of praise and understanding, suggesting that children prefer greater attention and involvement from mothers, thus highlighting the importance of mothers in the junior sport experience (Ede, Kamphoff, Mackey, & Armentrout, 2012).

Clearly, mothers and fathers comprise an important influential factor in children's sport. Although their roles and responsibilities can differ, two-parent families readily acknowledge the 'team' effort required by both parents to support children's sport (Knight & Holt, 2013). While this is not always the case in the context of elite level

youth sport (Keegan, Spray, Harwood, & Lavalley, 2014), at the community level there is evidence to suggest that both mothers and fathers act in the sport context following similar processes by demonstrating similar levels of praise and understanding toward children (Boiche, Guillet, Bois, & Sarrazin, 2011). Therefore, in pursuing greater understanding of parental influence, the current study will not ignore mothers or fathers, but rather conceptualise both as a collective ‘parental’ influence in the junior Australian football experience.

Conceptualising the role of parents

Although parents are a major influence on children’s sport participation (Siekanska, 2012; Taymoori, Berry, & Lubans, 2011), there has been considerable difficulty conceptualising their role in children’s sport. Early conceptualisations were based on Jon Hellstedt’s ‘Parental Involvement Continuum’ (Hellstedt, 1987, 1988, 1990, 1995). Hellstedt postulated that parental involvement in children’s sport falls onto a continuum from *under involvement*, through *moderate involvement*, to *over involvement*. Indications of under involvement may include a lack of attendance at games or events, a minimal financial investment, a lack of volunteerism, minimal interest and interaction with the coach, and little to no assistance in helping children set realistic goals. Moderate involvement refers to those parents who are supportive, help children set realistic goals, and financially support participation without being excessive. Over-involved parents demonstrate a high level of involvement, help set unrealistic goals for their children, and exhibit angry and dissatisfied behaviours if children do not perform to expectation. Stein, Raedeke and Glenn (1999) provide moderate support for the continuum, adding that parental involvement is a dynamic process where parents can increase, decrease, or make no changes to their

involvement in children's sport. However, they also challenge Hellstedt's typology of parental involvement, suggesting that the quality of parental involvement may be more important than quantity. Côté and Fraser-Thomas (2007) also claim that while the parental involvement continuum is 'useful', it provides little insight into the specific aspects of parental involvement that positively and negatively impact sport experience.

Conceptualising the role of parents in children's sport remains a complex and difficult challenge for academics. This 'minefield' has been exacerbated by the lack of agreement in the literature surrounding the conceptual role of parents in children's sport through which they can positively or negatively implicate the experience. Some studies have adopted the position that parents fulfil three fundamental roles as provider, interpreter, and role model (Fredricks & Eccles, 2004; Stuntz & Weiss, 2010). As provider, parents commit time, energy and financial resources that are necessary to enable participation. As interpreter, parental attitudes and beliefs not only normalise the sport experience, they also assist the socialisation process, which impacts children's enjoyment and self-perceived confidence. As role models, parents demonstrate and encourage the importance of physical activity and appropriate sport conduct. However, Omli and Wiese-Bjornstal (2011) interviewed 57 children involved in tennis in north-western USA and proposed that parents fulfil the role of the 'supportive parent', the 'demanding coach' or the 'crazed fan'. Alternatively, Woolger and Power (1993) suggested that there are three dimensions relating to sport-parenting, which include parental support, parental modelling and parental expectations. Numerous studies have even conceptualised parental roles based on quantitative instruments (i.e., the *Parental Involvement in Sport Questionnaire*) where the constructs of active involvement, praise and understanding, directive

behaviour, and pressure are the primary aspects of parental involvement (Boiche et al., 2011; Ede et al., 2012; Lee & MacLean, 1997; Wuerth et al., 2004).

These conceptual iterations not only demonstrate the lack of coherence in the literature, they fail to converge, and therefore offer little basis for organising, mapping, and understanding the sport-parenting literature. However, a dyadic approach has recently emerged, in which some studies have found that it is more appropriate to understand the role of parents based on polarising notions such as *support* or *pressure* (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2008; Kanters et al., 2008). Other studies in the context of tennis (Gould, Lauer, Rolo, Jannes, & Pennisi, 2008) and basketball (Arthur-Banning, Wells, Baker, & Hegreness, 2009) have explored parental influence and conceptualised the sport-parenting role based on the notion of *positive* and *negative* influence. Various studies have even considered the views of children, leading to the conceptualisation of *preferred* and *non-preferred* parental behaviours (Knight, Boden, & Holt, 2010; Knight, Neely, & Holt, 2011). Furthermore, in Turman's (2007) study of parental involvement in encouraging athlete continuation, the two parental roles that emerged were 'supporter/encourager' and 'teacher/mentor'. This dyadic trend has some merit in that it may help categorise the ambiguous aspects of sport-parenting into essentially 'good' and 'bad' tiers of parental involvement. It may also provide researchers an adaptable framework for comparing and contrasting the contemporary nature of sport-parenting across diverse sporting planes. However, a dichotomous approach does not necessarily provide greater coherence for understanding parental influence. Wheeler (2011) agrees, stating that there is a lack of clarity in the literature as to what, for example, parental 'support' and 'pressure' constitute, which may explain why no single conceptual

iteration stands alone as the preeminent framework for understanding the sport-parenting role.

A thematic approach has recently been adopted in the academic field of sport-parenting. Elliott and Drummond (2013) explored parental involvement in junior Australian football based on a thematic conceptualisation of sport-parenting, including the themes of investment, role modelling, verbal reinforcement, and the competitive sport climate. This supports the approach of this current study, given that (a) the themes emerged from the existing body of literature, and (b) the origins of Elliott and Drummond's research relates to parental involvement in the junior Australian football context – a distinction consistent with the current study. Although this iteration has not been widely adapted to date, none of the established conceptual views have yet gained adequate support in the literature to form one predominant framework for understanding the role of parents in organised sport. The following section will therefore review the literature on parental influence based on the themes of role modelling, verbal reinforcement, investment, and the competitive sport climate.

Role models

Parents occupy a considerable space in the junior sport experience. They are not only involved in the process of socialising children into sport, but are presented with numerous opportunities to attend training, events and competitions themselves. While many parents regard attending training as one of the most enjoyable aspects of the junior sport experience, they inadvertently assume great social responsibility as a visible role model (Fredricks & Eccles, 2004). As such, a heightened emphasis is given to parents in demonstrating, maintaining and reinforcing a model of

appropriate behaviour (Anderssen & Wold, 1992; LaVoi & Stellino, 2008). This cannot be understated, especially since research suggests that children frequently observe and imitate parental behaviours in the sport setting (Yang et al., 1996). Importantly, as role models, parents not only have the potential to impact children's appreciation for acceptable conduct within the sport context, but also socially-oriented attitudes and behaviours which may be transposed to contexts beyond the sporting domain (Fraser-Thomas & Côté, 2006; Hartmann et al., 2011; Kremer-Sadlik & Kim, 2007). This perspective was first discussed by Cruz et al. (1995), who state that there is a dual importance placed on parents in modelling behaviours that are not only appropriate for the youth sport context, but also for social engagements in the broader community.

More recent research has supported this perspective. On the one hand, studies have shown that parents who display appreciative behaviours towards children, coaches and umpires not only demonstrate good sportsmanship, but encourage positive citizenship values that can assist children in the school context (Sandford et al., 2008). On the other hand, numerous studies have found that parents who model amoral sport behaviour such as cheating, abuse and dishonesty are likely to observe similar conduct in their children's game play (Casper, 2006; Omli & LaVoi, 2009; Shields et al., 2005; Shields et al., 2007), thus underlining the magnitude of parents as role models in children's sport. This aspect of parental influence is highly pertinent given that many parents do not understand the consequences of their behaviour. Holt, Black and Tamminen (2007) illuminated this point in their investigation of parental behaviour in children's soccer in Canada. They observed that parents did not appear to understand that yelling at referees served to disadvantage children during games, supporting the assertion that not all parents

understand the responsibilities associated with the role modelling concept. The only caveat to this is in the talented youth sport context in which research indicates that parents display a solid awareness of their own influence on the attitudes and behaviours of young people (Domingues & Goncalves, 2013). Nonetheless, given that majority of children do not move beyond the community sport level, it is important to consider the role modelling paradigm as a significantly influential aspect of the sport-parenting role, presenting a research area that may benefit from greater academic attention.

The manner in which parental attitudes and behaviours are role modelled during the early sporting years can also impact children's sport and physical activity beyond childhood and adolescence. Thompson, Humbert, and Mirwald (2003) argue that childhood represents the optimal time to forge permanent attitudes toward physical activity, which may lead to lifelong participation. Numerous longitudinal studies support this contention, indicating that parents who role model positive attitudes and behaviours toward sport and physical activity are more likely to positively influence children's adherence to physical activity into adulthood (Richards, Williams, Poulton, & Reeder, 2007; Kjonniksen et al., 2009; Ornelas, Perreira, & Ayala, 2007; Telama et al., 2005; Vanreusel et al., 1997). Research has also found that parents who explicitly use their own behaviour to support and encourage children to be active positively contribute to children's continued involvement in physical activity (Davison, Cutting, & Birch, 2003). This aspect of parental influence is critical given that continuation is likely to lead to the development of physical competencies, which encourages children to access and actively engage in the physical culture of society (Kirk, 2005).

Longitudinal research, however, has also found that negative parental involvement during childhood is linked to physical inactivity in adulthood (Thompson et al., 2003), reinforcing the influence of role modelling in the early sporting years. Parents who are poor role models in the domestic setting as a result of family separation and dysfunction can overwhelm children in accessing and continuing in organised sport (Berger, O'Reilly, Parent, Seguin, & Hernandez, 2008). The literature also suggests that parents who role model athletic or voluntary behaviours in sport are highly likely (86%) to have children actively involved in organised sport; this drops to 36% for parents are not involved in organised sport (Kremarik, 2000). Similarly, one Spanish study found that children aged between 12 and 16 years are four times more likely to be physically inactive if their parents model sedentary behaviour (Sanz-Arazuri, Ponce-de-Leon-Elizondo, & Valdemoros-San-Emeterio, 2012).

It is clear within the literature that the notion of role modelling is an important thread relating to parental influence in children's sport. While there are a number of trajectories through the role modelling discourse concerning parental influence, the evidence suggests that implications can endure throughout the immediate experience and into adulthood. However, what constitutes being a positive role model is an area that requires further investigation, especially given that diverse sport settings may encourage different elements of role modelling behaviour. Furthermore, there remains a limited understanding of how parental role modelling in the domestic setting influences junior sport participation. By continuing to pay greater attention to parental influence in children's sport, it is possible that questions surrounding the notion of role modelling will be addressed.

Investment

The notion of investment is a critical aspect of parental influence in children's sport. Although it is well documented that parents make a significant logistical and emotional commitment to children's sport (Kirk et al., 1997b; Weiss & Hayashi, 1995; Wiersma & Fifer, 2008), parents also make substantial financial commitments to enable initial and ongoing opportunities in sport (Bhalla & Weiss, 2010; Jowett & Timson-Katchis, 2005; Stuntz & Weiss, 2010; Ullrich-French & Smith, 2009). In this way parents exert a considerable influence on sport experience via the provision of initial and ongoing participatory opportunities. However, there is a concern that such contributions can invite undesirable and inadvertent consequences for children's sport. As Kirk et al. (1997b) identified, parents often suffer financial pressures that extend beyond seasonal registration, uniform fees, and health care costs. Some sports require specific equipment, training costs and coaching fees to advance involvement. Research has consistently demonstrated that basic financial demands associated with children's sport pose significant difficulty for single-income and low socio-economic families to manage (Holt, Kingsley, et al., 2011; Kirk et al., 1997a; Searle & Jackson, 1985). Subsequently, many children from disadvantaged backgrounds may become marginalised or limited to certain physical activities (Kirk et al., 1997a). However, given that children's participation and achievement in sport is regarded as a socio-cultural measure of 'good parenting' (Coakley, 2006; Trussell & Shaw, 2012; Wheeler, 2011), many parents sacrifice aspects of their own lifestyle in order to meet financial demands. This for many families means that vacations, savings and normal family expenses are sacrificed in order to support children's sporting endeavours (Merkel, 2013). In certain cases, parents have even re-mortgaged their homes to support children involved in exclusive sport programs (Harwood & Knight, 2009).

Given the potential difficulties associated with financing children's sport for many families, it is therefore plausible that some parents may seek, and/or expect a participatory dividend to affirm their sacrificial contributions. Numerous studies lend support to this perspective. For example, a study of coaches' perceptions of parents in children's tennis success by Gould et al. (2008) found that while many parents were positive sources of encouragement, some parents referred to the investment ideology in an attempt to attain greater performance output. In particular, it was purported that many parents emphasise to children the need to work hard because 'they do not want to be wasting their money,' but managed to avoid pressuring children to win in return for their financial investment. Dorsch, Smith, and McDonough (2009) describe this notion as an 'emotional tie' resulting from significant financial investments that enable children's sport; yet limited evidence exists surrounding parental influence from an investment perspective, particularly from an Australian sporting context. Still it provides an important lens for understanding the complex nature of sport-parenting and offers a potential explanation for the antecedents of highly emotional parental behaviours in children's sport.

Although the notion of investment may appear to apply to low-income families, it is also highly significant to parents who can afford to provide excessive resources in the junior sport experience. Beyond purchasing premium sporting products for children, there is a concern that parents demonstrate coercive behaviours by financially incentivising sport participation in the form of tangible, extrinsic rewards in return for specific performance outcomes. Turman (2007) first explored the perceived compliance-gaining techniques employed by parents to encourage children's sport continuation, and notes material rewards as a significant extrinsic resource used to motivate children. In addition to supplying the necessary costs

associated with participation, parents invested in a range of tangible rewards as a bargaining tool for children's continuation in sport. According to McCarthy, Jones, and Clark-Carter (2008), extrinsic rewards contingent upon performance or effort are central to demonstrating psychosocial support. Although this form of parental influence is founded on the premise that children are motivated by the possibility of attaining extrinsic rewards (McCarthy & Jones, 2007), research has previously suggested that coercive behaviours are not an effective strategy for promoting long term sport involvement (Anderson, Lorenz, & Pease, 1986). More recent evidence supports this view. For instance, Keegan et al. (2009) studied the influence of coaches, parents and peers on children's sport motivation and revealed that parents regularly coerced children with money, confectionary and video games in return for greater effort and achievement. Furthermore, they concluded that the provision of extrinsic rewards or added financial incentives was not always a positive aspect of children's sport, and often resulted in children suffering from increased pressure to perform. Similarly, in an investigation into the positive and negative developmental experiences of adolescent swimmers, Fraser-Thomas and Côté (2009) report that parents who financially coerced their children to excel or stay involved in swimming presented a negative aspect of involvement. It was found that parents who supplied the best resources demanded competitive success by regularly reminding children of the expensive costs associated with their participation. Moreover, Fraser-Thomas et al. (2008) compared the participatory experiences between engaged and dropout swimmers and found that only dropout swimmers reported that parents offered financial rewards or incentives for 'good performances', while continuing swimmers did not. This suggests that high levels of financial investment in the form of extrinsic rewards are neither effective nor preferred by children in promoting enjoyment,

participation, and long-term continuation in sport, thus highlighting a noteworthy, but understated aspect of parental influence.

Early research has indicated that children not only recognise the substantial financial contribution of parents from an early age, but subsequently experience increased performance pressure as a result (Coakley, 1992). However, there remains a paucity of contemporary research that illuminates the influence of parents on the junior sport experience from an investment perspective. Given that some studies have indicated that parents are adapting various forms of investment-related practices beyond the basic financial demands that enable participation, greater attention is therefore warranted in order to understand the notion of investment, particularly in popular sport settings such as junior Australian football.

Verbal reinforcement

Verbal reinforcement is a culturally endorsed practice at the elite level of many sports. It is common for spectators, players, coaches, and umpires to engage in various, and often unique forms of verbal communication before, during, and at the conclusion of play. In tennis, it is not uncommon for spectators to verbally encourage players between service points by cheering and chanting. In elite soccer, singing and chanting is a celebrated and normalised social aspect of spectating throughout the course of the entire game. In the Australian Football League (AFL), verbal reinforcement consists of a range of spectator behaviours reflecting what Klugman (2010) describes as visceral ‘agony’ and ‘ecstasy’. This often leads to verbal behaviours demonstrating either support for their team (ecstasy), or frustration and disappointment, which stem from agony. It is important to acknowledge the significance of verbal reinforcement in elite sport as part of broader society and

culture, especially given that verbal behaviours exhibited at elite level sport are often replicated at the junior level (Malina, 2009). However, it is conceivable that the verbal behaviours widely practiced at the elite level may not be necessarily appropriate or conducive in the junior sport setting, particularly those that render a potentially negative influence. Verbal reinforcement therefore comprises an important theme in relation to parental influence in children's sport, yet research surrounding the concept of verbal reinforcement remains largely limited to the youth soccer, tennis and hockey context (for example, Goldstein & Iso-Ahola, 2008; LaVoi & Stellino, 2008). Therefore, while it is important to consider the influential role of parents via verbal reinforcement, it should be tempered with the acknowledgement that wider research in alternative sport settings is necessary.

One of the concerns central to the notion of verbal reinforcement surrounds the potential for parents, coaches and spectators to articulate negative comments such as swearing, criticism, and abuse. However, early research indicated that very few verbal comments by parents were negative in nature. Randall and McKenzie (1987) examined the verbal behaviour of 116 randomly selected adults across 30 games of youth soccer to determine the prevalence and nature of parental comments. Using interval recorded data, they revealed that 74.4% of all comments were instructional in nature, with 19.8% of comments classified as 'positive' and the remainder (5.8%) classified as 'negative', suggesting that negative verbal behaviour such as abuse and criticism may not be a major issue in children's sport. They also concluded that while parental verbal behaviour occurred only 12.5% of the time during competition, verbal behaviours were more frequent among female adults (i.e., mothers), in games with younger children and when the supported team was winning. However, an observational study by Kidman, McKenzie and McKenzie (1999) involving 250

parents over 147 games from 7 different team sports provided new perspective on the nature of parental verbal reinforcement. They concluded that while most comments in children's sport were positive (47.2%), over a third (34.5%) of all comments were negatively oriented. In particular, parents involved in soccer and rugby recorded the highest number of negative verbal behaviours (40 and 45% respectively) while those involved in netball and tee-ball (modified baseball) recorded the lowest (31 and 33% respectively). The clear 'spike' in negative verbal behaviour was attributed to combining both instructional comments with negative comments based on the premise that instructional comments can place unnecessary pressure on children. In this way, these studies provided an important starting point for understanding how parents can influence children's sport through verbally reinforcing behaviour.

More recent evidence has provided greater insight into the nature of both positive and negative verbal reinforcement, supporting the contention that verbal behaviours are a significant, yet potentially problematic aspect of the sport-parenting role. For example, Holt et al. (2008) employed a grounded theory approach to examining parental involvement in the youth soccer context, and report that approximately 35% of all verbal behaviours consisted of supportive comments such as 'good effort', while 15% comprised of negative verbal behaviours such as publically labelling children 'pathetic'. They also found that over one third of comments were instructional in nature. Similarly, Bowker et al. (2009) conducted a naturalistic observation of spectators in youth hockey and found that 40% of verbal comments were instructional and negative in nature. They conclude that although the prevalence of negative comments was infrequent, abuse was largely directed towards umpires and officials. Omli and LaVoi (2009) record similar findings from the youth soccer context, claiming that verbally reinforcing behaviours such as parents yelling

at children occurs with moderate frequency. These studies confirm that verbal reinforcement is situated within the junior sport experience and that parents regularly engage in a range of positive, instructional and negative verbal behaviours. The negative verbal behaviours are predictably most concerning given that it can create difficulties in the relationship between parents and children (Wolfenden & Holt, 2005). However, the influence of verbal behaviour is much more complex given that encouraging and supportive comments can be misinterpreted by children, presenting a counterintuitive challenge for parents in sport (Holt & Dunn, 2004; Kanters et al., 2008). As Hellstedt (1995) and Siekanska (2012) argue, there is a subtle and thin line between supporting and pressuring a child, thus reinforcing the importance of pursuing greater understanding of parental influence in children's sport. For example, the typical comment 'good try' for many children may be perceived as a term of positive encouragement. However, some children may perceive the comment 'good try' as an expression which highlights an unsuccessful skill attempt, prompting feelings of incompetence, embarrassment or anxiety (Holt & Dunn, 2004; Kanters et al., 2008). Others may become confused by a combination of the demands of the game, parents' verbal engagement and instructions from the coaches, thus creating a complex and often stressful experience (Omli & Wiese-Bjornstal, 2011). This extends to behaviours such as excited and fanatical encouragement, which is well intended but not always preferred by children (Knight et al., 2011).

Various strategies to minimise the incidence of negative verbal behaviours have been employed, such as send-off systems and policy reform. The most commonly adopted strategy surrounds the concept of 'Silent Saturday', in which parents are permitted to applaud children's efforts, but not permitted to engage in verbal behaviour during competition. While it is likely that such strategies are successful in 'muting' negative

verbal behaviour, this approach inadvertently removes positive verbal support and encouragement, which is preferred by children (Knight et al., 2011; Omli & Wiese-Bjornstal, 2011). Given that positive verbal reinforcement has been linked to children's enjoyment, satisfaction and successful career development through sport, it is arguable that parental verbal behaviour should not be discouraged altogether (Wuerth et al., 2004). Additionally, the evidence from the youth basketball context suggests that concepts such as 'Silent Saturday' may elicit an undesirable effect on the behaviour demonstrated in children's sport (Arthur-Banning et al., 2009). In this way, it is critical to learn more about the way that verbal behaviours are perceived in order to develop more appropriate strategies that promote positive verbal engagement while discouraging negative verbal behaviours. Research that focuses on the voices and opinions of children, parents and coaches would be a timely and much needed contribution in this regard.

The competitive sport climate

To varying degrees, the notions of winning and success are central to the fabric of competitive sport. At the elite level, this is evidenced by the highly professionalised nature of managing sport clubs in pursuit of championships, world titles, and premierships. At the community level, an emphasis on competitive success is also evident among clubs who adopt practices that are geared toward winning in the local competition. For example, in the local Australian football community, it is not uncommon for clubs to remunerate players and coaches who can contribute to potential premiership success (Drummond et al., 2013). Even at the junior level, the importance of scorekeeping to divide winners from losers is viewed as a critical element of participating in competitive sport, without which some argue that sport

would be a misleading experience for children (Torres & Hager, 2007). However, there is a concern in the literature that an emphasis on winning and competitive success may be problematic when it comes to the nature of sport-parenting. More specifically, there are concerns that parents place an inappropriate and often excessive amount of pressure and stress on children to win, perpetuating a competitively oriented sport climate. This is often demonstrated by parents who choose to enforce early specialisation based on the assumption that more sport-specific training will produce a sporting 'champion' (Gould & Carson, 2004), but is more frequently reflected by parental behaviours that champion the notions of winning and competitive success. This is significant given that research readily identifies the notions of fun and enjoyment as the underpinning fabric of children's sport participation (Côté, 1999; Dubois, 1986; Walters, Payne, Schluter, & Thomson, 2012). In fact, according to both ground-breaking and contemporary evidence, the objective of winning assumes low importance for children compared to the enjoyment extracted from participation (Petlichkoff, 1992; Walters, et al., 2013). As Brockman, Jago and Fox (2011) note, children are motivated to engage in active play because they perceive the social aspects of play as highly enjoyable. Children also prefer sport environments that not only offer wide ranging opportunities regardless of ability, but experiences that enable them to participate at their own level of competence (MacPhail, Kirk, & Eley, 2003). While it is conceivable that winning is enjoyable for some children, Allen (2003) argues that the concepts of affiliation, belonging, task orientation and interest in sport best contribute to a fun and enjoyable sport experience. Such a perspective has since been corroborated by Cumming, Smoll, Smith and Grossbard (2007), who investigated the motivational climate in youth basketball and the impact of win/loss records on sport enjoyment. They

conclude that children who perceived sport climates with a high emphasis on ‘being the best’ and winning (ego-orientation) did not experience as much enjoyment as children who perceived sport climates that focused on effort and improvement (task/mastery-orientation), indicating that greater enjoyment is associated with sport climates that do not focus on competitive success. Similarly, among 9–14 year old swimmers, it has also been found that high perceptions of parent-initiated mastery climates throughout the course of the season positively results in greater autonomous regulation among children (O'Rourke, Smith, Smoll, & Cumming, 2013). That is, parents who contribute to a climate where focus is given to self-improvement, enjoyment of the activity and effort, rather than winning, positively enhance children’s intrinsic motivation.

It is worthwhile noting that not all sport climates foster a fun and enjoyable participatory experience as a result of parental behaviours that heighten the importance of the winning ideology. Although peers and coaches can also contribute to the construction and maintenance of a ‘win-at-all-cost’ sport climate in this regard, Hellstedt (1995) argues that the parents within the current organisation of children’s sport are chiefly responsible. Siegenthaler and Leticia Gonzalez (1997) echo this perspective, adding that children’s organised sport, together with parental attitudes that champion competition, perpetuates the view to children that winning is the most important aspect of participation. The current models of junior sport can therefore be viewed as becoming increasingly ‘professionalised’ (Gould & Carson, 2004) or ‘institutionalised’ (De Knop, 1996) by facilitating the marginalisation of children as either ‘winners’ or ‘losers’ through various competitive discourses. In the junior Australian football context, this is characterised by culminating events such as finals, representative teams, and ‘Best & Fairest’ awards. The role of parents entrenched

within these structures may be designed to support and motivate children to fulfil their potential (Gould, Lauer, Rolo, Jannes, & Pennisi, 2006), but more often contributes to reinforcing a climate which places a primary emphasis on winning and competitive success, and subsequently rendering the notions of fun and enjoyment as mere appendages of the experience. Consequently, in encouraging the competitive aspects of sport which are surreptitiously, and sometimes openly, prized (Brower, 1979; DeFrancesco & Johnson, 1997; Gould et al., 2008), many parents undermine the inclusive, game-play structure that children prefer for a more isolated, arguably less enjoyable, and often less engaging experience (MacPhail et al., 2003).

Consequently, there is a clear concern for parental attitudes and behaviours that foster a competitive sport climate for children, supported by a substantial body of evidence. Although parents can positively influence children's sport, where winning is concerned, the literature indicates that parents can also be a significant negative influence. For example, DeFrancesco and Johnson (1997) set out to identify parent and child perceptions towards competitive success. They report that 33.4% of the parents surveyed indicated that it was 'very important' for their child to win, while a further 64.4% of parents indicated that winning was 'moderately important'. Importantly however, they also found that 88.7% of parents reportedly experienced feeling 'moderately upset' during matches where they perceived their child did not put in a good effort. These trends were consistent with Shields et al. (2005), who surveyed 1000 children, parents and coaches representing 10 different sports in the United States to investigate good and poor sport behaviour. This large scale study revealed that while most parents were perceived to demonstrate generally good behaviour, 13% of parents confessed to demonstrating 'angry criticism toward their child,' while a further 14% of parents conceded that they have loudly yelled at or

argued with a referee or sport official. Not only do such behaviours overlook the importance of fun and enjoyment from participation, they convey the message that certain levels of competitive performance are necessary, further demonstrating the 'professionalisation' of children's sport.

In a study of coaches' perceptions of parents and their positive and negative behaviours in junior tennis, Gould et al. (2006) found that 36% of tennis parents were perceived to negatively influence the development of their child by demonstrating poor sport behaviour in reaction to sub-standard competitive performances. Specifically, it was found that many parents reinforce unsavoury sporting attitudes through behaviours such as verbal confrontations, emphasising competitive success and engaging in violent conduct with other parents. It was also reported that many parents overemphasise winning, hold unrealistic expectations, openly criticise children and engage in physical confrontations with other parents at various stages during the season. Moreover, research on parental 'sideline-rage' emotions and behaviours in youth soccer revealed that many parents demonstrate a range of anger-related behaviours such as muttering comments, yelling comments, walking away from events, making offensive gestures and confronting other spectators in response to the competitive nature of children's sport (Goldstein & Iso-Ahola, 2008).

While some parents may do their best to disguise the importance of winning, often their body language and non-verbal cues suggest otherwise. According to Knight, Boden, and Holt (2010), children notice inconsistencies between parents' comments and the tone of their voice and non-verbal behaviours, suggesting that while parents engage in supportive verbal behaviour, other non-verbal cues can simultaneously

convey messages of disapproval or dissatisfaction. Children also notice changes in supportive and pressuring parental behaviours during games when they begin to lose, providing children with conflicting messages about the purpose and nature of children's sport. This aspect of sport parenting is further complicated given that at times, parents are unsure as to how they should behave (Harwood & Knight, 2009).

The literature reinforces the perception that parents are key players in creating, maintaining and perpetuating a competitively-oriented sport climate. Consequently, children may also experience increased performance pressure, decreased playing time for 'low ability' participants, increased potential for sports injury, increased antecedents of cheating and aggressive behaviour, and increased violent and abusive spectator behaviour (Crone, 1999). Ultimately, children do not prosper under these conditions as much as they lose motivation and experience decreased enjoyment (Côté & Fraser-Thomas, 2007; Sanchez-Miguel, Leo, Sanchez-Oliva, Amado, & Garcia-Calvo, 2013). However, the ramifications can also extend beyond a lack of immediate enjoyment to permanent disengagement altogether (Butcher, Lindner, & Johns, 2002; Cervello, Escarti, & Guzman, 2007; Enoksen, 2011). Given that a lack of fun, enjoyment and excitement are common reasons for sport withdrawal (Rottensteiner, Laakso, Pihlaja, & Konttinen, 2013), it is clear that parents are crucial in constructing a sport environment compatible with the maturational level of children so as to avoid creating 'futile' scenes in children's sport (Brady, 2004). Indeed, by shifting the focus from 'competition' to 'fun', the evidence suggests that children's attrition can decrease significantly, thereby promoting continuation behaviours in sport and physical activity vital for lifelong engagement in a physically active lifestyle (Burton, O'Connell, Gillham, & Hammermeister, 2011). Yet for children who sustain their involvement in an increasingly competitive climate, the

evidence suggests that children want their parents to either (1) not attend competitions in an effort to avoid embarrassment or public humiliation (Shields et al., 2005), or (2) change their behaviour to compliment a supportive climate (Knight et al., 2010).

It should be noted that there are some positive aspects associated with the winning ideology in children's sport. Some early studies have indicated that competitive success is an 'important' element for many children and parents involved in organised tennis and basketball (DeFrancesco & Johnson, 1997; Knoppers, Schuiteman, & Love, 1986). The literature also suggests that a range of developmental benefits can result from school sport climates that emphasise a competitively-oriented, winning culture. For instance, Heeren and Requa (2001) examined girls' participation in school hockey and the values associated with being involved in a traditionally successful school team. They found that the most commoditised aspect of sport participation surrounded being involved in a winning sport climate, as it was perceived to enhance the notions of dedication, sacrifice and team cooperation. Research also suggests that children can value winning equally with other moral qualities such fair play, equality and justice (Cruz et al., 1995). It is therefore plausible that the naturalistic emergence of competitive success that leads to winning or losing is not problematic, but rather the parental behaviours and attitudes attached to winning add an important dimension to the discussion of parental influence in children's sport.

Consequently, several pivotal questions remain unanswered. For example, if winning engenders positive outcomes for some children yet holds enormous potential for negative parental influence, how much emphasis should be given to winning in

children's sport? Although winning should not be ignored completely, a lack of cogency surrounds the extent to which parents should foster the notions of winning, competitive success and performance. The potential opportunities to obtain a sport scholarship may indeed be a pertinent factor that enhances the importance of competitive success for families in certain sport contexts. It is therefore conceivable that attitudes toward winning may vary according to a range of social, cultural and political factors across different sporting contexts. Furthermore, what specific attitudes and behaviours 'shape' a competitively-oriented sport climate? Research has shown that parental encouragement is critical for children's sport participation (Spreitzer & Snyder, 1976). However, it is feasible that certain encouraging parental behaviours could be perceived by children as pressuring, thus highlighting a delicate, complex challenge for parents, coaches, and sport providers in positively influencing the sport climate and the overall sport experience. These questions are important because they not only situate parental influence within the theme 'competitively-oriented sport climate'; they further advocate the need for research attention into this aspect of the sport-parenting role.

Evidence from an Australian context

Although an understanding of the concept of sport-parenting from an Australian context is lacking, there are a limited number of studies (which have predominantly emerged from the swimming and soccer context) that provide some insight into how parents are involved in the sport experience. Light and Curry (2009) explored children's reasons for joining and remaining with an organised soccer club and found that positive relationships between children and parents, including the parents of peers, positively encouraged sport continuation. In another study which explored

children's social and personal development through swimming, Light (2010a) reveals that children perceived their parents as a supportive influence as they progressed from 'peripheral participation' to more formal engagement. Despite the 'committed' nature of Australian parents in competitive swimming (Light, 2010b), the children in this study readily claimed that their own participation was internally motivated and not influenced by 'parental pressure.'

A handful of studies from the Australian football context have also shed some light on parental involvement in children's sport. For example, Hastie (1991) evaluated the attitudes of coaches, players and parents toward club-based junior Australian football in Brisbane, and found that both parental support and the participatory elements of developing skills and playing with teammates were significant positive aspects of children's participation. However, research has also highlighted the potentially negative influence of parents in junior Australian football, including issues of conflict between other parent spectators' children and toward umpires (Elliott & Drummond, 2013; Hickey & Fitzclarence, 2004). In particular, Elliott and Drummond observed that most parents positively perceived their own involvement in junior Australian football, but negatively perceived other parents'. This highlights the importance of canvassing a range of viewpoints in order to understand the nature of parental influence (Elliott & Drummond, 2013).

Conclusion

This chapter has identified the major influential factors on the junior sport experience. It has explored the role of socioeconomic status, location, peer influence and coaches in shaping sport participation, motivation, enjoyment and discontinuation in the junior context. This backdrop is critical because it highlights a

range of aspects that can be targeted to further enhance the quality and quantity of sport engagement among children and young adults. However, it was also important to identify these factors in juxtaposition to the substantial influence of parents on the junior sport experience. Although this chapter demonstrates clear difficulty conceptualising the sport-parenting role, it provides a comprehensive overview of parental influence in children's sport by employing a thematic approach to reviewing the literature. In doing so, this chapter has illuminated a number of residual questions that remain unanswered by the existing body of literature. For example, with regard to role modelling, the influence of parental behaviours and attitudes both pre- and post-competition has not yet been adequately considered. Similarly, the theme of investment as a conduit for parental influence has lacked sufficient attention in the sport-parenting literature. The evidence pertaining to investment ideology has largely emerged from broader investigations into the positive and negative aspects of parental involvement, thereby highlighting a noteworthy theme to consider for the current study. Furthermore, parental influence via verbal reinforcement has been well documented in the youth hockey and soccer contexts. However, perspectives from sports such as junior Australian football have not yet made an adequate contribution to overarching discussions. This is surprising given the cultural significance of verbal behaviour to Australian football. As Hemphill (1998) aptly stated, Australian football is not only a 'wild fierce beauty of inspiration,' but a culture that belongs to the people in which they can 'rage and shout.' As such, exploring parental influence and the notion of verbal reinforcement appears highly pertinent from an Australian football perspective. Finally, this chapter demonstrates that there are many unanswered questions surrounding the notion of winning. The competitive sport climate therefore presents an important backdrop for addressing these oversights

while providing greater understanding to the broader issue of parental influence in junior Australian football. Despite a growing litany against parents in sport (for example, in the media), this chapter has provided an accurate account of the literature relating to parental influence in children's sport, subsequently foregrounding the significance of the current research.

CHAPTER THREE

Theoretical framework

Introduction

This study is a qualitative investigation of parental influence in the junior Australian football experience. Many theories have been used in the sport-parenting literature in order to study parental influence in children's sport. Theories most commonly employed such as Achievement-Goal Theory and Self-Determination Theory emerge from the field of sport psychology and concern, among other variables, the concepts of sport motivation and sport climate. The current research is concerned with the social and cultural dimensions of parental influence in the junior sport experience, and as such, requires an appropriate sociological lens through which to adequately understand the social, cultural, and historical constructions implicit in contemporary sport-parenting. Therefore, the theory of social constructionism will be employed. Conceptually, this study will also utilise an adaptation of the developmental model of sport participation (DMSP) (Côté, 1999). The DMSP is a dynamic framework relevant to sport pedagogy and sport sociology and provides an important scope for the current research by identifying typical participatory trajectories, developmental stages of sport participation and a consideration for the nature and purpose of children's sport. Together with the theory of social constructionism, parental influence will be examined in the context of junior Australian football. However, this chapter will first restate the overarching research question and the primary objectives of the inquiry. This chapter will also detail the deeply rooted ontological and epistemological underpinnings of the research, discuss the commonly used theoretical orientations in the sport-parenting literature, and outline the theory of

social constructionism and the DMSP as the most appropriate theoretical and conceptual framework for the study.

Revisiting the research question

The previous chapter highlighted numerous influential factors on the junior sport experience, including the influential role of parents. In many ways, parents are central to the way in which children experience sport, yet significant questions remain relating to parental influence in the broader literature. The literature review demonstrated that relatively limited evidence from the junior Australian football context contributes to this discussion, presenting a culturally significant, yet understudied area for academic research attention. Given that junior Australian football is a popular sporting pursuit among Australian children, yet perceived to be a ‘problem’ site for poor parental behaviour (Elliott & Drummond, 2013), the central research problem concerns parental influence on the junior Australian football experience. Specifically, the research is guided by an overarching research question relating to the issue, and a set of four pertinent objectives:

The research question posed is:

How do parents influence the junior Australian football experience?

In addition, the study maintained four key objectives:

- To gain insight into the positive and negative aspects of parental influence in the junior Australian football experience.
- To explore the meaning of participation in junior Australian football from ‘multiple perspectives’.

- To understand how socially constructed parental behaviours are developed, maintained and perpetuated within the junior Australian football experience.
- To identify key issues and challenges currently pervading the junior Australian football experience.

Theoretical framework

Qualitative research

While quantitative research approaches are traditionally characterised by empirical measures and the scientific notion of objectivity, qualitative research paradigms challenge the positivist stance by committing to understanding, with openness, the deeper underlying issues of a social phenomenon (Patton, 2002). Quantitative research, by design, ignores rich description in favour of developing generalisability; a polar approach to the qualitative tradition in pursuit of understanding *how* social experience is created and given meaning (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). It is the qualities of the latter approach which are most significant to the study's research question and inherent objectives, given that both depth and detail enhances understanding of naturalistic cases and situations (Patton, 2002). Although empirical research may provide useful statistical trends and patterns (Creswell, 2007), such approaches do little to explain the concepts of 'how' and 'why' in relation to socio-cultural issues such as parental influence in the junior sport experience. Therefore, in order to gain insight into the deeply rooted complexities and meanings embedded within the junior Australian football experience, a qualitative orientation is most appropriate.

Research paradigm

The notion of what constitutes objective knowledge is central to both qualitative and quantitative research approaches. As Crotty (1998) aptly states, the assumptions about reality that researchers bring to their work reach into ‘our understanding of what human knowledge is, what it entails, and what status can be ascribed to it’ (p. 2). Indeed, the choice of theory, the construction of the research question/s and the ensuing methodologies are influenced by these ontological and epistemological assumptions. However, it is critical to note that there is substantial disagreement in the literature regarding the distinction between ontology and epistemology in social research. For example, Bryman (2008) and Willig (2001) argue that ontological questions concern the nature of the world, while epistemological questions concern the rhetorical issues of ‘how and what can we know,’ thus articulating a clear distinction between the two philosophical strands. Guba and Lincoln (1994) concede that ontology, epistemology and methodology are all ‘interconnected’, but agree with Bryman and Willig’s argument that there are important questions that separate ontology, epistemology, and methodology. For example:

The ontological question. What is the form and nature of reality and, therefore, what is there that can be known about it?

The epistemological question. What is the relationship between the knower or the would-be knower and what can be known?

The methodological question. How can the inquirer (would-be knower) go about finding out about whatever he or she believes can be known? (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 108)

Many authors, however, do not share this view. For example, Crotty (1998) avoids disentangling these deeply rooted philosophical tiers on the premise that both ontological and epistemological issues 'tend to emerge together' (p. 10). Denzin and Lincoln (2003) corroborate this notion, arguing that both ontological and epistemological paradigms enact similarly upon qualitative research, referring to the net of epistemological, ontological, and methodological underpinnings as an 'interpretive framework' that provides the researcher with 'a guided set of beliefs and feelings about the world and how it should be understood and studied' (p. 33). This highlights the different ways that philosophy can underpin qualitative social research and demonstrates a lack of cogency in the literature. Although both critical perspectives converge on the premise that the researcher is implicit in the research process (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Willig, 2001), it is important to acknowledge how strands of philosophy in social research are distinguished, appreciated, and utilised differently.

Epistemological underpinnings

The current research identifies with constructionist epistemology. Constructionism assumes that 'different people construct meaning in different ways, even in relation to the same phenomenon' (Crotty, 1998, p. 9). For instance, a group of parents involved in the same organised sport can interpret meaning and experience differently based on previous experiences, beliefs, and the social, cultural, historical and political influences in the construction of meaning. However, those who accept constructionism as an epistemological paradigm accept the *a priori* assumption that meaning is not discovered, but constructed in different ways (Hacking, 1999). Constructionism therefore suggests that objects are 'pregnant with *potential*

meaning, but *actual* meaning emerges only when consciousness engages with them' (Crotty, 1998, p. 43). In other words, constructionism can be described as:

the view that all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context (Crotty, 1998, p. 42).

The concept of 'interactions' is vital to the constructionist paradigm. Its significance is emphasised by Brown (2004), who argues that meaning 'emerges from social interactions' (p. 74), and is constructed from how people come to think and act as they do in particular venues. This notion illuminates the idea that both understanding and meaning emerges from 'an active, cooperative enterprise of persons in relationship' (Gergen, 1985, p. 267). Given that this inquiry explores relationships within particular social contexts, or 'venues', constructionism offers an appropriate epistemological underpinning within the qualitative tradition to guide the research process. As previously discussed, constructionism can also be considered an ontological position that informs an interpretivist epistemology which is predicated on exploring the meaning of human action and experience (Bryman, 2008; Fossey, Harvey, McDermott, & Davidson, 2002). Yet, both interpretivism and constructionism share the common view that meaning comes into existence in and out of our engagement with the world (Crotty, 1998; Fossey et al., 2002). Although it is important to note that constructionism can therefore apply ontologically for social research, the current research employs constructionism as an epistemological perspective within a qualitative paradigm.

Theories of sport motivation

There have been a number of theories employed to shed new perspective on parental behaviour and involvement in children's sport. Most theories emerge from the field of sport psychology and relate to children's sport motivation. For instance, Achievement-Goal Theory (AGT) (Nicholls, 1984) has been widely employed in studies that have examined children's motivation within particular sport climates (for example, Cervello et al., 2007; Gershgoren, Tenenbaum, Gershgoren, & Eklund, 2011). AGT suggests that from the age of 12, children are more capable of displaying task- or ego-involvement tendencies in sport. Children who exhibit task-oriented behaviour focus on their own effort and improvement, while children who exhibit ego-oriented behaviour are concerned with comparing themselves to others and the notion of winning. Studies utilising AGT have made an important contribution toward explaining the impact of parents and coaches on sport climate, but are limited in exploring the broader socio-cultural dimensions of parental influence in the junior sport experience.

Another commonly used theoretical framework in the sport-parenting literature is Self-Determination Theory (SDT) (Ryan & Deci, 2000). SDT supports the notion that enjoyable sport experiences over time will positively affect children's motivation. Some studies have utilised this sport psychology theory for explaining the influence of spectator behaviour on sport motivation (i.e. Goldstein & Iso-Ahola, 2008). This is particularly relevant to the context of children's sport, where parents arguably reprise the predominant role of spectators and sideline observers during competition. However, like AGT, SDT is limited to exploring the concept of sport motivation, and assumes that children's motivation is positively enhanced by positive sport experiences. This assumption may be misguided given that participation rates

in junior Australian football have remained steady over the last decade despite a perceived increase in media reports around poor parental behaviour in children's sport (see Chapter 1). In this way, there is certainly value in exploring the social and cultural dimensions of sport-parenting to further understand how parents influence children's sport experience. SDT as a psychological framework does not provide an adequate theory for interpreting and understanding the socio-cultural aspects of children's sport in this regard.

Social constructionism

The use of theory in social research is relevant because it provides a rationale and framework through which social phenomena can be understood and a theory to interpret the research findings (Bryman, 2008). As stated, the current research employs the theoretical framework of social constructionism. The theory of social constructionism draws attention to the notion that human perception and experience is mediated historically, culturally and linguistically (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Burr, 2003; Willig, 2001). According to Gergen (1985, p. 266), social constructionism is not a reflection or map of the world but 'an artifact of communal interchange.' It recognises that there are *knowledges* rather than *knowledge*, and that there are multiple versions of reality (Willig, 2001). Social constructionism is based on the concept that things may not need to exist as they currently do given that people construct their everyday experiences rather than discover them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Hacking, 1999). Furthermore, the theory of social constructionism suggests that:

the same phenomenon or event can be described in different ways, giving rise to different ways of perceiving and understanding it, yet neither way of describing it is necessarily wrong (Willig, 2001, p. 7).

There are four tenets that are perceived as critical to the theory: (1) a critical stance toward taken-for-granted ways of understanding the world; (2) cultural and historical specificity; (3) meaning and knowledge is sustained by social processes and daily interactions, and; (4) knowledge and social action invites a different kind of action from human beings (Burr, 2003). These will be explained in greater detail.

A critical stance toward taken-for-granted knowledge

The theory of social constructionism constantly challenges us to be critical of taken-for-granted knowledge, of what we perceive to exist, and what actually exists in reality. It challenges the notion that knowledge is based on unbiased, objective views of the world (Burr, 2003). For example, social constructionism challenges the notion that there are two different genders; male and female. While there are distinct biological differences between men and women, social constructionism challenges the way that two different male and female identities are constructed. For example, social constructionism would argue that there are other categories that can be used to distinguish or separate human beings, such as large and small ear lobes or tall and short height (Burr, 2003).

Cultural and historical specificity

Social constructionism reminds us that reality is constructed as a consequence of human engagement with the world and shaped by cultural, historical, political and social norms that operate within a particular context and time (Berger & Luckmann,

1966). Burr (2003) concurs, stating that the perception of the world and how we understand it depends upon the time and place in which we experience it. Importantly, social constructionism reminds us of the possibility of multiple understandings of reality which emerge from cultural and historical specificity, as described by Berger and Luckmann (1966):

Indeed, I cannot exist in everyday life without continually interacting and communicating with others. I also know, of course, that the others have a perspective on this common world that is not identical to mine. My 'here' is their 'there'. My 'now' does not fully overlap with theirs. My projects differ from and may even conflict with theirs. Most importantly, I know that there is an ongoing correspondence between *my* meanings and *their* meanings in this world, that we share a common sense about its reality (p. 37).

Knowledge is sustained by social processes and daily interactions

Social constructionists place a great emphasis on the interchange between the human and context in the construction of meaning and knowledge. In this way, constructed knowledge of meaningful reality is not seen as 'something that a person has or doesn't have, but as something that people do together' (Burr, 2003, p. 9). This interaction, also described as a 'communal interchange' (Gergen, 1985), is facilitated by a common interface between humans and their context through forms of 'language'. Language therefore assumes a 'performative' role in the construction of meaningful reality (Burr, 2003). Importantly, this concept is not isolated to merely the literal form of verbal dialogue, but also includes the daily reproduction of actions within the social interaction process.

This means that the way a person thinks, the very categories and concepts that provide a framework of meaning for them, are provided by the language that they use (Burr, 2003, p. 8).

The theory of social constructionism is therefore applicable to the concept of sport-parenting given that parental influence as a cultural practice may be influenced by broader interactions shared between family, sport culture, peers, history and other social processes. The influence of parents on the junior sport experience may also differ from context to context, supporting the assertion that socially constructed reality is ‘constantly changing’ throughout time and by social process (Gergen, 1973).

Knowledge and social action invites a different kind of action from human beings

The construction of knowledge together with social action or conditioning encourages a different kind of social action from human beings. For example, historically, patients with a mental illness have been viewed as a risk to society, and subsequently institutionalised to remove them from society. However, recent understandings of mental illness have led to the emergence of various treatment options for individuals in order for them to participate in society, thereby negating the need to institutionalise patients. The theory of social constructionism therefore reminds us that constructions of the world maintain some patterns of social action while excluding others (Burr, 2003). The earliest developments of social constructionism are attributed to Berger and Luckmann’s (1966) text entitled *The social construction of reality* in which it is maintained that social phenomena are constructed and sustained by social processes. They argue that individuals are

socialised into society by externally projecting themselves into society while simultaneously internalising the process of the social world, thereby actively participating in constructing meaning. It is only by actively adopting these processes that an individual becomes a member of society (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Therefore, according to social constructionism, parents do not automatically influence the junior sport experience, but rather learn to influence children's sport through interchange with the social context. As such, parental influence may not need to exist the way it does.

As Burr (2003) contends, the insistence of social constructionism upon the importance of social meaning often leads logically to the use of qualitative methods in social research. In using social constructionism to guide the research process, it is therefore possible to begin to understand and account for how the world appears to be at the present time, and in the present context (Gergen, 1973).

A conceptual framework

The Developmental Model of Sport Participation (DMSP) (Côté, 1999) has been widely used by academics in the areas of sport pedagogy, sport coaching and sport development to investigate various aspects of children's sport using typical participatory trajectories. The DMSP emerged from extensive interviews with children in a variety of sports including hockey, gymnastics, baseball, rowing, tennis and triathlon, and identifies three distinct phases of sport participation; sampling, specialising and investment (Côté & Hay, 2002) (see Figure 2).

The sampling years for children consist of participation in a wide variety of sports that involve high levels of unstructured, deliberate play and low levels of deliberate practice. The sampling phase typically features a high emphasis on fun and

enjoyment for children aged six to 12 years. As children move out of the sampling phase, children are faced with three possible trajectories; they can seek to invest and develop into elite performers by following the investment pathway, compete at a recreational level, or retire from sport altogether.

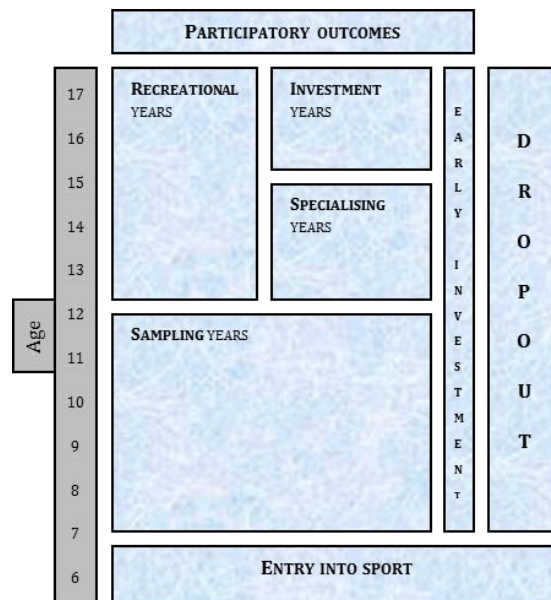


Figure 2: Developmental Model of Sport Participation (Côté, 1999; Côté & Fraser-Thomas, 2007; Côté & Hay, 2002)

Children who wish to engage in sport for recreational purposes will progress from the sampling years into the recreational years. Alternatively, those children interested in developing into an elite performer will progress into the specialising years. Throughout the specialising years, there remains an emphasis on fun and enjoyment; however, a progressive ‘shift’ towards more deliberate practice is typically experienced. Children naturally limit their participation to one or two sport activities during the specialising years. The investment years are characterised by a high amount of deliberate practice and a concentrated commitment to one sport, consolidating the developmental experiences of the specialising years. This transition

typically occurs at 15 years of age and continues into adulthood (Côté, 1999; Côté & Fraser-Thomas, 2007).

A significant component of the DMSP throughout all phases of participation is an exit route from sport involvement entitled dropout (Côté, Horton, MacDonald, & Wilkes, 2009), highlighting a proximal 'out' for children who do not wish to continue in sport. Over twenty years of extensive research has indicated that there are a multitude of precursors for sport withdrawal including pressure, a lack of fun, academic commitments and injury (Butcher et al., 2002; Enoksen, 2011; Kjonniksen et al., 2009; Petlichkoff, 1992; Wall & Côté, 2007). Omli and Wiese-Bjornstal (2011) contend that parents could encourage sport attrition in this sense given that their behaviour can make sport participation less enjoyable for children.

Despite criticisms that the DMSP is too rigid in researching children's sport (Light, Harvey, & Memmert, 2011), it does provide a useful framework for the current research. The studies that have previously employed the DMSP as a conceptual model have generally given specific focus to one phase of sport participation (i.e., the sampling years). Yet, the transitional phase at the intersection between the sampling and specialising years has largely been ignored by the literature. This is noteworthy, particularly given that research indicates that sport drop out peaks at 13 years among Australian children (Olds et al., 2009), highlighting a unique, but necessary characteristic of the current research. It is, however, necessary to utilise an adaptation of the DMSP in order to situate parental influence during the 'transitional' sport experience. Subsequently, the conceptual framework for the ensuing study recognises the central themes from the sport-parenting literature to demonstrate the ways in which parents influence children's sport experience (see Figure 3).

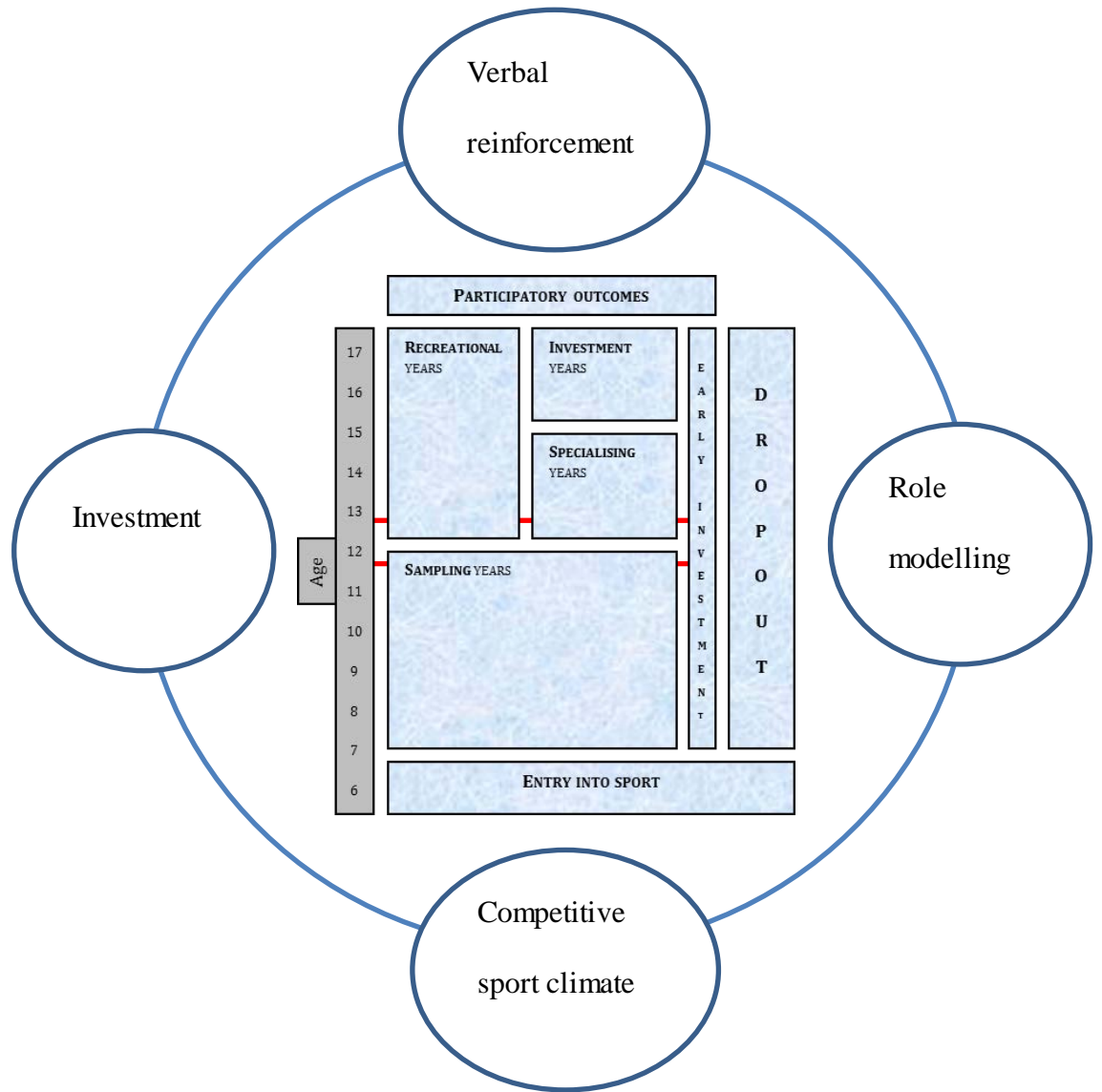


Figure 3: An adaptation of the DMSP: Parental influence on the junior sport experience

CHAPTER FOUR

The research process

Introduction

This chapter will provide an outline of the research design. It will describe the rationale underpinning the sample size and selection and recruitment of participants. The research will utilise both focus groups and individual interviews as the data collection method, which will be explained in detail. An important element of qualitative research is reliability and trustworthiness; these elements will also be addressed in this chapter, as will ethical considerations and limitations of the study.

Methodology

Research design

From the available research methodologies that belong to the qualitative paradigm, this study will embody a collective case study design, otherwise known as a ‘multiple’ case study approach (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003). By definition, a case study research design is the study of an issue explored through one or more cases within ‘a bounded system’, i.e., a setting or context (Creswell, 2007; Yin, 2003). The purpose of a collective case study is to illustrate, through the instrumental use of multiple cases, the complexities of the issue under inquiry (Creswell, 2007; Punch, 2005; Stake, 1995). This is consistent with the theoretical framework as social constructionism supports the notion of multiple realities and knowledges (Burr, 2003). Case studies are distinct from other research designs in that they make the unique contribution of providing the researcher ‘with a holistic understanding of a problem, issue or phenomenon within its social context’

(Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 256). Not only are collective case study designs able to document multiple perspectives and explore contested viewpoints, they are also considered analytically ‘stronger’ than single case study designs (Yin, 2003). Importantly however, case study designs compliment the rounded epistemological assumption that constructionism offers no truth through method, but a stability of understanding (Gergen, 1985). This point is supported by Yin (2003), who argues for the appropriateness of case study research design when:

‘how’ or ‘why’ questions are being posed, when the investigator has little control over events, and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context (p. 1).

In this way, a collective case study design is a highly appropriate methodology for the ensuing qualitative inquiry on the sport-parenting phenomenon. However, when adopting a collective case study design, it is important to select cases which serve ‘a specific purpose within the overall scope of the inquiry’ (Yin, 2003, p. 47). For example, it may not serve the purpose of the study – to understand parental influence in the junior Australian football experience – to ignore highly pertinent voices such as children and coaches. Indeed, they are both intimately involved in children’s sport as much as, and potentially more than, many parents, thereby offering important perspectives to discussions of parental influence. Subsequently for the current research, it is critical that cases or ‘sites’ are purposefully chosen to tease out the social, cultural and historical dimensions of parental influence in children’s sport. The criteria for selecting each case were based on access, cohort availability, and demographic variability.

Sample

Stake (1995) argues that all case study designs must regard ‘the opportunity to learn about the issue’ of primary importance and must therefore consider balanced and varied perspectives. Therefore, a maximal variation sampling technique (also termed ‘heterogeneity’ sampling) was employed for the current study because of its capacity to offer diverse variations and common patterns around a phenomenon (Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 2002). This methodological decision is also reinforced by claims that maximal variation sampling is the ‘preferred technique within case study research design’ (Creswell, 2007, p. 75). A chief advantage of maximal variation sampling is that any common patterns that emerge from great variation are of particular interest and value in capturing the core experiences of a phenomenon (Patton, 2002). 102 participants took part in the study, providing a rich sample through which a greater understanding of parental influence in the junior Australia football experience was gained. The participants included children, parents and coaches involved in junior Australian football across South Australia and were predominately male ($n = 95$). Some of the participants were relatively new to junior Australian football, while others boasted intergenerational and high level involvement. The participants represented a range of family structures, from single-parent families to traditional mother and father families, and included Indigenous Australians and migrants from other countries. Furthermore, some of the participants had stronger interests in other sports and physical activities, while for others Australian football was a central part of their life. This ensured that a breadth of experiences and perspectives were represented in the data. Across all cases, each participant emerged from one of the following categories:

- Category A: Children who are 12 or 13 years and currently participating in junior Australian football.
- Category B: Parents of participants in category A.
- Category C: Coaches of children in category A.

These categories were purposefully designed to best provide in-depth, rich information relating to the issue (Patton, 2002). The justifications for these participant categories are considerable. First, it was important to explore the sport experience at 12 and 13 years given that there is a developmental shift in the nature of participation according to the conceptual framework for the study (Côté, 1999; Côté & Hay, 2002). The literature also suggests that sport drop out peaks at 13 years among Australian children (Olds et al., 2009), reinforcing the significance of this particular age range. It was also important to select participants who can offer important, rich insight into parental influence in the junior Australian football experience. One of the recently identified issues within the sport-parenting literature is that parents often perceive their own involvement positively yet perceive others more negatively (Elliott & Drummond, 2013). By providing voice to children and coaches in addition to parents, a more holistic understanding on the social phenomenon was achieved. Parents, children and coaches are not only the most recognisable stakeholders in the context of children's sport, but are the most intimately involved throughout the entire experience, thereby offering important perspective to the phenomenon under inquiry.

Originally, the sample size per case was 20 participants, comprising eight children, eight parents, and four coaches. This would enable two focus groups with parents (four parents per focus group), two focus group interviews with children (four

children per focus group), and one focus group or a series of individual interviews with coaches (four coaches per focus group, or individual interviews). The underpinning rationale for small focus groups was based on claims that four to six participants is an appropriate number of participants when using focus groups for data collection (Creswell, 2007). However, other recommendations were also taken into consideration. For example, Krueger & Casey (2009) argue that five to ten participants is an appropriate focus group size, Patton (2002) suggests six to ten participants, while Stewart & Shamdasani (1990) recommend 8 to 12 participants per focus group. The size of the focus groups also considered recommendations by Hope, Wells, Morrison & Gilmore (1995) that groups of three to eight participants is most appropriate for working with children. However, the final decision was based on the premise of providing an environment that enhanced participant involvement (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990); an aspect of the study which can be inhibited by larger group compositions (Gibson, 2007). Therefore, each focus group interview consisted of four participants, which, according to Morgan (1996) is manageable, particularly in focus group discussions that accompany high levels of involvement around potentially emotional topics. Figure 4 represents the original sample size of the study, highlighting the intended number of participants per focus group.

Parents ($n = 8$): 2 focus groups (4 participants per focus group)

Children ($n = 8$): 2 focus groups

Coaches ($n = 4$): 1 focus group

Figure 4: An illustration of the original number of focus groups per case.

During recruitment however, the sample size expanded due to strong interest in the topic, resulting in an increased number of participants in some focus groups. Additional focus groups were also introduced to accommodate participant availability. Where coaches were concerned, a combination of individual interviews and focus groups were employed to secure their participation. This will be explained in greater detail later (see ‘Data collection’ discussion on p. 81). In summary, the final sample size was larger than anticipated, as outlined in Figure 5.

<p>Regional case study (Mount Gambier):</p> <p>Coaches ($n = 5$): 1 focus group (3 participants); 2 individual interviews</p> <p>Parents ($n = 11$): 2 focus groups (7 and 4 participants)</p> <p>Children ($n = 15$): 3 focus groups (6, 6, and 3 participants)</p>
<p>Remote case study (Kangaroo Island):</p> <p>Coaches ($n = 6$): 1 focus group (2 participants); 4 individual interviews</p> <p>Parents ($n = 10$): 3 focus groups (4, 4 and 2 participants)</p> <p>Children ($n = 20$): 4 focus groups (7, 5, 4 and 4 participants)</p>
<p>Metropolitan case study (City of Onkaparinga, Adelaide):</p> <p>Coaches ($n = 5$): 5 individual interviews</p> <p>Parents ($n = 13$): 3 focus groups (8, 3 and 2 participants)</p> <p>Children ($n = 17$): 3 focus groups (8, 5 and 4 participants)</p>

Figure 5: Summary of the final sample.

Recruitment

The principal researcher, in collaboration with the junior participation and development manager from the South Australian National Football League [SANFL], compiled a list of potential football clubs that could be targeted from which to recruit participants for the study. The identification and selection of clubs was contingent upon two conditions. First, the club must currently field football teams for children aged 12 and 13 years. The chosen clubs fielded teams in at least one of the under 12, under 14, or under 15 competitions. The second condition was that the clubs must be situated within the demographic regions comprising each case study. That is, a metropolitan, regional, and remote area in South Australia as prescribed by government classifications (Department of Health and Ageing, 2009). Once a short-list of potential football clubs was ratified between the researcher and the SANFL delegate, an email was sent to each of the selected football clubs, introducing the principal researcher and the study (see Appendices B – F for letters to leagues and clubs). All email addresses were publicly available. The purpose of the email was to garner interest from community football clubs to assist the recruitment process, which would involve the distribution of information pertaining to the study to prospective participants. The email consisted of attachments including a copy of a federal police clearance, a copy of the researcher's student identification card and a letter of support for the study from the SANFL. Ten clubs expressed interest in assisting the recruitment process by reply of email or via phone correspondence. Upon receiving expressions of interest, the principal researcher proceeded to organise and post-mail important information necessary to drive the recruitment process. Each club received 100 copies of the following documents for distribution: (1) a stapled letter of introduction for parents and coaches, an

information sheet for parents and coaches, and a consent form for parents and coaches, and (2) a stapled letter of introduction for children, an information sheet for children and a consent form for children (documentation included in Appendices G – N). Some of the clubs requested to have these documents personally delivered, with which the principle researcher complied. Although time consuming, it was an important opportunity to reinforce the role of the clubs in the recruitment process and address any residual concerns about the research. Upon receiving this information, the football clubs placed the articles in common areas for parents, children and coaches to access, at the request of the principle researcher. Some clubs distributed the information from the entry point to the oval as parents commuted children to training and games. Others chose to place the information in high traffic areas such as the canteen and the football clubrooms for prospective participants to view. Some individuals (i.e., team managers) within the football club also chose to personally distribute the information to children, parents and coaches after competitive games. Within one month of initiating the recruitment process, a number of parents, children and coaches indicated their willingness to participate in the research by contacting the principle researcher by phone or email correspondence. A contingency plan of actively recruiting participants in person was also required in some cases to ‘top up’ participant numbers. With the permission and support of the football clubs, this process involved the principal researcher approaching parents, children and coaches before and after training and games – an approach which was highly successful in recruiting additional participants. Once sufficient numbers were obtained specific details were arranged including times, dates and locations for focus group and individual interviews to take place. Given the importance of convenience and

accessibility to participants, all focus groups and individual interviews were located in the football clubrooms or training room before or after training.

Data collection

This study employed both focus groups and individual interviews for data collection. Although combining individual interviews with focus groups can enhance data richness (Lambert & Loisel, 2008), the decision to utilise both qualitative methods was not wholly influenced by the importance of enhancing methodological rigour. Rather, the availability of the participant cohort demanded the use of focus groups and individual interviews from a methodological and logistical stance. Initially, focus groups were chosen for data collection given that their purpose is to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest (Krueger & Casey, 2009). 'Interaction data' emerging from focus groups are considered valuable because greater depth of inquiry is possible as participants accentuate similarities and difference in relation to the topic of discussion (Lambert & Loisel, 2008). Focus groups are often used because they are easy to operate, flexible, stimulating, recall-aiding, cumulative and elaborative (Punch, 2005; Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990). In essence, focus groups allow researchers to explore the nature and effects of social discourses in ways that are not possible through other qualitative methods such as field observations (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

While focus groups are more often used as an 'inexpensive' substitute for individual interviews in qualitative research, the epistemological underpinnings of the current research advocates a method founded on the purposeful use of interactions in order to generate data (Morgan, 1996; Krueger & Casey, 2009; McLafferty, 2004). Furthermore, while there is a perceived lack of standardisation surrounding the

organisation and facilitation of a focus group method, McLafferty (2004) argues that they are nonetheless rewarding for the richness of the data alone. However, it is important to acknowledge that data quality is contingent upon carefully planned discussions designed to better understand how people think or feel about an issue (Krueger & Casey, 2009). This is particularly important for focus groups involving children (Gibson, 2007). In youth sport research particularly, Ennis and Chen (2012) argue that researchers need to carefully consider the power relationship between adult researchers and child interviewees. They recommend starting with an activity or scenario to engage students and neutralise the evident power relationship embedded within focus groups with children. Given the nature of the current study, specific questioning routes and discussion guides were subsequently designed to optimise conditions to provoke rich discussion, including an introductory activity. The literature also indicates that aspects such as location, group dynamic management, scheduling and seating arrangements need to be considered when conducting focus groups with children (Morgan, Gibbs, Maxwell, and Britten, 2002; Gibson, 2007; Hoppe et al., 1995). This was central to the planning, especially given that successful focus groups with children rely on creating a safe and comfortable environment (Gibson, 2007).

Although the decision to employ focus groups was carefully considered, there are criticisms around the use of focus groups in qualitative research. Focus groups lack a relative consistency in make-up and content (McLafferty, 2004), however, there are broader concerns for how discussions are facilitated and guided which may implicate the trustworthiness and reliability of the data. For example, despite the multitude of advantages, there is a concern that highly articulate individuals can dominate discussions to the extent that others may not effectively participate (Patton, 2002).

Consequently, the data may not entirely reflect the wider views of participants. This can be problematic, particularly in small groups where all voices are critically important. The current study attempted to minimise this issue by utilising a seating arrangement to maintain passive control of the discussion (Krueger & Casey, 2009). While this was employed with some degree of success, it did not always promote an environment in which participants could equally voice their own perspective, prompting the need to employ a second technique of verbally shifting attention. By articulating cues such as ‘does anyone feel differently?’ participants were constantly invited into the discussion. To further address this concern, the researcher constantly ‘tinkered’ with the questioning route prior to each focus group as a way of improving the moderation process in a manner that continually encourages participants into the conversation (Adams, 2010). Together, these three techniques accounted for highly articulate and dominant participants with great success.

Patton (2002) also claims that focus group interviews cannot assure confidentiality. This concern is further compounded by the notion that homogenous groups appear to work better among participants who know one another, rather than following the recommendation that participants should be strangers (McLafferty, 2004). Confidentiality therefore remains a significant issue surrounding the use of focus groups in qualitative research. Subsequently, a number of steps were carried out to best ensure confidentiality, including revising the details of consent with participants prior to the commencement of each focus group discussion. Subsequently, participants were reminded that they could choose not to disclose information during the discussion if they did not feel comfortable. Furthermore, prior to starting discussions the researcher established a verbal agreement with participants to avoid

disclosing identifiable information about individuals, the football club and the community football league.

Coaches proved much harder to recruit. Due to work commitments and the demands of being a coach, some coaches were only available at select times during the data collection period, making it difficult to arrange focus groups. Other coaches were more accessible due to being self-employed, but preferred to participate without other coaches due to personality conflicts and indifferent availability during the week. Consequently, individual interviews were employed during the data collection period when focus groups were not a viable option for coaches. Individual interviews are the most widely used data collection method in qualitative research (Kvale, 2007; Sandelowski, 2002). Although they are considered a staple of qualitative inquiry, individual interviews come in various forms. For example, Patton (2002) identifies three different interview approaches; the informal conversational interview, the general interview guide approach, and the standardised interview. The informal conversational interview, also known as an 'unstructured interview' (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Fontana & Frey, 2000), offers maximum flexibility in pursuing discussions in any direction, however, being unstructured does not mean that conversational interviews are unfocused (Patton, 2002). The standardised interview, also known as a 'structured interview' (Fontana & Frey, 2000), is generally used when it is important to minimise variation in the questions posed to participants. The general interview guide, also known as a 'semi-structured interview', provides a basic line of inquiry that the researcher follows during each interview, but allows sufficient flexibility for participants to respond in relation to the discussion topic (Kvale, 2007; Patton, 2002).

An unstructured, informal interview approach was initially considered because of the inherent flexibility they offer. However, although unstructured interviewing approaches allow participants to respond with freedom, some structure was necessary for this research design to ensure cross-case comparability (Bryman, 2008). Therefore, a semi-structured interviewing approach was employed. The key advantage of using a semi-structured interviewing approach is the flexibility or ‘great deal of leeway’ that it offers (Bryman, 2008, p. 438) – an advantage that was not only valued by participants, but also by the researcher who was able to intuitively probe particular themes as they emerged naturalistically (Patton, 2002). As such, semi-structured interviews enabled the researcher to develop more or less detailed questions within the context of the interview, and thus, ‘free to build a conversation within a particular subject area, to word questions spontaneously, and to establish a conversational style’ (Patton, 2002, p. 343).

Much like focus groups, individual interviews have also attracted criticisms despite contributing rich, in-depth data (Kvale, 2007). The main concern is that while researchers may set out to adopt a neutral position during an interview, they may inadvertently demonstrate a preference for a particular perspective, and in the process, bias the findings (Lambert & Loisele, 2008). Subsequently, a carefully designed, semi-structured questioning guide was adopted to account for probing bias during the interview. The interview guide included introductory questions such as ‘How did you get involved in coaching junior Australian football?’, followed by some pertinent questions such as ‘How would you describe your role and responsibility as a coach?’ and ‘What are the most challenging things about being a coach?’ Similar questions were used during the focus groups, but reworded in a

manner suitable for children and parents. (See Appendix O and Appendix P for more detailed examples of questions used during data collection).

On average, the individual interviews lasted approximately one hour. Some coaches spoke at length for up to two hours, while other individual interviews lasted 45 minutes. Similarly, most of the focus groups with parents ranged between 45 minutes and nearly two hours. However, all of the focus groups with children did not exceed 40 minutes. The focus groups and individual interviews were recorded with two digital audio-recorders; one master, and one 'back-up'.

Saturation

The concept of theoretical saturation was adopted to finalise the number of interviews and focus groups. Although 'saturation' in qualitative research lacks coherence, most researchers generally accept that saturation is the point where data collection continues until a category or theme becomes fully developed and new evidence does not provide additional themes or properties (Creswell, 2007). This ambiguity is at the heart of the debate surrounding the importance of demonstrating how saturation is achieved in qualitative research (Bowen, 2008). Morgan (1996) argues that saturation is generally reached following four to six qualitative interviews. However, the current research consists of three demographically diverse cases across South Australia, and within each case, the sample consists of parents, children and coaches. In this way, four to six interviews will not be sufficient to interview coaches, children, and parents across three cases, thereby challenging Morgan's recommendations. This perspective is supported by Bryman (2008), who contends that certain methodologies advocate for a wide exploration of 'multiple perspectives' of an issue. Nonetheless, the concept of saturation remains nebulous.

As such, data collection concluded at the point where no new data was perceived to emerge, resulting in a total of 20 focus groups and 11 individual interviews conducted.

Data analysis

A characteristic strength of all qualitative data is that it is rich in description (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In pursuing an understanding around meaning and experience, it is therefore important to consider all perspectives that may provide a ‘thick description’ of the issue (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In qualitative research, thematic content analysis is the accepted analytical method of textual inquiry (Silverman, 2006). Thematic content analysis is the process of coding and categorising large amounts of textual information into broader trends of consensus (Grbich, 2007). The coding process, often referred to as ‘data reduction,’ aims to make sense of the data by organising it into manageable segments of text (Richards, 2005). The objective of coding is to learn from the data and keep revisiting it until the researcher understands the patterns and explanations (Richards, 2005). This patterned response is conceptualised as an important theme ‘captured’ in relation to the research questions and objectives. This research utilised a thematic content analysis, following Braun and Clarke’s (2006) six-step analysis model (outlined below).

Step 1: Familiarising yourself with the data

This involved the researcher manually transcribing the audio-recorded data verbatim, which not only helped organise the data sets, but promoted a closer familiarisation with the data by re-hearing voices and noticing misremembered details (Richards,

2005). Although manual transcription is time-consuming (Richards, 2005), it is also consistent with the constructionist paradigm (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Step 2: Generating initial codes

Generating initial codes involves organising features of the data that are interesting or of importance to the research (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The generation of initial codes is not the same as themes, which are the collaboration of codes into groups of similar data sets. In qualitative research, data can be manually or electronically coded. While computer assisted qualitative data analysis software [CAQDAS] (e.g., NVivo, QualPro, NUD.IST) has made it arguably more efficient to store and analyse data, a series of concerns about the use of electronic coding in qualitative research exists. For example, Fossey et al. (2002) and Davis and Meyer (2009) both claim that specific features of CAQDAS such as '*auto-coding*' may distance the researcher from the data. Although CAQDAS has great potential for sorting information, it does not 'replace the researcher for data interpretation' (Malterud, 2001, p. 486). Kidd and Parshall (2000) also state that CAQDAS may 'distort' the underlying context and meaning of remarks and seduce the analytical process away from a reflective engagement with the textual data. Furthermore, Welsh (2002) argues that NVivo is 'less useful' in terms of addressing validity and reliability because of the inherent fluidity in the way that concepts emerge from qualitative data. Similarly, Auld et al. (2007) note that manual analysis may not be as time consuming as others perceive, challenging the notion that CAQDAS expedites the analysis process. Despite these concerns, the major determining factor in deciding between manual or electronic coding was founded on the need to contextually understand the phenomenon under inquiry. Although one of the claimed advantages of using CAQDAS is its efficiency

in the coding process, it is equally problematic because it eliminates the social context of the code within the interview (Davis & Meyer, 2009). Therefore, the data in this research was coded manually in order for the researcher to become more familiar with it.

After coding the textual data, all of the codes were re-examined, and taken back to the data source to see if they accurately matched the descriptions in text (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Specific quotes were circled from the transcripts that supported these themes (Creswell, 2005). This analytical process enabled the researcher to compare and contrast variation in perspectives, and refine further categories and blends in the data (Richards, 2005). At this point, the codes were collaborated into similar data sets, and aggregated into broader abstractions, yielding potential themes and sub-themes (Creswell, 2005).

Step 3: Searching for themes

This step involves sorting the different codes into potential (preliminary) themes. Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest a number of methods to aggregate codes into broader themes, such as using tables or mind-maps to visually represent the data. Another method suggested is to write the name of each code (and a brief description) on a separate piece of paper and play around with organising them into ‘theme-piles’ (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Through this process, the researcher considered the intersecting relationship between codes, sub-themes, and broader, higher-order themes. In this research, over 50 initial codes were abstracted and organised into six preliminary themes.

Step 4: Reviewing themes

Step four involves refining the preliminary themes to ascertain if they accurately represent the data. There should be clear and identifiable distinctions between the themes, supported by compelling segments of text (Braun & Clarke, 2006). During this process, some preliminary themes may actually collapse into one another, while other preliminary themes might be further broken down into new, separate themes. In the current research, no new themes emerged; however, two themes collapsed into others as there was not sufficient data to sustain them on their own, providing a more accurate portrayal of the emergent findings. Braun and Clarke (2006) concede that this phase lacks coherence surrounding when to stop reviewing themes, therefore, once the refinements added nothing substantial to understanding a broader picture of the data, the researcher proceeded to define and name the themes.

Step 5: Defining and naming themes

This step involves analysing the data extracts within these themes to not only identify the 'story', but how each theme fits into the broader, overall narrative (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In this way, it is important to consider the themes themselves, and each theme in relation to the others. Furthermore, this step involves identifying clear sub-themes within the broader theme, giving structure to the analysis and subsequent narrative. Given that the current study is a collective case study, a cross-case examination was also conducted to strengthen the overall findings (Yin, 2003). While not well defined, this process involved comparing and contrasting the emergent themes from each case in search for greater understanding around the phenomenon (Yin, 2003).

Step 6: Producing the report

As the name suggests, the final step involves writing a report to accurately describe the themes in detail. The task of the write-up is to communicate the ‘story’ of the data by providing a ‘concise, coherent, logical, non-repetitive and interesting account of the story within and across themes’ (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 93).

Rigour

The term methodological rigour refers to the robustness and completeness of qualitative research, or in a word, the ‘trustworthiness’ of the data (Tobin & Begley, 2004). Despite being treated to an array of interchangeable, and often confusing nomenclature (i.e., accuracy, goodness, validity, authenticity, reliability, and credibility, to name a few), there remains a general consensus that qualitative inquirers need to demonstrate that their studies are indeed trustworthy, or valid (Creswell & Miller, 2000). The current study employed a number of methods to enhance the rigour of the methodology and, in turn, the strength and reliability of the emergent data. For example, methodological triangulation was employed in an attempt to get what Silverman (2006) describes as a ‘true’ fix on a situation by combining different perspectives. Many proponents consider maximal variation sampling an acceptable method of enhancing the methodological rigor (for example, Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011; Patton, 2002). Maximal variation sampling was used to target and recruit participants, which enabled the researcher to triangulate multiple data sources (parents, children and coaches). Furthermore, manual transcription of interview data that are ‘verbatim’ accounts of what transpired is also considered an important method for enhancing rigour in qualitative research (Poland, 1995). However, these alone are insufficient to claim trustworthiness and reliability.

Therefore, the current research employed two additional strategies to enhance methodological rigour. First, inter-coder reliability, also termed 'inter-rater reliability' (Marshall & Rossman, 2011), was undertaken. Inter-coder reliability is a widely used technique involving independent coders to evaluate a characteristic of a message or artefact and reach the same conclusion (Lombard, Snyder-Duch, & Bracken, 2002). The purpose of this process is to review or check segments of a transcript for consistency in meanings (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Silverman (2006) adds that independent coders who can analyse qualitative data can arrive at the same conclusion is 'crucial' in relation to the reliability of the measures and validity of its findings. The research supervisor, as an experienced qualitative researcher, volunteered to fulfil this role. The research supervisor was familiar with the project and has extensive background knowledge in the socio-cultural dimensions of sport. An additional reviewer outside of the project had been identified, in the event that agreement was not achieved; as the principal researcher and the supervisor achieved near identical evaluations of the same set of data, the additional reviewer was not pursued.

Member checking (Patton, 2002) was also employed to enhance methodological rigour. This process involved taking data back to the study participants to confirm the accuracy of the information (Creswell & Miller, 2000). In this way, member checking shifts the 'validation' process away from the researcher by having participants view the raw data (i.e., post-hoc transcript evaluation) and comment on their accuracy (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Member checking was pursued with all participants. Following transcription, the researcher emailed the interview transcripts to the participants and asked them to review the transcript and inform the researcher in the event that the information was not accurate. No participant raised concerns

about the representation of the raw data. Following member checking, the data was subjected to a thematic content analysis.

The role of the researcher

Given that qualitative research is continually in pursuit of in-depth understanding, the quality of information obtained during data collection becomes largely dependent on the skills of the researcher (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011; Patton, 2002). This subjectivity appears to contradict the rhetoric that ‘any credible research strategy requires that the investigator adopt a stance of *neutrality* with regard to the phenomenon under study’ (Patton, 2002, p. 51). Indeed, the researcher was aware that his own experiences and subjectivities posed a potential bias to the collection and interpretation of the data. It is these qualitative characteristics that provide scepticism when compared to rigour in positivist research. However, it was important for the researcher to struggle with this inherent bias because of his commitment to understanding parental influence in the junior Australian football experience. For this reason, the researcher strived to maintain a position of ‘empathetic neutrality’ in the research process; that is, the middle ground between becoming too involved, which can cloud judgement, and remaining too distant, which can reduce understanding (Patton, 2002). In an attempt to manage the level of researcher bias, the following excerpt was used as a guideline to position the researcher within the data collection and analysis process:

[Make] a commitment to understand the issue as it unfolds, be true to complexities and multiple perspectives as they emerge, and be balanced in reporting both confirmatory and disconfirmatory evidence with regard to any conclusions offered (Patton, 2002, p. 51).

Reflexivity

Unlike quantitative approaches that employ standardised instruments for data collection, the researcher *is* the instrument for all qualitative data collection (Patton, 2002). The credibility of all qualitative research, therefore, to a great extent hinges on the skills, competence, and rigour of the person doing fieldwork (Patton, 2002). This unique characteristic of qualitative research has drawn criticisms about the accuracy and trustworthiness of data given the high degree of human involvement in the data collection process. However, the qualitative tradition acknowledges the virtual impossibility for the inquirer to remain ‘outside’ of the research process (Willig, 2001). Indeed, qualitative researchers are aware and acknowledge their role as part and parcel of the construction of knowledge (Bryman, 2008). The researcher, by implication, is involved in the construction of knowledge through the stance that he or she assumes in relation to the observed and through the ways in which an account is transmitted in the form of a text (Bryman, 2008). Accordingly, the qualitative researcher is likely to experience a dual role of inquirer and respondent, teacher and learner, and as an individual coming to know the self within the processes of research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). Nevertheless, there still remains one contentious issue; does the role of the researcher compromise the process of data collection and reporting, from conversation and text, and from dialogue to paper? In attempting to best address these concerns, qualitative researchers commonly adopt and declare ‘reflexivity,’ described by Patton (2002) as ‘an ongoing examination,’ and a ‘deconstructive exercise,’

reminding the inquirer to be attentive to and conscious of the cultural, political, social, linguistic, and ideological origins of one’s own perspective

and voice as well as the perspectives and voices of those one interviews and those to whom one reports (p. 65).

Reflexivity involves thinking about how the research may have affected and possibly changed us, as people and as researchers (Willig, 2001). It is an examination of the project and how the researcher and inter-subjective elements impinge on, and even transform, research (Finlay, 2002). Reflexivity advocates the need for social researchers to be reflective about the implications of their methods, values, biases and decisions for the knowledge of the social world they generate (Bryman, 2008). Denzin & Lincoln (2003) echo this point, arguing that reflexivity ‘demands’ a ‘self-interrogation’ of the inquirer regarding the ways in which the research efforts are shaped and staged around the binaries, contradictions, and paradoxes that form our own lives. However, reflexivity also asks the reader to accept itself as authentic, as a conscientious effort to ‘tell the truth’ about the making of an account (Woolgar, 1988). This type of self-reflection, termed introspection or introspective reflexivity, entails loose injunctions to ‘think about what we are doing’ and how the inquiry was carried out;

[introspection] is encouraged as a means of generating addenda to research reports, sometimes in the form of ‘fieldwork confessions’, which provide the ‘inside story’ on how the research was done (Woolgar, 1988, p. 22).

To encourage introspection, a series of questions was canvassed throughout the data collection period, forcing the researcher to reflect upon the ways in which personal values, experiences, interests, beliefs, political commitments, wider aims in life and social identities have shaped the research (Willig, 2001). The following questions

suggested by Patton (2002, p. 66) were adopted as a way of provoking introspective reflexivity:

What do I know?

How do I know what I know?

What shapes and has shaped my perspective?

With what voice do I share my perspective?

What do I do with what I have found?

Additionally, a reflexive diary (Nadin & Cassell, 2006) was utilised to promote researcher reflexivity as a valuable tool of maintaining an account for the methodological and theoretical decisions made throughout the research. The diary consisted of written entries concerning the inquirer's position in the research and the pre-conceived thoughts and feelings toward aspects of the study. In particular, there were early entries relating to concerns that the researcher was parsimoniously probing for desirable information during the interview process rather than allowing discussions to emerge freely and naturally. The diary provided an important reminder for the researcher to continuously pursue reflexivity and maintain an awareness of his position in the construction of knowledge.

Delimitations and limitations

A delimitation of the current research surrounds the exploration of parental influence in the junior Australian football experience in the age group of 12 and 13 year old children. It is feasible that perceptions of parental influence will vary depending on the age group of the participants. For example, children involved in introductory

Australian football programs such as ‘Auskick’ may experience parental influence differently to children involved in an organised junior Australian football competition. However, the 12–13 year age group is of vital significance given that it highlights an important participatory transition in the childhood sport experience (Côté, 1999; Côté et al., 2009). Furthermore, this age group is particularly poignant given that sport dropout peaks at around 13 years in Australia (Olds et al., 2009).

Despite calls for wider research on the influence of parents in children’s sport (Gould et al., 2008; Wheeler, 2011), another delimitation of the study relates to the specific sport setting of junior Australian football. Indeed, it is possible that issues around the contemporary nature of sport-parenting may extend across a multitude of sport settings. However, junior Australian football is not only one of the highest sport preferences among children in Australia, but also one of the more affordable sporting pursuits (Kirk et al., 1997a), providing a highly accessible and pertinent ‘hotbed’ for pursuing research into parental influence in children’s sport.

In terms of limitations, from a methodological perspective, qualitative research has traditionally been criticised for its lack of generalisability. This criticism has been central to discussions around the utility of case study research, as highlighted by Patton (2002, p. 580):

The pragmatic criterion of utility leads to the question of what one can do with qualitative findings. Certainly, the results illuminate a particular situation or small number of cases. But what of utility beyond the limited case or cases studied? Can qualitative findings be generalised?

While Patton articulates an important question, some authors address this perspective by arguing that the first priority of case study research is particularisation and not

necessarily generalisability (Stake, 2000). That is, the purpose of any case study design is not necessarily to represent the world but to represent the case (Stake, 2000). Others argue that generalisability is critical, but claim that the quality of the sampling decisions on which the generalisations depend are more important than quantification in qualitative research (Flick, 2009). Nonetheless, it is important to acknowledge that the findings of this study may not hold true in alternative sport settings in relation to parental influence, particularly from a social constructionist perspective that advocates the notion of 'multiple realities' (Willig, 2001). In this way, the study provides a detailed chronicle specific to junior Australian football which may provide a mere indication of the nature of sport-parenting in alternative settings in Australia. For example, organised rugby and soccer are also high sport preferences among Australian children, and render similar principles of play (i.e., two teams, large field area, and invasion type game in nature). Therefore, the contemporary nature of parental influence in junior Australian football may assist in understanding sport-parenting in similar sport settings, but also cross culturally and internationally in the context of children's sport. Yet for settings such as golf and tennis (i.e., individual sports, can be expensive), the generalisability of the study is arguably more limited.

Ethical considerations

The intimate nature of interviewing meant that a considerable amount of time was spent in the field with participants at various locations, raising a number of moral and ethical concerns that had to be addressed appropriately.

Informed consent

In compliance with national ethical standards and the Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee [SBREC] at Flinders University, all participants provided informed consent to participate in a focus group or individual interview by signing a letter of consent. Where children were concerned, a parental or caregiver's signature was also required. The letter of consent was coupled with an 'easy-to-read' information sheet pertaining to the study and a letter of introduction. Two versions of this letter were designed in a manner that was suitable for children as well as for parents and coaches. The information sheet comprised of simple words and explanations for children, but not at the expense of omitting important information regarding the study. To the researcher's knowledge, no information was withheld. However, in a number of cases involving children, the researcher needed to verbally clarify the consent form items with parents or caregivers, which proved to be crucial in securing children's participation.

Deception

Deception occurs when the researcher represents their work as something other than what it is (Bryman, 2008). In the current study, all aspects of the research were declared to participants during the recruitment period and reiterated prior to commencing focus groups and individual interviews.

Privacy and confidentiality

As outlined previously, there are some challenges to ensuring privacy and confidentiality when using focus groups. In the current study, appropriate cautions

were employed to best preserve the participants' rights to privacy and confidentiality.

Specifically the following steps were undertaken:

- All audio-recorded data were not made available to any individual beyond the principal researcher. The data was stored on the university network server in a de-identifiable format and password protected.
- All consent forms consisting of names and signatures were stored in a locked cabinet within the researcher's secure office at the university. Access to the office cabinet was limited to the principle researcher.
- All forms relating to recruitment, including permission forms detailing the identity of the football clubs and football leagues, were stored in a locked cabinet within the researcher's secure office at the university. Access to the office cabinet was limited to the principle researcher.
- A copy of the audio-recorded data was stored on a portable hard-drive in a de-identifiable format and password protected. The portable hard-drive was then stored in a locked cabinet within the researcher's secure office at the university.
- Prior to commencing focus groups and individual interviews, participants were reminded that no information which identifies an individual will be published in the resulting thesis or any subsequent publication.
- Prior to commencing focus groups and individual interviews, participants established a verbal agreement to avoid the use of real names and identities. Any deviation from this agreement was accounted

for during transcription by substituting names and identities with pseudonyms.

Accuracy

There was also a need to comply with the ‘cardinal principle’ of social science research – accuracy (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). With the exception of concealing identifiable names during the transcription process, it was important to represent the findings without fabrication, fraudulent materials, omissions and contrivances (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). By manually transcribing the audio data, the principle researcher was able to control the cadence of the transcription process in order to provide an accurate account of focus group discussions and individual interviews.

Working with children

Despite providing evidence of ethics approval, personal identification, a national police clearance and certificate of teacher registration to the football clubs and participants, some consenting parents and caregivers were uncomfortable leaving children in the care of the principle researcher. In some instances, and with the permission of the football clubs, it was necessary for the principle researcher to ‘meet and greet’ parents during the recruitment period. This proved an effective approach in appeasing any concerns and familiarising potential participants with the researcher. In one focus group with children however, the principle researcher had to negotiate a suitable location to satisfy parental concerns. The focus group was moved from the confines of the football clubrooms office to a more visible dining area of the clubrooms, enabling parents to oversee the focus group from a distance without interfering with the discussion.

In the lead up to data collection, another potential ethical dilemma surrounded children disclosing reportable information (i.e., physical abuse). Although this did not eventuate, the researcher grappled with the question, ‘should I maintain privacy and confidentiality promised to the participants as per conditions of consent or should I report suspected abuse?’ Consequently, a range of carefully selected public health services were made available to participants in the event that additional support and assistance was necessary:

Kids helpline (free call) – 1800 55 1800
Child abuse report line (free call) – 13 14 78
Families SA [Mount Gambier office] (free call) – 1800 800747
Families SA [Onkaparinga office] (cost of a local call) – 8207 3000
Kangaroo Island Community Health Service (cost of a local call) – 8553 4231

Figure 6: Selected public health service information made available to participants

From a political and ethical perspective, it was appropriate to first contact the community Australian football leagues and formally request permission to access affiliated football clubs (see Appendices B – D for letters to local leagues). In this way, the leagues become aware of the research activity being undertaken during the course of the competitive season. This process involved a high degree of interpersonal skill to effectively ‘sell’ the research, and required the researcher to follow a hierarchical structure that would ultimately enable recruitment and data collection. The principle researcher exchanged a series of emails with the SANFL junior development and participation manager to garner their interest and support for the research, which proved to be the catalyst for obtaining the support and assistance of affiliated community football leagues and football clubs.

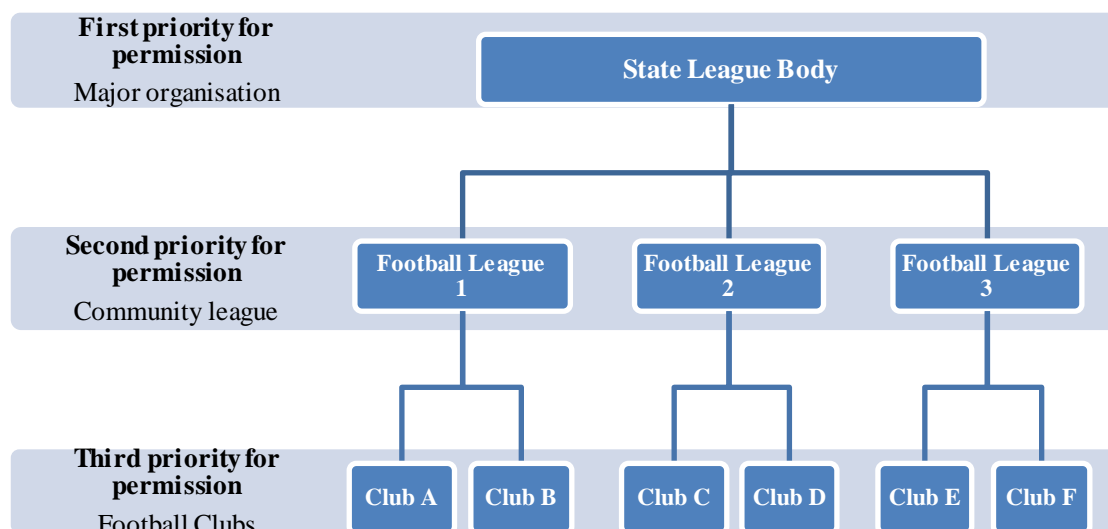


Figure 7: A political hierarchy of Australian football in South Australia

Conclusion

This chapter has provided a detailed account of the research process for the current study. It has comprehensively discussed collective case study research design as an appropriate methodology consistent with the epistemological underpinnings of the research. This chapter then detailed the recruitment and purposeful sampling strategies used, and provided a descriptive argument for the use of focus groups and individual interviews as the data collection method. This chapter also considered the notion of theoretical saturation and the criticisms and advantages of collecting conversational data in qualitative research. Furthermore, a significant section of this chapter was devoted to outlining the data analysis process, including a deliberation of manual or electronic methods, and an important consideration for the strategies that contributed to enhancing the methodological rigour of the current study. Finally, this chapter illuminated a range of ethical considerations that influenced the research process and subsequent approaches to drive the research agenda.

CHAPTER FIVE

Themes

Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the data that emerged from 102 parents, children and coaches involved in this research. Where participants are quoted, pseudonyms are used to protect identity and maintain integrity according to the conditions of their consent. All participants are currently involved in an organised junior Australian football competition as a player, coach, volunteer or spectator. The participants were recruited from specific regions across South Australia including Kangaroo Island, Mount Gambier and southern Adelaide. This chapter first provides a crucial contextual backdrop for the ensuing discussion of themes by articulating the way in which the competition structure and delivery of junior Australian football varies across South Australia.

Mount Gambier

The local football competition in Mount Gambier has a high number of participants. The current structure consists of three divisions within the under 12 [U12] competition (U12A, U12B and U12C respectively) and one under 14 [U14] competition consisting of multiple teams from five clubs (i.e., ‘Saints Red’ and ‘Saints Blue’ from the club Saints United). There are also pathways for children to progress into the under 16 [U16] and under 18 [U18] competitions, which lead to adult grade competitions. The U12A division predominantly comprises of ‘top-age’ (chronologically the eldest) children who are closest to progressing into the U14 competition and for players who possess the physical maturity to compete in the

same division with older players. In contrast, the U12B and U12C divisions consist of 'bottom age' players and players with developing football competency. The U12 competition does not include a finals competition, but it does host a round-robin 'lighting' carnival in which every team meets all other teams in turn, accommodated inside a single day, to conclude the season. This event allows all children to participate in a series of shortened games against all children within the U12 competition and signifies the culmination of the football season. Conversely, the U14 competition does host a finals series format. Another important distinction about junior Australian football in this region is that both U12 and U14 competitions are organised as a Sunday competition separate from the senior competition, which occurs on a Saturday afternoon.

One of the unique issues facing junior Australian football in Mount Gambier is the fact that school football no longer operates as a 'feeder' pathway into an organised community competition. Schools have previously played an integral role in this regard. However, the abandonment of this concept has placed greater pressure on local teams at the community level to accommodate rising participatory numbers. The implications are three-fold. First, the advent of a three-tiered division in the U12 competition has meant that more volunteers are needed to facilitate the expansion of the competition. While many parents fulfil a range of roles necessary to enable children's participation, many clubs and grades experience a lack of volunteerism, straining existing resources. Second, due to the increased number of games on the weekend, the duration of each game has become shorter, thus limiting playing opportunities for children. The third issue concerns the categorisation process in the U12 competition, whereby children are ranked into the A, B, or C division based age

and ability. This places additional pressure on volunteer coaches attempting to select teams that are competitively appropriate for each division.

Kangaroo Island

The local Australian football competition on Kangaroo Island [KI] does not have strong participatory numbers to support a traditional competition model. Consequently, the current structure consists of an under 12 [U12] and an under 15 [U15] competition only before progressing into the senior competition. The U12 and U15 competitions on KI house a traditional finals format to conclude the season, and all junior matches are scheduled on Saturday morning as a ‘curtain raiser’ (opening games) before the senior grades. The remoteness of the island also heightens local rivalry between the five clubs, giving football strong social and cultural significance for the community.

A longstanding challenge for junior Australian football on Kangaroo Island concerns the lack of participants in the U12 and U15 competitions. Given that there are no grades offered between U15 and senior football, many children who wish to continue playing football beyond the U15 competition are forced to play against physically mature adults in the ‘reserves’ or ‘senior’ competition, with consequent concerns for children’s safety. The lack of numbers also forces many children in the U12 competition to participate in the U15 competition in order to ‘make up the numbers,’ further reinforcing issues around player safety and welfare. As one child stated ‘you’re kind of forced to play up [in an older grade] because we lack the numbers.’

Kangaroo Island experiences an immense drop in participation between the junior and senior grades. To encourage children to continue their involvement in Australian

football, modified tackling rules have been adopted to protect young children coming into the adult competition. The Kangaroo Island football league has also introduced a permit system enabling children to participate in the junior competition for an additional season if they are not physically mature enough to move into the senior competition.

Southern Adelaide

The junior Australian football competition in southern Adelaide engenders the most traditional structure or pathway through the junior competition and toward senior football. In the Southern Football League, there is one under 12 [U12] and under 14 [U14] competition comprising of 15 teams from across the region. The U12 competition does not consist of a finals format but, like Mount Gambier, does host a ‘lightning carnival’ to conclude the season, whereas the U14 competition does include a finals structure. Another distinction between the two junior grades is that the U14 competition is scheduled on Saturday morning before the senior competition, while the U12 competition is scheduled on Sunday, separating them from the older grades.

A major issue facing junior Australian football in this region surrounds parental behaviour, highlighted by the recently reported cancellation of the U12 ‘lightning carnival’ in response to poor parental behaviour (Spence, 2012). Another unique issue for junior Australian football in southern Adelaide includes the financial difficulties associated with operating a sporting club in a low socioeconomic community. Indicative of most participants in this region, one parent stated:

The clubs are broke. The amount of money we have to pay the association before we break even is just phenomenal. I mean, I understand the costs that

go into insurances and stuff but some clubs are run by the council, and all their maintenance is done for free, whereas other clubs have to put the money up themselves and so it's a big struggle to keep that going. We heavily rely on grants and stuff.

In summary, there are a number of noteworthy differences between cases in relation to the structure and delivery of junior Australian football. The structure of competition and the context-specific challenges facing parents, children and coaches are important factors influencing the junior Australian football experience. These distinctions play an important role in providing a contextual backdrop for the ensuing chapter, which explores the primary themes that emerged from the individual interviews and focus group from across all three cases. They are (1) promoting participation; (2) game day; (3) the contemporary coach; and (4) the junior football culture. Each theme is underpinned by a number of important sub-themes and nuances that provide greater understanding around parental influence in junior sport. This chapter provides the most pertinent voices and perspectives emerging from the data.

Promoting participation

Home practice

One of the significant aspects of parental influence in junior Australian football surrounds children's initial introduction to the sport. For many children, this began at an early age through school football clinics and introductory programs such as 'Auskick' and 'AFL 9s'. Many children recalled this entry-level experience with great fondness and agreed that it served a fundamental role in developing the basic skills necessary for continued participation. However, most children did not

transition into competitive junior Australian football via these introductory programs. Instead, the most common entry-level experience for children was engaging in a casual ‘kick-to-kick’ at home with their parents. Television and media also played a small role in promoting a fascination with Australian football, but parents were perceived to be instrumental in promoting children’s participation through various forms of home practice. Often, the home practice would manifest into more structured practices set up and facilitated by parents. Many parents engaged in skill ‘drills’ and goal kicking practice with children, while for others the home practice comprised of contests that challenged children’s ability through long kicking competitions and accuracy-based tasks. Interestingly however, home practice was not limited to the interactions traditionally shared between fathers and sons. Many mothers found home practice to be an effective way of positioning themselves in the junior Australian football experience, while simultaneously promoting positive attitudes around physical activity and engagement in sport. In describing her involvement in home practice, one mother reflected:

It [my support] can be during the game or when he’s at home. I mean I don’t have much experience, but Adam will often be like ‘Mum, can you do me some drills?’ and this will be in the backyard and it will be like throwing the ball down and handball it back and if he’s a bit further back, I will say ‘ok, you can kick it to me now and then throw it down and run around me,’ and ... It doesn’t matter that it’s me doing all the things like that; he likes to do them all.

The home practice provided an opportunity for both mothers and fathers to creatively design football-related games and challenges for children. Even if they did not possess a deep knowledge of the game, most parents were more than willing to ‘have

a kick' with children after school, after work and on the weekend. In this way, the nature of the activity was more stimulating and motivating for children than the expertise of the parent involved.

Beau, he likes to stay after school and practice on the school ovals and stuff.

I don't really have to encourage it; they just want to do it so we'll hang around. I'll kick the football with them. I can't tell him much about football because I don't know much but it's just kicking the football with him you know. We'll get out on the street as well at my mum's house, because it's a quiet street and kick the football there as well.

In promoting children's participation in junior Australian football, parental involvement in home practices was especially important for 'raw' beginners. However, parents were perceived to play a less significant role among self-motivated and highly skilled children. Although parents were not precluded entirely from home practices, self-motivated children often chose to train alone and design their own practices to improve specific skills and general football competency. In this way, parents fulfilled a different role in the home practice experience by permitting children to engage in unsupervised activities at the local oval and beyond the home setting. Some children claimed to run 'three-to-four kilometres' after school to improve their fitness, while others preferred to design individualised home practices that developed goal kicking proficiency and skill acquisition. The following conversation with children begins to highlight the reduced parenting role in home practice among self-motivated children:

Tom: I go running every night at our block at home.

Matt: I live straight across from the oval so I do laps and kick goals by myself.

Dale: And if we want to we have sleep overs and our parents let us go to the sports oval by ourselves and we have a game of mini football or something.

Matt: I kick goals and snaps.

Similarly, from a parental perspective:

I mean, if we're home on a Friday night, he'll put the TV on and turn on the footy instead of cartoons or something like that – the Simpsons, something. If he knows the Crows are playing Essendon, boom. So I don't have to do too much because he will just do things of his own accord. Same as if it is after school. He will come home, have a glass of cordial, and say 'Dad, can I grab a footy? I am going off with a couple of mates down the footy oval,' 'no worries'. So I am just there to encourage, I don't have to push. He generally loves the game himself.

Although home practices enabled numerous opportunities for parents and children to interact through sport, it was not always a pleasurable experience for children. In some cases where a casual kick-to-kick became too rigid and specialised, children often expressed frustration and dissatisfaction toward their parents and the activity. In particular, several parents who boasted expertise and knowledge relating to Australian football found it increasingly difficult to contribute to an enjoyable home practice experience, as epitomised by the following quote:

Definitely, my son will just crack it at me just saying nicely 'you have got to hold the ball like that' and then he'll kick it and it goes off like that and it's like 'you're not doing it right mate, you need to keep practicing' and if I

keep going he'll just keep cracking it at me big time. When I can see him getting a bit annoyed at himself, I just take a few steps back and have a few more kicks and he ends up getting it but yeah.

Nonetheless, the home practice experience promoted the opportunity and freedom for children to practice kicking goals from 'the impossible angle' and mimic the movement patterns of their elite AFL idols. Despite manifesting in different forms, the home practice routine appears to be a crucial element in promoting children's initial and ongoing participation in organised junior Australian football.

Coerced participation

The notion of 'coercing' children to play junior Australian football emerged as a unique, yet highly pertinent aspect of promoting sport participation. Although parents, children and coaches described the concept as 'steering', 'guiding', 'pressuring' and 'forcing', it was not always perceived as a negative aspect of the sport-parenting role. Instead, coercing participation was rationalised by broader parental concerns for children's holistic health and wellbeing. Most parents argued that children were becoming 'lazier' in response to increasing appeal and accessibility of video games, 3D television viewing and other contemporary technologies (i.e., tablet computers, mobile application technology). By coercing children's involvement into a sport that required a commitment to weekly training, parents claimed that they were countering the potentially negative influence of contemporary sedentary leisure activities by promoting physical activity. Reflective of most parents' views, one participant stated:

I think we probably pushed him a little bit to make sure he does play. We don't like them to sit down and play the Nintendo DS for 24/7 hours and

watch TV, so we get outside and part of getting outside was kicking that footy, setting up some goals, doing some drills and just keeping my fitness up if nothing else, to make sure I don't sit on the couch and watch TV with him so maybe there was a little bit of a push there.

In this sense, coerced participation is socially accepted in junior Australian football under the guise of promoting physical activity and healthy lifestyle behaviours. Most of the children agreed that parents coerce them to participate, but described being 'forced' as a 'good thing' for 'keeping fit,' 'improving' and 'getting a sweat up,' and therefore did not perceive it to be a negative aspect of parental involvement.

Another tier of coercive, yet well-intended parental behaviour concerned the pivotal role of fathers in the early sport experience. For nearly all fathers, junior Australian football was a favoured sporting pathway because they could attest to the intrinsic fulfilment it provided them during childhood. One father noted 'I suppose because I played footy, it was an important part of my life, so I tried to give it to them.'

Another father noted:

We've all played football when we were kids when we were young and stuff, and they've seen us playing football and that's sort of been the natural progression hasn't it! Especially because boys want to be like their dads, don't they?

Consequently, many fathers admitted to 'steering' children away from other sports such as soccer, hockey and netball, and toward junior Australian football. This tier of coerced participation was further compounded by fathers who assumed all decision-making responsibilities, including the decision around which club children will play for. For many children, this meant that they were socially isolated from their school

friends and forced to play for their father's childhood club. One father commented 'I did my juniors here as well, so I thought I'd sort of give back to the club,' while others parents believed that introducing children to a new social circle would positively impact their social development. Furthermore, one parent claimed:

Jim goes to Mary Vale primary school so that's in this region. We live in Point North and I've brought him down here [to Point North] to mix with a different bunch of blokes to give him confidence to mix with other blokes – it's best for him you know, and now he has got friends at Mary Vale and friends down here.

While there were numerous examples relating to this tier of coerced participation, several parents expressed a far more ruthless approach in coercing children's involvement in junior Australian football, albeit, for similar reasons. One parent was particularly uncompromising in this regard, because he perceived that the potential social outcomes from sport are vital for his son who has Asperger's syndrome. In this case, the parent felt that it is paramount for his son to take advantage of all opportunities through sport to develop social competency. The following quote describes his involvement in coercing participation:

I am terrible to a degree. I mean if he really detests like I have had this year, I have only just got him to play in the under 15 competition this year and plenty of kids have been playing 2 or 3 years longer than that, and I have been trying to get him to play but I have not pushed him too hard. He played a couple of games and he didn't enjoy it. I said 'no that's fine,' but this year I have upped the ante a bit because he's getting to the stage where he's big enough and should be able to do it, 'just go out there and see how you go.' The coaches are very good; they sit him in a forward pocket, they don't shift

him from there very often. The boys are good; when they're winning, they'll give him a handball and a kick at goal so I didn't really give him a choice at the start of this year. I am probably one of those terrible parents.

Another mother reiterated the importance of forcing her child into junior Australian football:

Well for the first few years I sort of had to drag Andrew out there but now he wants to go out there so he has muscle dis-coordination, it's called Oro-motor Dyspraxia, so it was important to try and keep him in there and do what the other kids do. You can't tell that he's got it, I can tell, but it was important to keep his skills up and play some sort of sport.

For several parents, the notion of coerced participation peaked at the beginning of a new football season. Although many children were excited by the prospect of a new football season, some children were not motivated at the thought of pre-season training and other factors associated with playing such as potential football injuries. In response, many parents adopted a variety of persuasive techniques to coerce participation. Some parents convinced children to play by emphasising the importance of 'sticking with your mates,' while others simply forced children to commit to one season, hoping that any enjoyment extracted from their involvement would provide the motivation necessary for continuation into the future. As one father explained however, it is a strategy that does not guarantee long-term involvement:

We made him play school football last year and said 'you have to play school football this year for Mort Street primary school, and then next year if you don't want to play for Normanton, that's your decision,' and he played a full season of football, and we thought he loved it and then we said

‘ok, are you ready to play for Normanton?’, and he said ‘no, I am not interested in playing footy’ and that was it.

The only time forced participation clearly emerged as a negative construct of parental influence was when participants discussed their perceptions of ‘other’ parents in junior Australian football. Ostensibly, most participants suggested that ‘all parents want their kids to play AFL,’ and this was the reason why many parents were perceived to negatively force children’s involvement in junior Australian football. Some parents described seeing ‘terrible’ incidents of forced participation, while another parent noted:

We don’t push our kids to play sport if they don’t want to play, we don’t push them. I am not sure what other people think, but there are other parents who push their kids to the point that they’re fanatical about it, that they expect them to be out there doing their best, and if they don’t do their best, they can be sometimes negative about it.

Similarly, from a child’s perspective:

When my mum and dad come over, like I am pretty small and I am playing against bigger 14 year olds that are twice my size and my dad said ‘you don’t have to play if you do want to,’ but I came out to one training and I liked it, but probably 15–20% of children are pushed by their parents to play.’

From these stories of personal experience and self-reflection, it is clear that coercing children to participate in junior Australian football is not an uncommon parenting practice, usually underpinned by well-intentioned motives. The notion of coerced participation is a substantive thread through which parents can positively or

negatively influence the junior Australian football experience, both at an entry level and from season to season.

Sacrifice

The notion of sacrifice was a common thread relating to promoting participation. Without some form of sacrifice, financial or otherwise, participants claimed that many children would not have the opportunity to participate in junior Australian football. Despite acknowledging the relative affordability of junior Australian football in comparison to sports like cricket and basketball, the chief example of sacrifice surrounded time. It encompassed not only the time commitments associated with travel, but the volunteerism associated with weekend community sport. Most parents perceived this to be a normative aspect of the sport-parenting role, while others perceived volunteerism as a sacrificial act to support children's participation:

The amount of work we do, I get here at 7am in the morning and I don't get home until 8pm at night on a Saturday and my wife, she'd be here on home games on the BBQ for nearly five hours a day and that sort of thing and Jay will see the amount of work that we do, what is sacrificed, and it's really for him you know.

While most parents claimed to do 'whatever it takes' to support children's involvement in junior Australian football, they also expressed anger and frustration toward those parents who do not volunteer similar levels of time and effort. In this sense, the sacrifice of time was more significant among parents who assumed many roles to enable and support junior Australian football. One parent reflected:

You have actually got a whole split. You have got one group that comes to the footy to support their kids and does things around the club, and you've

got the other ones who drop their kids at the club and that's it, you'll never see them. I mean, some of the kids just scrap in on a Saturday. You don't even know who the parents are and it leaves a lot up to us but many hands make light work too you know.

For many parents and coaches, the sacrifice of time impacted beyond the competitive sport setting. Being a junior Australian football coach required considerable planning and preparation for training and game day. This forced some coaches to sacrifice aspects of their working and personal life in order to fulfil the coaching role, reinforcing the notion of sacrifice in promoting participation in junior Australian football. Similarly, a number of parents claimed to undertake fewer working hours in order to support children's participation.

I dropped working on a Sunday. There's a lot mate that we sacrifice, even getting ourselves to the footy. I've got four kids. Two girls that aren't interested in football whatsoever, but they get dragged along to the football every weekend and it goes on for three months and we do it because that's what our boys want.

Another parent confirmed:

I guess you harp back and say 'I wish my dad could have seen me.' As much as possible, I am probably trying to structure my business around making sure I can be there, and I am disappointed if I can't be there. I know my father probably felt the same way but he probably didn't have a choice, so yeah, that's what I try and do. It's just a general sporting Saturday thing. I put off work if possible, if somebody rings me up about work, I will try and put it off until the next day or the Monday or something because they [the children] come first.

For many, the entire family unit sacrificed weekend activities and schedules to support children's participation in junior Australian football. Some participants admitted that family holidays were scheduled around the football season, while others prioritised the entire football season into their weekly and yearly time budgets above social and academic engagements. Some parents even made substantial lifestyle changes to enable more time with children, and promote their involvement in sport.

I've been here for 16 years. I came over here when my eldest daughter was about seven for a better lifestyle and whatever else. The girls were heavily involved in netball – we've got two older girls, and a younger son. I recently sold my business so I could spend more time with my son and the rest of my family too, so last year I took on a position as the player manager of the colts team. My son was playing juniors and that led into being team manager for the colts as well. I am doing the same thing this year plus working on the committee out there, so quite hands on really.

From a monetary perspective, the notion of sacrifice to promote participation was also significant for many participants. In particular, many parents claimed to work fewer hours in order to support children's involvement in junior Australian football. For low-income families, the decision to assume fewer working hours was necessary in order to take children to training and games. However, the financial consequences of working less were noteworthy, especially at the beginning of the football season when sport related expenses were most pronounced. Similarly, self-employed parents discussed having greater job 'flexibility', which enabled them to transport children to training and assist with tasks such as refilling water bottles and retrieving equipment post training, but this meant that they had to post-pone or decline weekend 'cash

jobs' and shift work. These forms of sacrifice not only limited household income during the winter football season, it also made it increasingly difficult to afford basic equipment such as football boots, socks, shorts and mouth guards in preparation for the football season.

One item that most parents did not provide was compression garments based on the premise that they were expensive and 'unnecessary.' Children disagreed however, arguing that they were important for improving training and competitive performances. 'Skins' were the most popular and desired brand, but children also understood that they were expensive and therefore difficult to acquire. While a few children were privileged to own a pair of compression garments, others engaged in domestic or part-time work to pay for additional items like skins, reinforcing the notion of sacrifice, albeit from a children's perspective. The following extract is significant in this regard:

Corey: My parents pay for them [skins].

Dan: I pay for mine. I have to work.

Ryan: I have to do the dishes.

Liam: I do garden duty.

Corey: My parents just pay.

Zane: I do umpiring.

Liam: I still have to do housework to get money.

Corey: Like I don't get money when I do housework because when we go out my parents just buy stuff.

In promoting participation, it is clear that parents potentially influence the junior Australian football experience in a number of ways. By exploring the sub-themes of home practice, forced participation and sacrifice, numerous examples of positive and negative parental influence emerged. Through their involvement in promoting children's sport engagement, parents are crucial in shaping initial and ongoing participatory experiences in junior Australian football.

Game day

Among all participants in the study, discussions of parental influence were most pertinent in discussing the theme 'game day'. Game day emerges from a range of important sub-themes that relate to not only the actual game day experience, but also the pre- and post-game aspects of the competitive experience. Importantly, parents are situated within each temporal phase of the game day theme, underlining their influential, yet unique significance on children's involvement in junior Australian football.

Pre-game

Most participants described pre-game parental influence as supportive, encouraging and positive. However, their involvement in pre-game routines and preparation was also described as highly organised, 'strict,' and at times, 'serious.' Most pre-game routines involved preparatory activities that occurred in the home setting the night before the game. By their own admission, many children began to think about the game and how they might play under certain conditions. For example, children considered scenarios surrounding the weather, the position they might play and how they intend to fulfil their role for the team. Many children also engaged in viewing

the Australian Football League [AFL] on television and used it as a learning tool to prepare for their impending game performance. As one father describes, pre-game routines surrounding AFL telecasts can be very specific for young children:

You know, on weekends, Friday night watching AFL, he watches that until half time when he has to go to bed, kind of watch the end. We tape the last half and he watches that at six in the morning and then we're off to football. I am certainly supportive of his football. It's a great sport for him and for his stature as a person in the community.

Given that football matches are regularly televised on Friday and Saturday nights, it presents numerous opportunities to view, and for some children, study their elite AFL idols. Most children discussed players like Gary Ablett and Lance Franklin as their most revered idols, and tried to replicate their feats during practices and in competitive game situations. Significantly, many parents engaged in this pre-game routine with children as it presented an opportunity for parents to discuss skills, strategies and game plans in greater detail by deferring to these elite role models. The following quote epitomises the role of parents and televised football matches in children's pre-game routines:

He will bring it up. He will watch the footy and something will happen in the game and he'll ask me and then of course I refer it back to potentially what happened two weeks ago or last Wednesday, our practice night. So we'll discuss things which related to the situation that he was in and why we kick on our left foot and why we kick on our right. Why we handpass left and why we handpass right. Why we tackle. So whenever he's thinking about it, we make sure that we cover the bases so he understands the

question he brought up and relate it to what he saw as well as what he actually tried to do.

Parents were also perceived to play a significant role in organising children the night before game day. Being organised not only benefited children, it also ensured that parents saved time the following morning to prepare for travel. Preparing football uniforms and packing the football bag were the most common examples of pre-game organisation. While some parents assumed responsibility for organising the football bag, other parents stated that children were old enough to organise themselves:

I have them organise their uniform, have their socks out, get their boots ready, have it all ready to go straight away for the morning. Jason will do that. I will wash it during the week and he'll put it away in his cupboard before he goes to bed I'll say 'get your footy gear out and put it in your bag and its ready for the morning and we can get up and go.'

Another significant aspect of the pre-game routine concerned the nutritional behaviours of children. At 12 and 13 years, children demonstrated varying levels of health literacy in relation to junior Australian football. Specifically, they claimed that in order to perform at your best, consideration must be given to the foods consumed pre-game, particularly the night before game day. While some children claimed to simply eat what was prepared for them, many children felt that it was important to consume carbohydrates the night before, and therefore preferred foods such as pasta, vegetables and noodles. Additionally, many children recognised that fast foods were not an appropriate food choice, particularly before a game of football as epitomised by one child:

They [parents] make sure you eat good food, give you the right tea, carbs, they give you lots of pasta, just a good tea, like no fast foods, proper vegetables and stuff.

An emphasis on healthy eating was also exhibited on the morning of competition. For parents and coaches, breakfast represented the most crucial meal in preparing children for competitive sport. Without a nutritious breakfast, many parents and coaches argued that children were unable to be 'at their best.' That is, children who do not consume a healthy breakfast will not be able to fulfil their performance potential and role for the team. As one mother claimed in response to the importance of pre-game nutrition, 'He's committed to playing the game so he needs to be at his best.' Despite placing a high importance on pre-game dietary choices however, many parents were not involved in supervising or preparing children's breakfast. Therefore, many children assumed responsibility for making food choices at breakfast time. As the following extract suggests, children's pre-game food behaviours can vary as a result of minimal parental involvement:

Adam: Parents make sure you eat breakfast before the game.

Interviewer: How important is that?

Adam: Heaps important, cereal, milo cereal and a glass of milk.

Shem: Weet-bix.

Flynn: Weet-bix.

Jack: Sometimes I'll eat sausages – sometimes I just get mine cold or hot.

Adam: Whatever is in the fridge.

Jack: Sometimes bacon and eggs. Sometimes I'll just open up the fridge and start cooking bacon.

Clayton: Toast.

Joseph: I eat porridge.

Adam: I eat sustagen as well.

Shem: Eight weet-bix.

Flynn: Well I probably eat the same as Shem, except I can eat six maybe.

Adam: Carbohydrates.

Despite some children claiming to eat sausages, bacon and eggs, the majority of the children preferred to eat cereal before junior Australian football. For most 12 and 13 year old children, an emphasis on pre-game nutrition demonstrates their commitment to sport and reflects broader sport-related attitudes and beliefs shaped by parents. This passage is important because it highlights children's capacity to make generally healthy food choices as part of their pre-game routine.

Being a parent involved in children's pre-game routine also requires fulfilling the advice-giving role. Pre-game discussions mostly occurred in the car while travelling to sporting venues, yet for some families, advice and support were offered in the home setting before departing. Most fathers drew on their previous playing experience to provide children with additional tips and suggestions to improve performance. However, for mothers and fathers lacking experience, the nature of the pre-game 'chat' rendered a more encouraging dialogue, as highlighted by this parent:

Well, in respect for myself, I'll sort of have a little chat with him before his game in respect to him just being positive about his game and positive with himself because I know some kids can be down on themselves if they don't think they're performing or whatever. I just sort of try to give him the positives of it. Obviously he's got his dad as well that talks to him and has a chat with him, but yeah, just try and encourage him to go out there and have a good game and do his best and don't worry about how everybody else thinks he plays and yeah do the best he can.

The origins of the pre-game discussion are historically constructed, and deeply rooted in the sport-parenting role in junior Australian football. Parents recalled receiving pre-game advice during their childhood prior to sport, and so felt that it was an integral part of the pre-game routine for their children. For some parents however, the pre-game advice giving role begins much earlier in the week, as pointed out by one coach:

I don't know. Sort of as a coach, you are probably giving advice on game day, but as a parent you are probably doing it all week really. Every time you have a conversation, footy comes up all the time in anything.

Similarly, from a parental perspective:

We probably discuss and work on things that may have not gone to plan previously, why he gets frustrated, why he gets injured ... so we discuss things at length, debrief, whatever you call it but it goes on all week and then we set goals up and we run through things from practice to game day. We do it over the week.

As much as the pre-game 'chat' forms a key aspect of preparation, it also highlights the potential of enhancing the parent-child relationship through junior Australian football. Pre-game discussions were an excellent conversation starter, regularly initiated by children. It enables children to receive verbal encouragement and an opportunity to grapple with specific game-related theory such as positioning, game strategies and scenarios. One parent in the coaching role argued that while the discussions were not personally important to him, he recognised the enjoyment his children evoked from pre-game discussions.

Even tonight, it's a 30 minute drive back to Anderson Riviera, we'll probably talk a bit of footy. On the way to football on Saturday, he'll talk to me about game plans and stuff because he knows the kids that play for the opposition and he might say 'I might stand on that side today Dad' or 'I will play on this player' or 'I will change with so and so,' and just general play like that, he loves it, he really does.

Despite being a central part of the pre-game experience, the nature of pre-game advice differentiated according to the needs of children. For example, highly skilled children perceived pre-game advice as important to enhancing their understanding of the game from a strategic perspective. Highly skilled children would seek information and 'tips' from parents leading up to the game that would give them the knowledge to gain a competitive advantage. In this way, the parent-child interactions in the pre-game routine assumed a more professionalised tone. In contrast however, children who were not athletically endowed viewed basic instructions and advice as supportive and helpful in nature. They did not usually solicit parental advice, but reacted positively to pre-game discussions. This noteworthy distinction is epitomised by the following conversation with a group of children:

Lyndon: They try and help you work out a strategy.

Craig: Yeah tips, but it depends.

Luke: Sometimes they say 'go hard at the ball.'

Jamie: Keep your feet.

Fabian: They tell you to try your best.

Lyndon: He tells you what to do and not what to do.

Cameron: Some skill hints.

Gary: yeah like in the car, my dad is like talking me through the whole game before we get there. Dad asks me what I am going to do at the game, and I tell him and he gives me tips and help to do that.

Lyndon: Dad runs me through what I should do before the game.

Parental influence in children's pre-game preparation is noteworthy. Through the organisational, nutritional and advice giving roles, significant attention is given to the pre-game routines specific to junior Australian football. Not only are they perceived as necessary, they reinforce generally positive aspects of parental influence in the pre-game experience.

During the game

Verbal reinforcement

From the start of the game until the final siren, parents are highly visible influences in the junior Australian football experience. However, the nature of parental influence is complex and situation-specific. That is, parental influence may be

positively or negatively oriented depending on the circumstances of the game. Injuries to children, weather conditions, coaching instructions, the score and umpiring performance can shape the way that parents influence children's sport. Initial perceptions among the participants indicate that parental behaviour has improved considerably over recent seasons, characterised by an increase in positive verbal behaviour and a decrease in what is colloquially termed 'ugly parenting'. This is vital, as it has provided children with the confidence and motivation to persevere with the challenging and unpredictable nature of the sport. Importantly, the participants argued that most parents demonstrate positive encouragement to all children, including children playing for opposition teams:

Well no matter who's child is out there, whether they do something good or bad, they complement them and say 'well done' or you know if something goes wrong they will say 'bad luck, next time' and most parents are very complementary and even to opposition players. Nine out of ten are very supportive.

Another parent concurred:

From my perspective, you just encourage them. If I see a great mark or a great play I am like 'well done.' I am always out there screaming that you know, and if I see someone take a mark that's on the other team, always 'well done.' You have got to remember they are only under 14s.

This perception was also a consistent thread among children and coaches. While the junior Australian football experience was not completely devoid of poor parental behaviour, there was a strong sense that the overall incidence of poor sideline behaviour as the most overt form of negativity had dramatically decreased over the

last few years. Sport policies such as the code of behaviour were thought to have played some role, but most parents and children attributed this perceived improvement to understanding the importance of being a positive role model. As the following excerpt illustrates, parents are cognisant of the impact of their behaviour at children's sport:

Marshall: When we have got our own kids we try to push that [good behaviour] onto them. I always say to my son that my kid is a mirror image so the way he acts is the way that I brought him up, that's the way I look at it.

Aaron: I think at junior football, you have to be really careful because you are setting an example for kids and you want those kids to follow your example, so I think it's hugely important how you behave as a parent at football.

Alec: It's not only the kids on the field either, like it's the kids that are walking around while you might be supporting in the grandstand or whatever then blurting expletives out, well, kids around are going to be hearing that.

Most children recalled numerous examples of positive parental behaviour in the junior Australian football context. Many admitted to briefly looking at parental reactions in response to kicking a goal and taking a mark, while for others, recognising positive parental behaviour peaked at the end of the game in the form of encouraging behaviours and comments such as 'good job' and 'well done.' While 'tooting the car horn' was also a popular example of parental support, clapping and cheering was the most visible form of positive parental behaviour on game day.

Children also recognised the positive behaviour of other parents, highlighted by the following experience:

There's this old guy that goes to our home games and he's really encouraging. He roots for both teams and if someone does something good, he'll clap for both teams, this old guy will just start clapping away and after the game, he's gone. Yeah, he's really encouraging and that, it makes you feel good.

This comment highlights a key aspect of parental influence that children prefer during competition. The notion that 'it makes you feel good' is a crucial aspect that denotes the significance of positive support and encouragement in competitive junior sport. However, not all participants recalled positive experiences of parental behaviour in junior Australian football. In discussing the concept of umpires, the majority of the participants conceded that they had experienced various tiers of parental abuse, criticism and negative conduct toward umpires and officials. The significance of the issue is further underlined given that many junior umpires are also 12 and 13 years – the same age as the junior Australian football participants. Yet, according to some parents and coaches, minor criticisms toward umpires are not necessarily problematic given that 'it's forgotten in 10 seconds,' as the following quote suggests:

A couple of times you might get a parent, and it's very minute, his little Johnnie has been pushed in the back and the umpire has said play on, you might get a parent yell out something to the umpire and that's about as far as it goes. It's forgotten in 10 seconds – no biggie.

This quote reflects the general attitude of many parents who do not consider momentary outbursts and ‘slips’ a problematic aspect of the sport-parenting role. As another parent described, ‘you’ll go “fucking hell” and then you’ll turn around and you’ll walk away.’ These comments towards umpires are also overlooked based on the perception that they are not widely audible. While junior Australian football invites parents to sit together and enjoy children playing sport, it also encourages parents to mutually react to umpiring decisions that unfold throughout the course of the game. Yet, verbal criticisms that emerge from this context are not considered to be concerning given the perception that children and umpires cannot hear them. The following quote epitomises this view:

They might say ‘that wasn’t fucking right,’ but they don’t make a big issue of it from my point of view, from where I stand. There are normally five or six standing next to me and we might all say something together but we make sure that it’s not loud and vocal that other people can hear it.

A noteworthy perception was that umpires evoke parental abuse and criticism. Put simply, parents stated that it was the umpires’ fault for inciting abuse and negative verbal behaviour. Most participants recognised that junior umpiring was often a voluntary role taken up by young children and adults who lack umpiring experience, and conceded it to be ‘one of the more difficult things in footy.’ However, they also argued that poor umpire decision-making in the form of decision inconsistency and spectator intimidation further provoked verbal parental behaviours during the game. While the majority of the participants maintained that they do not expect all decisions to be officiated correctly, they did admit that it incited frustration and momentary anger in the junior setting. This issue was particularly significant among participants who perceived some umpires to deliberately disadvantage some teams

while favouring others. This notion further perpetuated existing rivalries in junior Australian football and heightened the negative cultural perception around umpiring performance and decision-making. Yet within the context of the game, criticism and abuse towards umpires is not always perceived to be a problematic aspect of sport-parenting if the negative verbal behaviours do not to endure beyond the temporal moment:

I mean you *can* react and say ‘oh bullshit,’ but you can’t keep going on. Other parents go on and on which then detracts from what you’re trying to do. If they come in at quarter time and you’re like ‘oh that bloody decision was a load of crap, the umpires are full of shit,’ then it puts a whole negative on the whole game.

The children in this research shared mixed views of parental behaviour toward umpires. On the one hand, children agreed with parents who claimed that it was normal to disagree with an umpiring decision and briefly react. As one child aptly stated in reference to his own father:

He doesn’t yell at the umpire, he just says ‘oh that was a terrible call’ and like that’s what my dad does. I don’t know what the other [interview participants] dads do. None of them yell at the umpire, they yell at like themselves to the umpire. Does that make sense?

On the other hand however, while children did not render their own parents as major offenders, they did admit that some parents had ‘lost it’ at umpires, challenging the perception that umpire-related parental abuse is brief or ‘short-lived’ on game day.

A couple of times there has been a couple of people that just go off their heads and just like pace around and swear and that. When the umpire makes

a bad decision or something like that, if there was a tackle and he say's holding the ball or something, they just go off their heads.

The behaviours exhibited at the AFL level were also argued to play a role in normalising elements of abuse towards umpires in junior Australian football, desensitising the significance of negative, yet transitory forms of abuse and criticism. While most parents agreed that negative comments are unnecessary and inappropriate in junior Australian football, they conceded that the behaviours which manifest at the elite level plays a role in constructing parental behaviour at the junior level:

You know you watch stuff on 'telly' and if it looks normal on there, I guess you just get used to that and it becomes the norm. I don't think it's influenced mine, but I'd certainly agree that people feed off what people see other people doing. They go to an AFL game and sit next to someone who is really quite loud and I guess it's like a lot of things you know, if you see it and keep seeing it, you think well that's how thing are supposed to be.

Advice and instruction

Beyond verbal engagement with umpires, parents also influence the junior sport experience via verbal reinforcement toward children. According to most participants, comments that occur during the game are generally instructional and intended to provide children with 'on the spot' advice and encouragement. By drawing on their previous playing experience, many parents believed that giving advice and instruction was particularly important because they felt they could assist children's developmental success. Common instructions included individualised comments such as 'kick longer down the line,' 'push up to the contest,' 'keep your feet,' and

more team-oriented advice such as ‘man-up’ and ‘work back’ (both in reference to the team’s defensive positioning). However, for parents fulfilling voluntary roles such as goal umpire, water steward or ‘runner’, providing instruction could be more individualised given the opportunistic nature of their involvement. For example, brief face-to-face dialogue is possible once a goal is scored or when there is a stoppage in play due to injury, the blood rule or a ‘ball up.’ While some parents conceded that it did not always portray a positive image, the potential benefits for children were argued to offset any potential drawbacks. As one father explains, the intention of verbal instruction is not to hijack the game or confuse children, but to help them develop:

I tend to walk around the boundary line, like normally in the defensive area because that’s where the ball is all the time, and because I’ve played football for a long time, played at a high level, I can read the play and that and just yell out to some of the kids ‘just go over there, that’s where the ball is going’ and try and give instructions from the boundary line to assist them to get the ball.

A number of children valued parental instruction and advice given during the game, particularly if the person giving the advice was highly regarded in a football context.

As one child explains:

It’s because he [dad] is like an inspiration because he used to play and he has won a premiership and like he gives me tips and everything and say if you are in the wrong spot like he will tell you to ‘go there,’ you’ll go there and end up getting the ball and kicking the goal so it’s good.

For many children however, receiving parental advice and instructions often provoked a sense of confusion and frustration. Although from a parental perspective the purpose of advice and instruction is to assist children's game play and performance, it potentially conflicts with the explicit instructions set forth by the team coach:

Last week in the under 14s there were parents three or four cars down from us telling their son to get into the goal square. It's small, but he was telling him to get into the goal square and the runner/trainer came out a couple of times and said 'the balls not coming down here mate, you have got to get up the ground a little bit' but the parents kept on telling him – you could see the kid in the goal square was completely perplexed.

The quarter-time, half-time and three-quarter-time breaks further perpetuated the advice giving culture in junior Australian football. While the game breaks traditionally represent a window for coaches to provide children with encouragement and instruction, many parents also viewed this as an opportunity to provide children with individualised feedback and an 'in-progress' report of their performance. However, this was often limited given that the coaches engaged children for the majority of the break. For many parents, this meant that giving advice and instruction had to occur briefly as children huddled at the break, or as they walked out to position for the next quarter.

I guess I don't say anything during the game. At quarter time, half time, three quarter time, you simply encourage his actions by saying as he is running in, you say 'well done, you did a really good job, this is why what happened, happened' and then the minute the coach looks up and says something, you don't say a thing.

Similarly:

There are a lot of parents I've noticed, and I have probably been guilty of it myself as they have broken up and gone to position, if Dale is in earshot or arms reach of me I might go 'Dale, keep your feet,' just as simple as that you know, and normally the coach has told him that already because that's one of his big faults so yeah, I'll try and reinforce that rather than change anything.

For most children, receiving parental advice and instruction during the break was generally a positive aspect of parental involvement. Even if parents did not claim expertise in Australian football, children enjoyed seeing parents gather around the huddle during the breaks as it symbolised encouragement and support for the team. As the following quote illustrates, children thrive from positive feedback and support at the breaks:

When you are in the huddle at quarter time, most of the parents talk to you and say 'well done, keep it up,' and stuff. Like sometimes they are not even your parents, it feels like sometimes when you go in and don't think you can do much more, they give you advice and say 'well done' and then you go out there thinking you've done well and you go harder.

Abuse

Parental verbal behaviours extended beyond merely advice giving and instructional comments. For most participants, countless examples of verbal abuse and insults were observed and experienced on a regular basis. Although children admitted that their opponents had regularly adopted verbally insulting tactics or 'banter' to gain a competitive advantage, children were more upset by abusive comments from parents.

These ranged from emasculating insults such as ‘get up you sook’ and ‘come on princess’ to offensive remarks around physical appearance such as ‘get up fatty’ and ‘you are a squealing pig.’ The following conversation among children illustrates a recent encounter of parental abuse during an under 14s game of Australian football:

Tobin: Parents calling us dirty players.

Clint: Yeah. At Paddington, the fence is pretty close to the boundary line and I tackled someone over the boundary and one of the parents thought that I was trying to put him through the fence and he’s going ‘you are a fucking dickhead, go fuck off’ and ‘go back to your fucking dero life’ and stuff.

Bryan: ‘Hackers’ and ‘drug users’...

Marshall: I’ve been called a big dirty player, and been told to ‘go have a cry’ and ‘go fuck yourself.’

A similar type of discussion emerged from another group of children when they claimed:

Seth: Last week, what did I do? I said something like someone kicked a goal and I said ‘wow that was the first one for the quarter wasn’t it?’ and he comes up to me and say’s ‘say it to my fucking face’ and all of his supporters were like ‘you’re a wanker mate.’ It’s alright but they take it too seriously.

Tristan: Like it’s not so much the teams, it’s more the parents and coaches that are pretty bad at some clubs. You’ll be standing someone and get over there and get the ball, get bumped out and the dad will go ‘oh you’re fucking useless, get back up on your feet.’

Benny: It is stuff like 'oh you dirty cunt' and stuff like that.

Austin: A Warrenville parent said to me 'stop it you fatty, get off him, he's not gay.'

These experiences are problematic given that they negatively situate parents within the playing experience and convey the idea that poor parental behaviour remains a salient issue in junior Australian football. They also highlight an important distinction around abuse and criticism in children's sport. Specifically, the origins of negative comments appear to be more offensive and upsetting if they emerge from parents than from opposition players, suggesting that certain negative verbal behaviours are tolerated, or more socially acceptable than others within the broader construct of junior Australian football.

Although parental verbal abuse was widely condemned among participants, several participants argued that it was also an inevitable or 'normal' part of junior Australian football. For one parent in particular, the notion of parental abuse in junior Australian football was simply 'human nature':

Once you get to the game, and you are watching your kid play football, I think the code of conduct goes out the door because you become so embroiled up in the game that you are screaming at your own kid or someone else's kid. It is a given. It is human nature and it's going to happen regardless. It is a part of human nature, you know, your kid is out there playing football. The adrenalin starts, the kid gets the ball and you're hoping that he kicks the goal or whatever. It is human nature that you are going to step over the line regardless. It is just that every dad wants to push their son to be an AFL player instead of just enjoying the game.

Other participants discussed difficulties controlling their emotions during the game, especially when children are intentionally hurt or injured. Several admitted that they immediately felt a sense of guilt for their verbal behaviour, but maintained that it was instinctive and not deliberate. While they acknowledged that the nature of junior Australian football as a contact sport engenders a risk of player injury, many parents admitted that when children are perceived to be hurt by reckless players it is difficult to maintain appropriate behaviour.

You do get upset sometimes when you see other kids hurting your child but you keep it calm, like you might not be happy with something but you can't rant and rave about it.

While none of the participants admitted to 'overstepping the mark' in reference to intimidation or assaultive behaviours, most claimed that there are many parents who lack self-control under these conditions. Despite retelling several recent encounters with 'ugly parenting', one of the more severe examples of parental verbal abuse and intimidation-like behaviour was aptly discussed by a group of young children:

Allan: When I was versing Laughton, I accidentally slung-tackled someone and the parent hit me, like came up to me, really close to me, but then our coach got in the way and pulled him away and all that. He was serious, he was coming after me. He was going like that [gesturing violently], clenching his fist heaps and was red faced and he was yelling at me. This was half way through the game and like then he started walking after me and chasing me and all that.

Campbell: Yeah we all saw it.

Allan: I got hidden in the back [of the change rooms] and they said to stay with our team before we go home.

Despite this confronting experience, participants differed in their perceptions of the overall prevalence of abusive parental behaviour. Based on recent experiences in junior Australian football, parental behaviour during games was described as 'excellent,' 'supportive,' and 'no problems whatsoever' by a number of children, parents and coaches. As one parent articulated, '90 out of 100 parents are very good, but there's 10 per cent that stuff the job for everyone else.' Yet for others, parental abuse and criticism was perceived to have escalated into a 'major problem.' This perspective was corroborated by the cancellation of a 2012 junior end-of-season carnival in response to parental abuse towards children and umpires. While some parents expressed disappointment at the decision because children were forced to miss out on greater participatory opportunities, most parents supported the broader message associated with cancelling the popular end of season event:

I think with what the Seaside League has done with the mini league carnival to show they are not going to put with crap that few parents are dishing out as far as parents being abusive at matches and stuff like that is that it is a really good, positive thing to have put a ban on the mini league carnival and that they are willing to say 'hey, we have to do something about it, and if you are going to act like an idiot, well the kids are the ones that are going to suffer.'

The influential role of parents during games of junior Australian football suggests that their involvement can be experienced both positively and negatively. Through advice giving and the provision of instruction, parents are significantly, and visibly involved in the actuality of sport, situating them at the heart of 'doing' sport.

Similarly, through verbally reinforcing behaviours, criticism and abuse, parents form a central part of the playing experience, which contributes to the overall enjoyment or dissatisfaction of junior Australian football.

Post-game

Debriefing

Although parental influence was significant in the pre-game experience and during competition, it was particularly notable in the post-game experience. Specifically, the notion of post-game discussions between parents and children emerged as one of the more challenging, yet highly practiced aspects of the contemporary sport-parenting role in junior Australian football. Post-game discussions were also described as a 'debrief,' 'summary' and 'assessment' of children's participation and performance. It was not uncommon for parents to record the number of possessions, tackles and marks children accrued during the game as a way of initiating the post-game discussion. Similarly, parents often made 'mental notes' in their mind as a reference point for ensuing post-game discussions. Many parents suggested that the post-game discussion was one of the most important aspects of parental involvement, because it enabled them to encourage various aspects of their child's performance, but also highlight areas where improvement could be made. Others preferred to provide a general summary of the game and depict where children made a noteworthy contribution to team's performance. However, the overarching factor that shaped the post-game discussion for most participants was children's mood and perception of their own performance. For children who positively perceive their own performance, receiving feedback was a positive and rewarding experience. Yet, engaging in post-game discussions was much more frustrating and unenjoyable for children who

negatively perceived their effort and performance. This was a challenging aspect of the sport-parenting role given that children do not necessarily respond well to the post-game debrief, particularly young boys in junior Australian football, as one parent noted:

On the way home in the car, we'll go through what's happened and I guess, like most boys, positive affirmation is more important than telling them where they went wrong. I have a daughter as well and if you tell her what she did wrong, she's fine with it but I find that boys respond better if you kind of highlight the things that they did well and then kind of bring into the conversation where they could improve, particularly if they've had a bad one. With boys, you have got to kind of be a bit more sensitive to boy's needs; girls are a little bit tougher at that age I think.

This quote highlights two important aspects about post-game feedback. First, it underlines the typical composition of post-game feedback comprising both positive and negative comments. Most participants claimed that while supportive comments are necessary, critical comments are also embedded in post-game discussions. Second, the above quote highlights the car as the preferred site for debriefing. Not only does this context allow children to engage in a one-on-one style discussion, it also constructs a defined start and finish to the discussion during the drive home, making the exchange much more palatable for children and parents. As one parent-coach describes:

Being a coach and the father of a player as well, in the car on the drive home, I'll have a chat to him about his game and anything I see or ask him a few questions about it but then once we get home and his sister and mum are around the place, I don't bring it up anymore. I sort of leave it as our little

chat on the way home. I'll tell him what I think, he'll tell me what he thinks and that's where it stays, that one-on-one.

For a few parents however, the drive home was not an appropriate time to engage in post-game discussions, as epitomised by this comment:

I've learnt not to do it [debrief] in the car on the way home from the game, especially what I have found and learnt, and I am not perfect, but quite often after the game I might start saying something about what happened during the game and how he went, and he'll go 'I don't want to talk about it,' so I have learnt that if I don't say anything on the way home, he will eventually come to me and say 'what did you think of my game?' and then I can say well 'good,' because if you try and force it down their throats, I've found that doesn't work.

Regardless of the time and location of the post-game discussion, one of the common threads among all participants was the notion of honesty. From a parental and coaches' perspective, providing post-game feedback was a delicate exercise, especially given that children do not always respond positively to constructive criticism. However, it was evident that most parents felt compelled to be 'brutally honest' with children during post-game discussions, contrary to the general nature of the pre-game discussions. While several participants claimed that it was the coaches' role to provide children with 'negative' feedback and constructive criticism, most participants argued being brutally honest is an important parental duty in developing children into competent footballers, and vital to their holistic development. Subsequently, in addition to providing supportive, encouraging feedback, parents were also compelled to provide feedback around the negative aspects of

performance. The following extract from a group of parents epitomises this perspective:

Cindy: You just tell them.

Ryan: Straight out there.

Leonie: Yeah, you just have to tell them.

Bruce: You can't beat around the bush.

Cindy: You don't sugar coat it, you just tell them.

Leonie: People always say 'how did I play today Mum?' and you have got to be honest you know, if I saw that they didn't do so well, I will say 'maybe next time you need to go a little bit harder' or whatever it may be. You have got to be honest with them.

Cindy: You have just got to tell them. Things like that happen in general outside of football and stuff. You have just got to tell them how it is because even if like they played a crap game, I tell them 'you played a crap game.' If I didn't like what he was doing out there or if his attitude was a bit off, I say that because in the long run, does it pay to sugar coat things? No. I just don't think it does. If you want to build them up and make them stronger people, better footballers and stuff like that, you have got to tell them the negatives as well as the positive side of things.

While for some parents, being 'brutally' honest was not appropriate for 12 and 13 year old children, they did agree that it was important to provide some subtle criticisms that allow children to develop their physical competency through sport. For them, deliberate feedback techniques were used to convey both discreet critical

comments within a broader, more encouraging debrief. Specifically, the debrief structure typically comprised of positive comments initially, followed by a critical comment, and concluded with another encouraging observation. In adopting this method, parents suggested that children would be more likely to ‘take on’ the feedback without losing motivation or self-confidence:

When I go to him to pass on advice, he will just be like ‘leave me alone dad’ sort of thing after the game. He takes it all personally my boy though. He just thinks that I am having a go at him but after the game, I tell him that he’s played well, but then add ‘you could have done this,’ and ‘the next time the ball does come down his way.’ He will then try and do it and he’ll even come up to me after the game and say ‘I did it the second time dad.’ But I always try to finish on some sort of positive note. Not just give him entirely negative feedback, but say ‘you did this good.’

Another interesting aspect of the post-game discussion surrounded the notion that giving positive feedback has a ‘threshold’. While it was universally agreed upon that verbal praise and encouragement are important components of debriefing, many parents and coaches also argued that excessive positive comments can be problematic, and can result in children developing egoism. To keep children ‘grounded’ and ‘not ahead of themselves,’ many parents were comfortable with providing a cross section of both positive and negative feedback. However, by intentionally highlighting the negative aspects of children’s performance, parents often overlooked a number of positive aspects of children’s performance. This point was strongly articulated among parents who claimed to be their child’s ‘harshest critic’:

I try to pass on things, not while the game is on, but you know afterwards, 'perhaps you should have dealt with this on field situation by going here,' so just trying to impart a bit of knowledge. I mean I can be negative, but when I say that I mean not condescending, but perhaps will point out a situation and because I am a hard task master, I might say 'you dealt with that situation wrong there' and perhaps I should be more encouraging, but certainly not trying to pick on any particular aspect, but sometimes I do. I do agree that I am not always trying to pick out the most positive aspect.

While many children claimed to value the post-game debrief with their parents, they also admitted that it was difficult to listen to parental criticisms surrounding their football performance. This was particularly the case for children who are highly critical of their own game, and for children who simply played 'a shocker.' For these children, being subjected to criticism was an unpleasant experience and often contributed to heightened anxiety post-game. Some parents recognised this and adjusted their involvement in the post-game discussion to a more empathetic role. Instead of pursuing the brutally honest approach, some parents adopted a reassuring role in situations where children exhibited high levels of frustration and disappointment with their performance. As one parent reflected:

My lad doesn't really like it but he puts really high standards on himself and he gets frustrated with himself for not playing as good as he thinks he can and that is one of his problems in football and gets a bit frustrated with that and he starts taking it out on the field. The best way to subscribe to that is to say 'sometimes the ball doesn't go your way – Gary Ablett only got 15 touches last week because the ball didn't bounce his way – it just happens sometimes, you can work as hard as you want, but sometimes the ball just

won't go your way' and that's the best way to sort of bring him back to earth if you like.

One of the revealing sub-themes of the post-game experience concerned the notion that post-game discussions can endure beyond game-day. It is not unusual for children to 'sleepover' at a friend's house after football and socialise over the course of the weekend. The issue for many children however revolved around the subsequent interactions with the host family and their participation in an extension of the post-game debrief:

Dane: I hate going to people's houses because they don't stop talking about it [the game]. It's 'oh you played a good game today' like to their son and they just look at me and then look back at their son like I lost pretty much.

Dave: Oh yeah, I get that when I go to Staley's house because his dad has only got eyes for him you know.

Taylor: Yeah, I am the same. I feel weird when I go to someone else's house or someone from the opposition's house or something because they will talk about the game and ...

Sam: Like, we are not on top of the ladder and like if I go to someone else's house and they beat us, they go 'wow, you guys played bad yesterday,' calling us crap team and stuff like.

Similarly:

Darren: One of my friends, Dean, right, his dad is pretty involved into it and like I sometimes go out to their house after we play Western because I go motor bike riding with him and he has a big farm and stuff so like I go straight there from the game, and the next day we'd be like doing work and

his dad is like ‘grab and chase that sheep’ and if he doesn’t get it, he’s like ‘you grabbed that sheep like you missed that goal yesterday’ or something, just like comments with it.

Rewards

The notion of rewards emerged as an important and highly debated aspect of the post-game experience. In particular, many participants expressed conflicting views around the place of rewards in junior sport, and the underlying messages that they can convey to young sport participants. Others argued that rewards were a necessary motivational resource in encouraging children’s long-term involvement in junior Australian football. They also argued that in the short term, rewards may potentially encourage children to strive for greater success and improvement as a player. However, various forms of reward were perceived to be more appropriate than others. For example, food was perceived to be a suitable form of reward in the post-game experience, especially given that children are hungry after an hour of physical activity. While acknowledging the relatively low nutritional value of the foods available through local sport, many participants admitted to regularly utilising the sport club’s canteen and local barbeque as a prominent form of reward in the post-game experience. Unlike the attitudes toward food choice in the pre-game experience, parents rendered more lenient attitudes to children’s post-game food preferences, exhibited by giving children money and the autonomy to make unsupervised food-related decisions – a concept with which many parents are comfortable in the junior Australian football context. As one child stated, ‘well at the end of the game, my mum gives me some money to buy some food and fill up.’ Similarly, from a parental perspective:

As I said, they come up and say ‘can I have five bucks? I want to buy a pastie or hotdog’ and that’s the last you will see of them all day until you’re driving home.

For many parents who do supervise children’s food-related decision-making, leniency is again demonstrated under the guise of ‘rewarding’ children for sport participation. It was evident that parents accepted the fact that there were no ‘good’ food choices in the junior Australian football setting, and therefore softened their approach to encouraging good dietary health in the post-game experience as an alternative form of reward. The following conversation is significant not only because it reflects these attitudes among parents and coaches, but also because it reinforces food as a socially constructed reward in the post-game experience:

Tony: Generally Jordan has a drink after the game. He will have his red creamy soda and a bacon and egg sandwich after the game.

Jane: Oh yeah, they all go for the bacon and egg sandwich after.

Kate: That’s a footy thing.

Tony: They get their treat after the game, that’s the main thing, that’s what they want.

Kate: The bacon and egg sandwich.

Tony: That’s what they want. They want to go play football, they want that routine of getting a treat after the game, something they don’t get during the week, and maybe if they have a good game, you reward them with a McDonalds or something for dinner, that’s what I do.

While from children's perspective food and money-for-food are considered a post-game reward, for many parents it also served as leverage to initiate post-game discussions. For one parent in particular, the importance of debriefing was greater than influencing children's post-game dietary behaviour, as illustrated by the following quote:

Oh well me personally, I usually grab him straight after he's finished in there with the coaches. He will come to me and want a chips and coke, and then I tell him how he went before I give him the money so it's a bit of a two-way street but he's pretty cool, he doesn't mind the feedback because that's the way it is.

Money as a standalone concept comprised the most debate in regards to post-game rewards. While food was generally perceived to be an acceptable, if not tokenistic form of reward, the notion of money divided participants. Some parents suggested that the potential of money can negatively influence children's attitudes toward participation by teaching children that they will essentially earn money in return for competitive success or outstanding effort. Others, however, attested to the appropriateness of money as an extrinsic reward in junior Australian football, especially for encouraging children with low football ability. Indeed, according to most children, kicking goals and accruing disposals (kicks and handballs) often resulted in receiving some kind of monetary reward, as epitomised with this group of children:

Kane: Sometimes when I kick goals I get money.

Lee: Yeah I do as well.

Shaun: They are really happy for you and that.

Tom: One of the Belmont kids kicked an impossible snap and they got \$100 for it.

Another group of children concurred:

Reagan: I get five dollars a goal from my dad and my brother.

Ash: Mum used to give me five dollars.

Wade: You know Jack? He gets \$50 if he gets two goals because he got two goals last week and his mum forked out \$50.

Anthony: I get \$10 for every goal I get.

Wade: I get four dollars.

Seth: [I get] five dollars a goal and two dollars a point and I also get two dollars a tackle. It makes us try our best. My friend Marco, he's really good. He gets like five or six goals a game and his parents pay him like \$10 a goal, so each game they are giving away like 50 to 60 bucks – crazy. It makes us try harder.

Not all parents, however, were comfortable with the idea of incentivised rewards infiltrating the post-game experience. While many participants conceded that rewarding children with money had occurred in previous seasons to secure sustained involvement, it was becoming an increasingly uncommon practice in the junior sport setting. They believed that by continually providing children with money as a reward in U12 and U14 football, it can undermine the importance of teaching children about team-oriented attitudes – a crucial philosophy in junior Australian football:

I certainly encourage him once he's played because he was certainly reluctant to play the under 15s but nothing, no money, no chocolate bars or

bribery or anything like that, he just gets verbally congratulated. I hear a few people giving chocolate bars and a dollar a goal that sort of stuff, and I have heard people coming up and saying 'you should give your son a dollar every goal he gets,' well I don't know that's installing the right picture you know. They don't need to get rewards for everything in terms of monetary value, and also I don't believe that it necessarily promotes teamwork.

And:

I think they get rewarded for us showing up. My parents never came to anything that I did and I say to mine that they are so lucky that their mum and dad both come and we participate so they can play. I think that is their reward from us as such.

Similarly:

There are no presents; there are no dollars for goals or anything like that. Just verbally you know, 'well done,' that's about it. You know you can't say anything, can't give no rewards for kicking goals or getting best players or things like that, you know you might see their name in the paper and say 'oh shit you have done well, you got best player,' things like that, but that's it.

Parents are deeply entrenched in the post-game experience and exert a complex but significant influence on the practices that manifest with the context of junior Australian football. Through post-game discussions and the rewards culture, the contemporary sport-parent appears to be highly visible across the entire game day theme.

The contemporary coach

In exploring parental influence in junior Australian football, the role of the contemporary coach emerged as a pertinent theme among participants. Most of the parents in the research identified as a previous or current team coach or assistant coach in the junior competition. While most participants were not adverse to the prospect of a female coach, they did admit that male coaches usually boast greater expertise and game knowledge given that football is traditionally a masculine domain.

Parents in the coaching role are responsible for successfully negotiating the competitive season and contributing to children's physical and social development through junior Australian football. In addition to assuming responsibility for training and game day processes, many coaches also described coaching as a multifaceted role, which included responsibility for being 'team manager', 'counsellor', 'trainer', 'psychologist', 'doctor', 'friend', 'mentor', 'babysitter' and supporter. Despite the demanding nature of the role, most coaches suggested that it was a rewarding experience contributing to, and witnessing, the inevitable improvement in children.

One coach responded:

From my point of view, it [coaching] is great to see them improve from you know day one of the preseason through to the end of the season, and during that journey, just seeing the little wins along the way. Even tonight, there was a young fella who all of a sudden, his kicking has improved since six weeks ago. We didn't think he was ever going to spin one straight, we thought that it might have been later on, and not only that, it's the intensity that which he's training. You know, probably not going to be an AFL

player, but to see that improvement in six weeks, I think that's been good, a really good aspect.

Another coach described the 'magic' of being a modern day football coach:

Just the improvement of kids that can't even kick, stuff like that to the time, like three years later, charging in and getting the ball, not dropping the ball, taking marks, playing on, yeah it's magic, seeing the kids that are willing to learn and spending time with them.

Many children and parents declared admiration for coaches and described them as 'positive role models.' Coaches were praised for spending additional time with children before and after training to work on skills and techniques, thus underlining their commitment to the coaching role. Coaches were also admired for providing children with equal opportunities for participation. The following conversation with a group of parents epitomises this positive perception of their current junior football coach:

Amanda: I don't have a high-achieving child. For a few years he was put on the bench for the first half of the game and you'd go 'bloody hell, what am I coming out for?' He goes to every training session and then these kids come back from school in Adelaide in the holidays and then they get a game. That frustrated me but the coach this year seems to give my son a go, and not just in the backline, which is important, but he seems to move him around a bit more. He's been good.

Dean: My son just loves it and I think a lot of it comes from his coach last year who took him aside a couple of times and helped him with his kicking because he was a shocking kick and no matter how many times I tried to

show him how to do a drop punt, he just got frustrated and yet when the coach took him aside, he bonded instantly and that really helped the situation and from last year, he's just changed so much.

Terry: I haven't seen one coach do something wrong, I haven't watched every minute of the coach every game, but to me, at the end of the game, you know how most kids will shake hands and clap, most coaches come out and clap both teams and they shake hands with the other coach, and that's really good.

However, not all participants shared positive perceptions of parents within the coaching role. According to several participants, coaches were perceived to be 'harsh,' 'pressuring' and concerned with winning instead of enjoyment and fun. These perceptions were synonymous with discussions around the disciplinary nature of the junior Australian football coaches. Specifically, there were concerns that some coaches enforce unnecessary levels of discipline in the junior Australian football context. According to many coaches however, discipline is necessary for controlling large groups of children, especially during weekly training sessions. Without enforcing basic team rules and guidelines coaches argued that children would not individually, and as a team, achieve improvement or success. Reflective of this tension, one coach recalled a recent experience with a parent concerned with his coaching methodology:

I didn't agree with one parent, he didn't agree with the way I was coaching his boy. We have got one boy who thinks his only position is in the forward line, and he's got to that age where he has to play by the team rules as such and we tried to nip it in the bud and we dragged him and he sat on the bench and he sat there and sulked, and so we gave him five minutes and said

‘listen, if you do this and listen, then you will go out and get another opportunity.’ We sent him back on and he did the wrong thing again so I sent the runner out to get him off and sit him down again and it was getting to the point where I was not going to give in and he was not going to give in. I am the coach and I am going to win this one, and I won that little battle between me and the child for the day, and I went to give him some encouragement at the end of the game, but the parent came up to me and said that I was treating his boy too harshly and I went and explained that his son wasn’t playing by the team rules.

Even at training, the notion of discipline can create tensions among parents and coaches, as highlighted by the following quote:

As much as you want kids to enjoy it, there’s not a lot of point playing chasey for an hour if they just want enjoyment. There has got to be some footy aspect to it and there has got to be some discipline involved and it has got to start from my grade [under 12s], like when the coach talks, you have got to listen, so by the time they leave me, they have got to start to think about their footy a bit more and start to settle down but what works for one kid is not going to work for another, and the more interactions that I have with the parents and getting to know what the parents think influences the way that I interact with their child. For example, if they are not doing the right thing and I give it to him, send him to do a lap, yell at him or whatever, you know, no issues from one parent, and then I do that to another kid and the parent is like ‘what are you yelling at my kid for?’ You can’t win.

An extension of the disciplinary nature of the coaching role surrounded the notion of verbal criticism and feedback between players and coaches. While the participants suggested that this verbal exchange is a traditional aspect of the Australian football

code, they also noted that some coaches' verbal reinforcement can be too explicit, which can further evoke tensions with parents and children. Nearly all of the coaches argued that tiers of verbal negativity are culturally embedded in their role as coach, and that it was inevitable that at some stage across the season, it was necessary to raise their voice, or be critical of the team's performance. They did admit that their behaviour can often be misinterpreted, but reaffirmed that given the right context, criticism and pressure are essential for children's development. As one coach aptly stated, 'the role of the coach is to psychoanalyse each kid and suss out what button makes them work.' By exposing children to verbalised pressure and criticism, coaches believed that children would gradually demonstrate improved performances and greater on-field leadership. However, many coaches acknowledged that not all children thrive under these conditions, and not all parents approve of this tier of discipline and authoritative coaching behaviour. Consequently, coaches are selective in the way that they articulate negative or critical verbal reinforcement in the junior Australian football experience, as elucidated by the following conversation:

Warren: The kids bring out the best in you I reckon, just like because you can do it both ways. You can put pressure on the older ones, but you can encourage the little ones and it mellows you out.

Timothy: As a coach, it is nice to see the bigger kids, like I will put pressure on the bigger kids and say 'you have got to perform,' but as coach like if you had a good side coming up, you'd put more pressure onto it like, you would actually force the issue a bit more.

Riley: Yeah I was going to say that you are normally selective on your, on who you can use as an example. Suppose the example where you turn the ball over and you know at quarter-time you want to lead into something, if I

say Sam's name, he's going to burst into tears every time I mention his name.

Edward: When you have got a range of kids, it can be a bit hard because you have got the bigger boys who can respond to a bit of negativity, or a few harsh words. The little fellas however, you can't really tell them off if they don't go for the footy hard enough or something.

Despite coaches admitting to selectively choosing which children to verbally criticise, it is evident that parental verbal negativity under the guise of being team coach is a commonly practiced aspect of parental influence within the coaching role. While most children claimed that at some point during their involvement in junior Australian football a coach had yelled at them, they did not perceive this to be problematic, further normalising the nature of the contemporary coach.

Fairness

One of the challenges for parents coaching their own children is circumventing the perception of favouritism. A number of coaches confessed that this was one of the most difficult aspects of being involved in their children's sport, but added that the enjoyment of coaching made the experience worthwhile. In pursuing the image of a 'fair' coach, several coaches admitted to intentionally placing greater pressure on their own children and providing them with 'harsher' feedback. By doing this, the coaches argued that perceptions of favouritism would gradually subside. While for most coaches, this was not an ideal parenting practice in junior Australian football, it was perceived as necessary to alleviate parental concerns around favouritism in junior Australian football. As one parent-coach explains:

I've had the conversation with my son before I started coaching and it was like 'look I am going to be harder on you this year than any other kid because I'd prefer another kid's parents come up to me and say that I am being a bit hard on you than say that I am favouring you' sort of thing ... I had that idea right off the bat, how I'd have to do it [coach] to at least, sort of look like I was being fair sort of thing.

Similarly, one coach admitted to being 'hard' on his own child, but could not articulate the exact reason why:

We've got one kid who cannot kick for nuts but he will get one right every so often so you praise him up on the ones he gets right. You don't bag him for the ones he messes up, but I do with my own son. I am tough on him, I don't know why; I am just tough on Paul.

These quotes are noteworthy because they not only further legitimise potentially negative parental behaviours within the coaching role, but because they seemingly contradict coaches' endeavours to treat all children fairly. While some children claim to cope with the pressure associated with being the coach's son, not all children prosper under these conditions, resulting in a less enjoyable and experience. As one father noted:

I mean you certainly try and share the positives. Interesting though, I did get picked up by my young fella when I was driving him home. He said 'why do you always pick out me every time something goes wrong? I'll drop the mark and you will have a go at me,' and I said 'I've just got high expectations for you, but you know I've said that to others.' And he said 'No, you've said that more to me,' so ok, well I take that on board, he might be just more conscious but I'll make sure I don't yell next time.

To further combat the issue of favouritism, many coaches professionalised their coaching practice by using iPads, tablet computers and Excel spreadsheets to document the playing time each child received. This was particularly evident among coaches attempting to manage a high number of participants. Highly organised rotation processes were considered the fairest way of providing children with equivalent playing opportunities and inadvertently minimise the perception of favouritism. While it comprised an extra responsibility for coaches, it was perceived to be a good way of responding to parental concerns around coaching favouritism:

We actually take stock of every quarter they play, like Pagey's got a spread sheet and just notes down each quarter that each kid plays and when they come up to me, and say 'well hang on, he's only played two quarters,' we can say 'well hang on, he's actually played four,' just so I've got a bit of back up, I can say this is what actually is the facts and it's not just what I am saying. So yeah, that just helps you out as far as communicating with them and letting them know what is going on as well so.

Despite these parameters however, many participants still perceived that some children are given greater opportunities than others, reaffirming the issue of favouritism. Most coaches recalled examples of being confronted by parents concerned about team tactics and children's positioning and playing time, illuminating tensions between some parents and coaches. They accepted that 'disgruntled' and 'angry' parents are a normal part of the coaching role in junior Australian football, and that not all parents and coaches would 'see eye to eye.' The following quote illustrates this tension:

Some parents can be trouble. I've experienced it as a coach now with parents giving me a hard time from my own team because their child isn't getting

enough time on the field or they aren't in the right position or anything like that, just the usual ...

Another coach concurred:

I have had a few parents pop into me, one in particular sticks in the mind, a single mother whose boy was very limited in ability, underdeveloped in skills and they arrived at the club and haven't been at the club very long, and because I had 18 of the field, I had a very long interchange bench which I've since decided that's not the way to go because it's very difficult to give them all a go. But during the game, she sort of came up to me and confronted me and said 'why isn't he on the field, I am going to take him to another club' in front of everyone, yelling at me. You do get a bit of that sort of thing, you get parents that are a bit with the fairies but I guess they are focused on their own child and they want them to be part of it.

While not a dominant trend, several participants did admit to verbally confronting the coach because of a perceived lack of playing time for children. They perceived that although coaches articulate a philosophy around fairness, at the heart of the competitive experience, most coaches are only concerned with the notion of winning. By limiting opportunities for children with low skill levels and playing ability, coaches were perceived to perpetuate winning attitudes above the notion of being a fair junior coach. Not only does this limit some children's involvement, it also carries the potential to incite parental frustration and anger. One participant claimed:

Some coaches just always keep the good players on, even though we have the mercy rule (a rule where teams are integrated to form two balanced sides at half-time), they'd still have the good players out there and the little ones, the not-outstanding achievers on the sideline and it's like 'you have already

won, how about swapping it around or how about letting the people down back go up front and try and kick some goals or take off the good players kind of thing?’

Yet for most participants, confronting the coach was not appropriate in junior Australian football. Instead, some participants’ suppressed their discontent, while others utilised social media to express their frustration and disagreement with coaches. Several participants had used social media outlets such as ‘Facebook’ to express their concerns around junior coaches. Given the immediacy of social media, it was possible for parents to have a ‘rant and rave’ in reaction to events that occur within the context of the game without confronting the coach. It also allowed participants to gain a sense of online notoriety whereby criticisms could be erased as quickly as they were published in the public domain. The main criticisms articulated on social media surrounded the tactics and positioning employed by coaches, issues around perceived favouritism, and coaching style. One of the more pertinent examples of coach-parent tensions played out via social media is illustrated by the following passage:

Well I had a mother last month getting on Facebook and bagging me when I forfeited a game. She was getting on Facebook and saying that I was a bad influence by not teaching the kids how to lose and that was bit hard to take on board for me. A friend of my wife’s actually rang up and said ‘do you know this is going on?’ and I said ‘No, I have got no idea.’ It went on for a few days. Her and her partner had a child in my team, a young lad. What did I do? I finished up, I stewed over it, I was pretty gutted, and like I said earlier, I was angry. I was more disappointed you know, I felt like I had

done the wrong thing and you start to second-guess yourself. It sort of gutted me a bit.

Similarly, from a club's perspective:

There was an incident [of] parental abuse on social media. The club doesn't appreciate anyone commenting on social media about things that might happen – you know 'Johnnie didn't get a game today' or whatever. The club has had to constantly send out reminders so everybody is fully aware of the consequences that if you act stupidly on-field and off, it's not just you that's going to suffer, it's the kids as well.

The distribution of best player awards presented another challenging aspect for coaches in dealing with favouritism. Receiving an award recognised excellence or improvement in performance and often heightened social status among peers. Despite the inherent emphasis on 'team', awards for best player, as selected by the team coach, comprised the highlight of game day for many children. For coaches however, best player awards represented another conduit through which their credibility as a 'fair' coach was being tested in the eyes of other parents and children. Consequently, for many coaches, choosing best players often resulted in overlooking their own children's performance in favour of other children regardless of the level of their performance, as suggested by this participant:

At times you get the odd issue. I have to be very careful that I don't favour him you know giving out best players and stuff. You have got to be aware of that. You tend to be harder on them than the rest of the boys sometimes.

Similarly:

I am probably in the same boat as Ray a bit because we're both coaching our own kids and it's a hard boundary there where you can be too tough on your own kids because you're the coach and parent as well, it's sort of hard to draw the line. It is to a degree, you are probably harder on your own kids than the other kids, especially with giving out best players and stuff like that.

For a few coaches however, the awards process enabled them to enhance their image by deliberately awarding children with less skill and ability. The coaches acknowledged that it was important to recognise the best performers, but also important for encouraging children with developing competency. Despite being highly critical of their own children, the coaches also admitted that deliberate decisions were taken to ensure that each participant received an award at some stage during the season. In this way, coaches manipulated or 'fixed' the distribution of best player awards as a way of encouraging children's involvement, which inadvertently heightened the way in which others perceived them. As one parent noted, this was an important way for coaches to positively influence the junior Australian football experience:

I think the coaches are very good. The best player awards can quite often go to the same people, but there's also those incentive awards they can give out, you know beanies and the like to those players who struggle. Last Saturday my son [who was described as a low-skilled player] got a mug and a beanie you know, there was 18 players out there and he probably would have been the 15th best, but they somehow worked it that they gave it to him. He was proud to show Mum when he got home.

And:

I've got ten kids in my side that I know are never really going to be in my best three so I try to make sure that I give them fifth best at least one throughout the year so they can go home and make a milo or milkshake and they've got a cup that they can walk out of the change room and say 'I've got a cup.' That's how I differentiate it because your best players are your best players but this is a good way to encourage other kids – that's how I do it.

Most children claimed to understand the deliberate rotation of best player and awards and felt that it 'keeps your courage up.' In receiving awards, children stated that they feel 'legendary,' 'proud' and 'happy.' However, some children felt bad receiving an award ahead of other players who performed well due to the rotation policy, reducing the significance of best player awards. As one child mentioned:

I felt sorry for Fin last week when I got in the best but didn't play that well because Fin put a lot of effort into his game and didn't get near the best players.

In summary, parents within the coaching role encounter a series of situation-dependent and context specific issues in junior Australian football. While coaches can positively influence children's experiences through football, they also possess the potential to exert a negative influence through verbal reinforcement, awards and conflict with other parents around favouritism. Yet, in some cases, these tiers of negative involvement are masked by the demanding nature of the coaching role and the way in which the contemporary coach is socially constructed. In this way, junior Australian football normalises certain aspects of parental influence within and through the coaching role, such as the notion of negative verbal reinforcement. However, there are a number of deeply-rooted and emerging issues that require

immediate social and cultural attention, such as the use of social media in facilitating tensions among parents in the junior Australian football experience.

Football culture

Winning and losing

An obvious, yet highly pertinent aspect of the junior Australian football culture surrounds the notion of winning and losing. While the concepts of winning and losing were often linked to ‘beating your opponent in a contest,’ the participants principally associated ‘winning’ with winning games of football. The role of parents in this regard was substantial, comprising a chief influence in shaping children’s attitudes toward winning and in reinforcing winning as a dominant socio-cultural aspect of junior Australian football. Initially, nearly all the participants suggested that winning was an important feature of participating in competitive sport. However, most participants added that winning ‘is not the be all and end all’ of participation, tempering the significance of winning in the junior Australian football experience, as epitomised by the following quote:

Winning is nice like everybody says but if the team goes out there and plays the best they can well then you are happy with that and if they don’t win that’s just bad luck. We don’t win too many games at the moment. As a parent, you like to see them successful but if they’re not, well it’s definitely not all about winning. It’s more about getting out there and having a kick sort of thing.

This perspective was echoed by another participant:

Winning is not everything but it's nice to get up and have a few wins, especially for us because we've gone five years straight without winning a game, so it's good that our kids have stuck together throughout that time and are now starting to get some reward for their effort. They have started winning a couple of games, actually picking up their skills, and I think by them winning a few games, they are more encouraged to continue playing football rather than giving it up.

Similarly, among children:

Dwayne: Winning is a better option but if you try your hardest and lose, like by a point, or like you try your best, losing is alright, but winning is better than losing.

Marshall: Like, it gives you a good feeling if you win, but you know that if you have tried your hardest when you lose, it's not that bad.

Nicholas: Yeah well, I don't really care but I just think that you should go out and have a good time and it doesn't really matter who wins and losses because you had a really good time.

Aaron: Yeah, I reckon winning is more about confidence as a team throughout the season but it's not everything.

In further exploring the notion of winning, many parents admitted to suppressing their actual attitudes toward winning to avoid the perception that they are living vicariously through children's sport. This was especially difficult for parents who were naturally competitive and for fathers who had previously played football and could attest to the enjoyment they experienced from winning. As one parent

admitted, 'no-one wants to lose; you don't want to be a loser.' Another participant articulated:

It's very difficult because you just want the kids to win because you know deep down in the gut that it is so much better to win than it is to lose.

A number of participants claimed that their attitudes toward winning were not only shaped by past experiences, but by broader society beyond the junior Australian football context. For example, the nature of the AFL competition was frequently cited as a chief reinforcing factor in this regard. As one parent noted, 'our kids watch the AFL and they know it's all about winning, that's the focus.' In this way, many participants argued that it was difficult to 'cap' the importance of winning in junior Australian football given that the winning ideology is constantly reinforced in contemporary society:

People are always coming up to me, the team managers from other clubs and they will say 'how did you go, did you win?' My supervisor's kids play at another club and it's the same thing, 'how did the boys go, did they win?' That's the first thing they say to me so it is all about winning, everyone that I speak it is all about winning. It's not necessarily about how they play, you know how well they played. It's just in life I reckon. You look at the Olympics, what do you try and do? Win a gold medal. You play cricket and try to win the World Cup, win the number one position, in life, in politics when you vote, so you know it is all about winning, it's in life.

Despite the deep-seated importance given to winning, many participants also pointed out that winning can also engender a number of negative outcomes. For example, while winning is an important construct within junior Australian football, winning

excessively was perceived to be problematic for children's overall skill development and game understanding. One parent noted:

My brother actually coached a team that won six junior premierships in a row, he coached them and my older lad was playing in that team. I used to go to the footy and watch and think 'bloody hell, this is a waste of time, what are they learning from this?' They are going out there smashing all these teams which are not evenly matched in age or ability, or size, and they learnt some bad habits that they can run around and do everything easily, but when they go into senior footy, some of them are playing in our A grade side and they have got these engrained habits that are holding them back in senior footy like running and grabbing the ball with one hand because they could do that in the colts, that's just one example.

Most children concurred, admitting that winning regularly and by high-scoring margins was 'boring,' 'too easy,' and a 'waste of time.' Instead, they preferred winning close-scoring games as they were perceived to be more important for building confidence and motivation in contrast to winning by high-scoring margins. This differentiation is best illustrated by the following conversation:

Leyton: Yeah, [I] especially like winning close games.

Harrison: Like I don't reckon it's that good to win by heaps. I like it when it's a close game and then you put your best players in better positions instead of like putting people in the middle when you're winning by heaps and people just hog it.

Corey: Say today you win by four goals or something, it's ok, but when you beat them by that much [gesturing a high margin with his hands], I don't really feel that happy, I dunno, I just like closer games.

Harrison: Yeah, like for me, I know there are a couple of other blokes that feel the same in my team too.

In response to children's preference for closer games, many coaches deliberately influenced the nature of the contest by fielding teams they believed would provide even competition. For some coaches, this meant adopting a high rotation policy to minimise the influence of dominant players while providing greater opportunities for children with developing competency to play in a variety of positions. Not only did coaches perceive this to be the best way of teasing out a closer result, they suggested that it encouraged weaker teams to persevere under more favourable conditions. In doing this, they also argued that a greater emphasis was placed on effort rather than the culturally endorsed notions of winning and losing. Yet, coaches also revealed playing their 'best' team against stronger opposition, particularly during finals, inadvertently reinforcing winning as a highly important construct within the junior Australian football culture. One parent in the coaching role admitted:

When you start having to play finals and stuff I think you get to a point where you try to mix it up throughout the year as much as you can and as you're heading into finals, that's when you start playing your better players so your better players are getting more game time so to speak, I mean, it is finals we're talking about.

This attitudinal shift around the importance of winning during finals was a consistent thread among all participants involved in finals, especially for those positioned inside the 'premiership window' – a football reference describing a team's perceived optimal opportunity for grand final success. While they echoed the importance of enjoying football, many parents and coaches also emphasised the importance of 'taking your chances' to win finals, contradicting previous claims that 'winning is

not the be all and end all.’ This was evident in the meaning given to end of season carnivals and winning the community shield, which were described as ‘the holy grail,’ ‘the ultimate,’ and ‘that’s what you play footy for.’ In response to the importance of winning the end of season lightning carnival, another parent described it as ‘basically the grand final.’ Furthermore:

Sometimes your cycle may take 10 years to come around or five years and by then, you have sort of, the clubs are hungry for the kids to do well, as well as the parents, and there’s sort of a bit of pressure there from everyone to win it. I know because we are there now.

While the finals context was an exciting time for participants, it also represented a context for heightened issues surrounding parental behaviour, especially during grand finals. Many participants recalled numerous examples of poor parental behaviour at previous junior Australian football grand final matches, and argued that the socio-cultural importance placed on winning influenced some parents to demonstrate verbal and violent behaviour toward children, umpires, coaches and other parents. One participant recalled:

When it was the grand final we were in, one of their players couldn’t handle it and he went and told his dad and then after the game his dad walked up to one of our best players and hit him, just walked up to him and slapped him in the face.

Another participant reflected:

When we won the grand last year, their coach intimidated one of our players so bad. He was screaming at him and when he took a mark, the coach didn’t move and he like bumped into him, like it was really bad.

In this way, winning is consolidated as an important, and for many, ultimate construct within the junior Australian football culture. However, winning was also a significant theme for participants not involved in finals, especially among participants who were part of the ‘rebuilding phase’ – a term commonly used to describe a team’s inferior size, age and playing ability which inhibits their ability to challenge for the finals and the premiership. Although participants involved in the rebuilding phase encouraged enjoyment more so than winning, they noted that the team would soon be capable of pursuing success in the future as a result of rebuilding. In this way, winning remains a significant theme in the junior Australian football culture, albeit, for many teams as a long-term focus. One participant stated:

I’ve found that this year like Rosedale has got a small group of players and they don’t win a real lot of games but next year because the next generation move up to the next year level, they are the big kids next year and they will start to win more games so it sort of evens out and we’ll be the ones for the flag.

And:

If I know we’re going to get flogged, it’s a matter of going out there and basically enjoying themselves. Dan for example is not the smallest one, but he’s only this high [gesturing with his hands] and he’s playing against kids that are six feet tall. So, obviously each club has got them so it’s a different game of football so therefore they think that they’re not good enough yet, but if they can see the improvement this year and enjoy it, and they do their sums, ‘Oh Nick has got another year left,’ so the year after, that’s when we are going to have our strongest side you know, so that’s our chance and if you miss that chance, well...

While the finals were identified as a conduit through which the importance of winning was constructed, the participant's attitudes toward winning were also shaped by the grade of competition. According to most parents and coaches, winning was perceived to assume less significance in the U12 competition compared to the U14 or U15 competitions given that U12 football encourages skill development, inclusive participation and enjoyment. Given that most U12 competitions do not consist of a traditional finals format, many parents and coaches argued that winning and losing games was not a focus of children's participation. However, the importance of winning in the U14 competition rendered a notable shift in emphasis. While fun and enjoyment continued to foreground the purpose of participation in the U14 competition, the notions of competitiveness, discipline and winning were also prominent. In this way, parents and coaches reinforce certain attitudes that they maintain are appropriate for children at 12 and 13 years. A common perception was:

I just think that by the U14s the kids have been in the game long enough and mentally grown enough, that at some stage winning is not everything but at some stage you have got to start pushing them a bit and I think by the time they get to that grade, they are getting mentally strong enough where you can actually push them a bit harder.

Another reiterated:

It gets inbred into them next year [U12] and the year after [U14], when they start going to high school and the competitive nature starts to kick in. When they are that young [U12] they are still trying to find their feet, still trying to find out where they belong in the world, they don't need the stress of winning or losing, just go out there any play with your mates, but next year is different.

Several participants however, did not make this distinction between U12 and U14/U15 competitions in terms of their developmental and philosophical underpinnings. They argued that both age groups should learn about the importance of winning and competitiveness at the expense of other idealistic attitudes. By emphasising the importance of winning and ‘beating your opponent,’ these participants argued that children would be more likely to cultivate ‘hardened’ attitudes that are necessary for football participation beyond the junior context. The following comment illustrates this view:

I don't believe that you should reward mediocre effort. I don't believe that you should give every kid an award throughout the year. Fair enough in under 8s and 10s but when you get to under 12s, these are young men, well about to be, and they need to be pushed into staying determined and focused. It's the biggest step of all going into the under 12s and then even bigger into under 14s. The lesser players aren't going to get the support they get in the under 10s where we give every kid the same amount of time, but the next step up where you are playing for points, they are not going to get picked every Saturday. This is what we play for, to win, so they know that they are playing in the big league now.

These views provoked fierce debate among other participants, who argued that such attitudes not only position the concept of winning at the heart of the junior Australian football experience, but inadvertently foster a negative perception around losing – something which many participants did not agree with in the U12 and U14/U15 competition. Indeed, for many parents and coaches, losing was associated with a range of positive experiential and life-learning outcomes, particularly for children

who frequently experience success, tempering the significance of winning in junior Australian football. One mother explained:

It's good for him [my son] to have a loss, just so he gets to feel what a loss is like and what a win is like because some teams win every game and don't get to feel that kind of empathy I guess for the other team. It can be just as good you know.

This perspective was most prominent among parents and coaches involved in teams that frequently experienced losing. Unlike participants in the 'premiership window', parents and coaches involved in a losing culture did not view winning as anything more than a 'bonus', and encouraged children to enjoy playing football and experience fun with their friends. This was an important form of parental support for many children, especially for children who experience bullying and teasing as a result of losing regularly. In this regard, some parents play a crucial role in redressing the deeply engrained winning and losing construction in junior Australian football culture. The following conversation among a group of parents epitomises this point:

Gayle: I like that the team struggles here a bit, and the fact that none of these kids seem to care. They are just all having fun and they don't care if they lose, and that's what we tell them. A lot of kids would be like whinging if they lost every week, but none of them seem to care at this club. They are happy as long as they are playing.

Alistair: Well my son recently came home after one game and said that a kid from the other team said that they were going to 'flog' him, and one of the kids from Beau's team turned around and said 'we don't care, it's all about

having fun,' and I thought that was good that a kid at that age said that. You know, what we've been preaching has started to sink in a bit I guess.

Dawn: That's good, that's a good one.

For the majority of children however, losing was not perceived to engender any positive outcomes. While some children were perceived to 'get over it pretty quick,' losing for many children was extremely difficult to grapple with. Despite not keeping score in some competitions, children were still able to discern winning from losing by calculating scores during the game, and through post-game discussions with peers and family. In response to losing, short-term disappointment was a common theme for children, especially when attempting to extract positive learning experiences from 'beltings' or convincing losses. Children demonstrated their disappointment by being quiet for prolonged periods after the game, and often lasted for several days after until the following training or game. For others, the disappointment of losing was further heightened if they negatively perceived their own performance. However, many children also experienced emotionally-driven disappointment from losing because they felt that they had disappointed their parents. Subsequently, winning is reconstructed as a key outcome of participation in the eyes of many children. For one participant in particular:

I don't want to disappoint my mum and stepfather like when we were playing out at Williams Way, they drove us all this way, it about 60 minutes, and then to lose by 10 goals and stuff, you think they feel disappointed because you have played hard but not quite hard enough to win, so yeah, disappointment, it lasts a while.

Winning and losing are both culturally significant concepts of junior Australian football, and invariably reinforced by parents, children and coaches under a range of conditions. While the overarching perception surrounded the notion that winning ‘is not that important,’ it is clear that winning assumes significant meaning from both short- and long-term perspectives, and through the ‘threshold’ lens. Furthermore, the importance of finals and the age of competition contribute to the overall cultural significance of winning in junior Australian football, but parents and coaches play a crucial role in facilitating this process. This is evident among parents and coaches who differentiate their attitudes toward winning and losing depending on their position in relation to the premiership window or the rebuilding phase.

Aspirations

Aspirations emerged as a significant theme within the broader junior Australian football culture among all participants, especially for children. While many children shared their ambitions of playing ‘A-grade’ football one day, nearly all of the children aspired to play at the elite level of the AFL. Several children were currently involved in talent development programs and exposed to highly professionalised training regimes, further fuelling their aspirations for a career in the AFL. The perceived best players in the junior competition were described as ‘legends’, ‘machines’ and ‘guns’ and regarded as players who may potentially reach AFL level. Others who were not involved in elite-age programs also maintained aspirations through football, albeit of a different kind. Some discussed ambitions to play senior football in the adult competition, while others aspired to become a captain and a senior premiership player. Many children also held aspirations to win a best and

fairest award and reach milestones such as playing 200 career games. When discussing the aspirational theme, a common aspirational attitude included:

Like it would be great [to play AFL], but I know that I am probably not going to make it, I am still not very good ... I don't get many touches now. My goal is to eventually make the A grade, or B grade.

Parents were highly involved in supporting children's aspirations by engaging in nostalgic discussions about an AFL career based on the premise that 'anything is possible.' However, parents also held their own football-oriented aspirations for their children. The most common aspiration surrounded the view that children would continue playing football beyond the junior years, and into the adult competition. Although they denied that it was a case of 'living vicariously through children,' most parents and coaches admitted that it was difficult to ignore their own aspirations for children to reach the 'seniors' via the junior Australian football pathway as a means of strengthening the senior teams in pursuit of premiership success. For many parents and coaches, the current 'crop' of juniors was described as a 'commodity,' the 'long-term solution' or the 'missing piece of the puzzle.' While it was never explicitly imposed on children, most parents could not deny their own aspirations for children to continue their involvement in Australian football.

I'd like to see him get some success now, but for mine it's not really that important, as long as he's learnt enough to play senior footy, then he's go the rest of his life to win a flag. That's what you play sport for in my opinion, but the trick is to get them from the juniors to be able to go on and play senior football at some stage.

And:

I don't find that I am strict or anything like that, as long as they enjoy the game and can have fun with their peers, with their friends, with their teammates, and then later on down the track, if they can become good senior players that would be great, it's good for the club.

Similarly:

I am more serious than I used to be. I used to think that winning was all that mattered, and especially now I can't play lately and coming back to coaching, it's still important to me. They are the future of the club and that's the next generation of people that are going to come up and they have to be brought up right.

The aspirational culture in junior Australian football was particularly evident among coaches who aspired to develop future AFL 'stars'. While they primarily viewed their role as developers of skill and game understanding, coaches also perceived their role to encompass talent identification and specialist coach for children with AFL potential. None of the parents coaching claimed to have coached a currently listed AFL player, but admitted that they had coached a number of talented children who had gone onto play representative football, or senior football at a young age. While coaching a team to a premiership was also significant, coaching a child that would go on to reach the SANFL or AFL was the most evident aspiration among coaches. They argued that it would not only cement their status as a 'good' coach in the junior context, it would also hallmark a highlight of being involved in junior Australian football or as one participant aptly put, 'it would be something to hang your hat on.'

Another coach stated:

Obviously being very involved in the football club myself, if the kids can develop their skills at a young age, then it's a good little tick for me if I can see half a dozen of my kids that I've coached in the A-grade ranks or even better still South Adelaide and so forth. I would like to see that from the young ones, you know something to hang your hat on. My involvement in this is to nurture them, try and have fun, enjoy the game, and maybe become successful Donnelly football club players, or AFL level maybe down the track. There's nothing more I'd love to see than a little kid that's out there 20 years old playing for Essendon knowing that I coached him.

Clearly, there is a strong aspirational culture in junior Australian football for children to pursue football ambitions, and for parents and coaches to demonstrate their own aspirational attitudes. In this way, the aspirational culture not only provides parents with another opportunity to influence the junior sport experience, it also enables parents and coaches to participate in the construction and maintenance of aspirational ideologies within the context of junior Australian football.

Club culture

Throughout the interviews, participants frequently discussed the on-field and off-field values and standards of their own, and other football clubs, giving rise to the notion of club culture. The participants claimed that the behaviours, attitudes and practices within a football club contribute to the overall 'brand' through which clubs forge their reputation in the competition and the broader community. While the customs and traditions of the club had some influence on club culture, most participants reiterated the importance of parents and coaches in building either a positive or negative club culture through the behaviours and attitudes role modelled in the junior sport setting. For example, although many clubs carried the burden of a

'bad name' from previous seasons, many participants claimed that they were currently involved in improving club culture which was previously synonymous with poor parental behaviour and substance misuse. One parent was particularly proud of the many parents and coaches attempting to effect positive change through the football club, thus contributing to the broader improvement in club culture:

We have been putting a lot of programs in place for the kids, like for example, 'save a mate', which are around choices on driving, and things like that, drugs and alcohol. We've done about three programs on that so far this year and there's a fourth to come so this year we've been about more educating kids than we've ever done before.

Another participant reiterated:

The culture here teaches them good choices from a young age. Ivan is still in the mini's but Jed is in the under 14s now and he's developed into a good kid. He's made the right choices and even found himself in a situation regarding friends and I've spoken to him about making choices, and I am so proud of him for making the right choice and I believe that is because of the culture here. We're here for seven months of the year, but I go into panic mode when football finishes at the end of the season because I need to keep him on track, because as a parent you lose focus on what they are doing and the choices they are making, so football season I love and so does he.

Another way that parents and coaches positively shaped club culture was through their attitudes, creating a safe football environment for children. The 'code of behaviour' was recognised as key to reinforcing an environment appropriate for children in junior Australian football, and described as 'that's our line in the sand' and 'it makes you think twice before you do and say things.' Some clubs adopted

generic policies on conduct from the internet, while other clubs designed their own code to promote a safe sport climate for children and families. Many football clubs reinforced the code of behaviour via social media, at presentations and during the mid-season break. However, the most common approach for advocating the code of behaviour was by attaching a printed copy of the code to the players' registration form at the beginning of the season.

We've got a code of conduct that goes out to kids and parents to sign from the start so before we even get to the first game, letting everyone know this is what is expected of you as a parent of our club and you step outside that and there will be consequences so we're sort of proactive on that side of things.

Another confirmed:

We've actually handed them out to most parents, and all of the new ones that come along most probably didn't get it, but most got a copy of what the code of behaviour is in the newsletter. We'll do it again next year, we'll give them a code of behaviour so parents have got it and then they can't say they haven't got it so that's the way we do it. We're also putting up signs and stuff next year out the front of the canteen and make sure it's around so people can see it so we don't get in trouble like the way we have this year.

By actively circulating the code in this regard, many participants argued that it contributed to the construction of positive club culture by (a) demonstrating that the club is proactive in its organisation and administration, and (b) encouraging parents and other adults in junior Australian football to model good behaviour for children.

Similarly, the coaches played an important role in emphasising the importance of positive attitudes and behaviours by regularly discussing the code at training, during the pre-season and before games, thus making significant contribution to the construction of a 'good' club culture. One parent articulated:

Before each game it's mentioned. Our coach will say to the players 'the umpires are it,' the umpires come in before each game and talk to the guys, say if they are going to work on anything or look at anything and whatever, wish them all luck, so it's, that sort of helps like the kids know the umpire and whatever else so, and that filters back through to the parents and everybody associated with the club I think.

Despite the potentially positive influence that parents and coaches can have on club culture, many parents were also perceived to negatively impact the culture of some clubs. For many participants, perceptions of other clubs often surrounded negative attitudes toward the code of behaviour, poor game day behaviour, and the visibility of drugs and alcohol in the junior context. The following discussion with a group of parents epitomises this perspective:

Carl: Probably the one just down the hill from Fairmont have probably the worst culture ... druggies, sheep stations ...

Broderick: Yeah, more than letting the kids just have a bit of fun.

Harris: And the ones down Blackville well there you go, the worst.

Jeff: It's unfortunately not the teams, but some individuals within the club that create a bad culture.

Sandy: It's the adults. Frustration with umpires, at under 8s 10s and 12s level and you think why are you even worried about the umpire you know, the kids are supposed to be having a good time you know.

Jeff: That's wrong.

Sandy: It's the negativity.

Another group of parents concurred:

Cheryl: Some clubs are really bad.

Sandra: Some are shocking.

Graham: Some of it is from a small minority though. Unfortunately there are two or three clubs, and it's only a minority that unfortunately just taints the whole football club or whatever club but it's only two or three people.

Brad: One of the teams that we played last week I thought was shocking, all the way from the under 14s up to the A-grade. The bench, the coaches, the runners, the parents, they were abusive all day towards the umpire, maybe not so much towards the kids, but it goes in patterns because the club you are talking about 15 years ago, you wouldn't have heard that, it goes in waves.

Another parent reiterated:

Well you will go to some grounds and you will be playing the opposition and one of the kids will take a mark and they will applaud the other team, but you go to another club and a parent just wants to come on and smack the kid that did the tackle, or 'boo' them or jeer, or they shout out at the umpire

and this sort of stuff, so in this region it depends which club you go to.

There are some clubs whose parents and coaches applaud the other team.

Some participants admitted to being affiliated with a negative club culture, and confirmed that parents and coaches contribute to its construction and maintenance. They admitted that many parents reject the idea of the 'code of behaviour' and dismiss it as 'useless,' 'nonsense' and 'bureaucratic crap.' Some participants also conceded that the club was not active in wanting to 'clean up' the clubs reputation for poor sideline behaviour because of a deeply rooted belief that poor behaviour was 'normal,' even in the juniors.

That's normal in all football clubs. It happened back in the 1980s when I was kid playing then, parents abusing umpires, abusing kids, giving them a hard time. I don't think it should be like it is but I think that's the way that it's been brought up over the years. I don't believe in it but it's a case of 'it still happens.' Socially, it's just there, regardless of policies and the Nick Riewoldt adds on telly. It's accepted but it's not something that I want to happen. I want the kids to go out and enjoy themselves, not coming off saying that they have been given a hard time.

Another participant echoed:

It's a given, it's human nature, it's going to happen, regardless. It's a part of human nature. You know, your kid is out there playing football. The adrenalin starts, the kid gets the ball and you're hoping that he kicks the goal or whatever, its human nature that they are going to step over the line regardless of policy. Once you get to the game, and you're watching your kid play football, I think the code of conduct goes out the door because they

become so embroiled in the game that they are screaming at their own kid, or screaming at someone else's kid, did they hit that kid or whatever.

Similarly:

I think you get it in all sports, I've experienced it in tennis, and there's politics in tennis too and you get parents arguing, parents that have gone over the line so then you have to pull them back, what's the protocol, I think it's all across the board, no matter what sport you play. It's in jobs, it's in work, it's in, and I think it is part of life.

Most participants also discussed concerns for some clubs that permitted drug and alcohol use, particularly in junior Australian football. While some clubs were perceived to be 'on the front foot' with regards to alcohol and drug-related issues, other clubs were not perceived to be as proactive in this regard, further differentiating some football clubs with either a positive or negative culture. One mother noted:

I don't like the parents drinking at the footy but mind you the kids play at 12pm now, but I don't like the alcohol closer to the footy field or drinking afterwards. I believe that our footy club is wrapped around the bar to me. I think there is a drinking culture in our club. Even last week, my son played up in the B grade to fill in last week and he went back to the change rooms as they do and they had an esky there and offered him a beer without even asking me and we were like 'what the ... Josh, you are not touching that' and then they got him a coke, but yeah after the game, they are pretty much saying 'help yourself and have a beer.'

Similarly, another parent articulated:

It's not just alcohol, I don't mind saying that I am very anti-drugs and if I think the wrong person is hanging around I get on the front foot, and it's happened this year already at our footy club with pot. We've had some folks there and a number of other parents and I was quite proactive in trying to discourage them from being around.

Most of the children acknowledged that alcohol consumption was evident in the junior sport setting, but denied that drugs were visible in their own football club culture. However, several children argued that junior Australian football was a popular backdrop for children to engage in alcohol consumption on the weekend, as epitomised by this group of children:

Neal: It's a family club and yet there are kids my age getting drunk after the game. One mate goes to me, he doesn't live far from me, 'Oh Neal, come around after we're having a party tomorrow night, just bring some beers' and I am like 'Totally, not. Where am I going to get beers from?' and he's like 'won't your mum buy them for you?' and I am like 'no' – I don't want to do that.

Taylor: It's ridiculous. It's not just beers, its spirits and other things.

Lee: At our night game, I always run water and some of them are sitting in the back of cars and they've got whole bottles of vodka, UDLs, blueberry vodka and they yell out 'Lee, you want some?' and I am like 'nah mate.'

These quotes are significant because they situate alcohol and drugs in junior Australian football, identifying a major challenge for clubs in pursuit of developing positive club culture. However, they are also significant because they provide perspective around the ways that parents can negatively shape football culture.

The goodness of football

In the junior Australian football culture, there is a deep-seated belief that football engenders an inherent 'goodness' for those who participate in the sport. According to all of the participants, football is associated with a multitude of potential benefits including social development, improved fitness, and the promotion of healthy attitudes towards sport and physical activity. Specifically, from a parental and coaches' perspective, junior Australian football also provides children with a capacity to develop 'life skills' that are important for beyond the sporting context. For example, the notion of being part of a team was perceived to be important for teaching children about life values relating to commitment, dedication, 'hard work' and leadership – all values that are perceived to be useful in the 'big wide world'. Most parents and coaches suggested that these life qualities can be transposed to school and family life, and help children develop a greater appreciation for others:

Parents will say that little Johnnie is playing footy this year and turn up six times for the year and five trainings because they go away this weekend and they go away that weekend and they are not showing the kids about being a part of the team. You're making a commitment to sport and you are trying to instil into them that it's a team game and you've got to learn to be a part of a team and I think that it's something that can help them later on in life. There are too many children that run around nowadays as individuals and have trouble I suppose in the larger groups. It's something that footy is a good thing for.

The goodness of junior Australian football theme was also evident in the perception that by playing football children are less likely to engage in antisocial behaviour such as drug use, delinquency, violence and vandalism. While drugs and alcohol comprise

part of the culture of some football clubs, many parents claimed that football provides children a 'focus', thereby reducing the likelihood of engaging in risky behaviours. A common perception was:

I think the most important part is that it gives them a focus, something to do on a Wednesday night and a Saturday, um, they can be part of a team, they can learn to be a part of a team, not individuals, but most importantly, I think what I've seen is a lot of kids that are not involved in footy are quite often the ones that are getting in trouble, and seem to be wandering around on a Saturday doing nothing but causing vandalism and mischief.

Another participant concurred, describing football as an individual learning plan:

Through football, what I try to do is say 'ok you might not win every contest but don't give up' because there are too many kids who's mum and dad have been like too easy on their kids and they're out there doing graffiti or getting stoned because they have had it too easy so maybe I am way off the mark but I believe that through football, it's like an individual learning plan for life, except I've got nothing written down, it gives them direction.

These attitudes were synonymous among most participants, reinforcing the notion that there is an inherent 'goodness' attached to participation in junior Australian football. While many participants admitted that other sports and activities may provide similar outcomes for children, junior Australian football was perceived to engender greater parallels with 'life' because the nature of the sport provided heightened experiences such as disappointment, frustration, enjoyment, admiration, jealousy, demotivation, anger and happiness. Subsequently, parents believed that children will be better prepared for the 'ups and downs' of life and develop a

stronger resilience to cope with the challenges outside of the sporting context. One parent argued:

Being in a small community, football shows the kids how to behave in life in some ways. It sort of gives them grounding for other parts in life hopefully. A real social learning thing more so than just a sporting thing, both but you know, just humility, a lot of things in life. Not a lot of things in life go how you want so you can have some positive things in life and some negatives, and footy hopefully shows them, it's a reflection of how life can be.

And:

I think that it's good that footy is about the positives and negatives because when the they're [children] are out in the big wide world, nobody is going to be nice to your kid if they don't want to be so I think that's good that you can show them that through footy.

Similarly:

I enjoy trying to improve them basically. Trying to teach them good football skills, behaviour, trying to teach them what's good behaviour, how to be a good sport, not to abuse the umpires and all that's a part of it, so I guess it's a bit about just football, but it's also life skills you know, because a lot of these boys are from underprivileged backgrounds. Quite a few of them have only got one parent and you know they have behavioural issues and all that sort of stuff, so that's probably the most important thing, those life skills you get from football.

The goodness of junior Australian football was also associated with developing children into potential leaders through participation. Being a captain, vice-captain or

a member of the leadership group in junior Australian football was argued to equip children with the characteristics and traits that will enable them to continue to be a leader at school and among peers. However, several participants also suggested that leadership qualities can still be developed by simply being involved in junior Australian football, as one participant noted:

Well sport helps them and footy helps them in so many ways that it helps their fitness and it helps their social skills. Liam was very introverted and since he's been here at Crofton he's really come out of his shell. I mean some people would say that compared to his teammates, he's still in a shell, but from where he's come from, it's made a huge different. And you know what, he's made friends from other schools now and he's putting his hand up at school in class and is a representative on youth forums and stuff like, student rep, because he's got that confidence from footy, and he knows other kids from other schools as well.

Playing football was also perceived to accelerate social development by encouraging children to interact with peers from a diverse social, cultural, religious and socioeconomic background. While parents and coaches also benefit from the social aspects of children's sport, children were perceived to extract greater social benefits, thus reaffirming the junior Australian football culture as inherently 'good':

I think football is good, and I mean our team this year we are probably pulling from a very diverse set of families and backgrounds and stuff like that. We hear about these kids at school that are bullies and everything else, but when they come into this team environment and in this bubble on the football field, yeah, it's so good for them.

And:

Yeah I agree with Phillip too, football is good for making friends, but also the thrill of seeing your own lad participate and enjoy the company of his mates, like I said, my son has got a bit of a social condition but the kids are fantastic and they do look after him and it's a sport where he's got that camaraderie and he builds certainly better social skills and also grows and becomes stronger within himself in a sense.

Participation was crucial in this regard; however there were other means through which children accrued significant social benefit from junior Australian football. The participants identified club fundraising events, BBQ sausage sizzles and jumper presentation nights that promoted additional opportunities for social development and cohesion. Similarly, the regular season 'bye' provided an opportunity for parents and coaches to organise a 'footy trip' and attend a game of AFL football, thereby reinforcing the potential goodness of junior Australian football. One participant affirmed:

I reckon the social side of football is the biggest positive, not just for yourself, but for the kids as well, like the other weekend we had a bye weekend, we had a trip or going away to Adelaide for a footy trip and just getting all the kids together, you know, they all 99% of the time get on really well. It's just that bonding.

Participation in junior Australian football did not, however, guarantee social benefits for children. Indeed, club loyalty and rivalry were argued to create heightened tension among school friends, which led to bullying behaviours within social groups at school. Though generally verbal, the nature of bullying at school was described as 'harassing,' 'intimidating' and alienating. This underlines a significant social and

cultural issue mitigated in and through junior sport, as illustrated by the following conversation:

Colby: The coaches are encouraging, but it's more when you are out of the football game, like when you're at school.

Harry: Yeah, because like some of the kids just much around and some of them take it seriously and they start trying to pick a fight.

Thomas: I think it's their attitude and peer pressure and trying to be cool and then they start to pick a fight with you and hit you.

Ed: Well, it's excluding.

Harry: We are always playing in a nice peaceful game and then Brin just comes through and pretty much ruins it.

Ed: He put him Thomas in a headlock.

Harry: And like, this week we are playing his side, and they treat us like the enemy. They won't even talk to me.

Another group of children affirmed:

Cole: When we play footy down here at school, I got the ball and Dillon came up to me and he's a good tackler because he also plays Rugby and he tackled me to the ground and it hurt a lot, and then I got back up and I could hear him saying to another Weston player, talking about how they need to do that to me next weekend. And I am half their size, it's just stupid, we are mates.

Craig: Sometimes at school, we muck around at recess and lunch and this guy from Norton always comes up behind me and shepherds me and elbows me face-first into the ground.

Kane: Last week, it's like ganging up on people and you're trying not to get bullied, so last week, when we were mucking around at lunch, Rhett, a kid punched me in the guts and no-one saw it.

A game for parents

In many ways, junior Australian football plays a fundamental role in the lives of parents, reinforcing the notion that junior sport is inherently 'a game for parents' as much as it is intended for children. A number of parents proudly discussed the important roles they fulfil in junior Australian football, and while their involvement was closely aligned with the idea of supporting children's sport, they admitted that their involvement evoked a personal sense of belonging and identity. Through these voluntary roles, junior Australian football provides an important space for parents to be a participant in the sport experience, albeit via more traditional gender roles and responsibilities. That is, most mothers were involved in netball while most fathers were involved in football, consistent with social and cultural stereotypes around gender discourse in sport and in broader society. For mothers who were involved in the male-dominated football context, they were commonly pigeon-holed to canteen duties, fundraising and washing the football uniforms. Fathers, however, assumed a greater variety of roles in junior Australian football, from delegate and 'behind the scene' roles to operating the local barbeque, timekeeping duties and team management roles. The following discussion epitomises this aspect:

Terry: My dad goal umpires.

Interviewer: And your mums?

Terry: She does the canteen.

Ashton: Dad does the goal umpiring and time keeping.

Blair: Dad played football, but mum takes me and stuff.

Samuel: Dad was the chairman last year and mum, she's just on the committee.

Chad: Mum helps out at the canteen.

Kane: Mum helps out with netball.

Blair: Dad won a premiership here, he coaches us now.

Despite reinforcing broader stereotypical gender roles, it is evident that parents situate themselves within the junior sport experience. Although most of the benefits relating to junior sport concern children, involvement in junior Australian football also provides a myriad of potential benefits for parents, particularly from a social perspective. Specifically many participants argued that junior Australian football invites parents to socially interact with other parents in the sporting community, and disengage from the rigours of working and personal life. Many participants regarded junior Australian football as an 'escape,' and 'something to look forward to' following the predictable and often unenjoyable nature of the working week. Given that junior Australian football occurs in the winter months, it also enabled parents to maintain mobility and involvement with the local community through children's sport. In particular, being involved in voluntary role in junior Australian football enabled parents to 'catch up' with other parents outside of work on a social basis. Indicative of many parents, one father reflected:

It [junior Australian football] is a mental break from day to day activities which can get so mundane and so structured. To go to the footy to see different parts of the community, different people, see how they do things differently, it breaks the momentum of what you do day today. And there are a lot of people that do the same thing day in and day out so mentally and socially, it is paramount. In juniors, as a parent, what I enjoy is seeing other families that you don't see during the week and communicating and discussing things that our children are doing at school, what they are doing during the week, and how they went in sport.

Another group of parents reiterated:

Donald: It's sort of the 'done' thing to do, you play footy, you know, football is, basically your week revolves around football.

Edward: It's a lifeline really isn't it? It's just as much parent related as it is child related like, because it's the parent outlet as well.

Ralph: At the end of the week, you are like 'you beauty, we are going to the footy,' you get to socialise with everybody.

Ned: Not everyone is involved in football, but my sort of social life and that, because football is our winter social life, it's extremely important.

While many parents perceived junior Australian football as an ideal time for socialisation, for others it was an avenue to pursue business and work-related opportunities. Many parents were self-employed and therefore viewed weekend sport as merely another opportunity to vend their business, services and labour. A common response included:

I try to make it part of my life, all through my life. Do you call that paramount, from my point of view? Absolutely, because Monday morning comes around far too quick and we all hate Monday mornings, but we are in a society where all of a sudden the parents of the kids you play footy with and against can be your business partners, or a business opportunity that you have to take. I feel it's paramount to look at it that way.

One constraint that limits parents' ability to capitalise on the social and working opportunities from junior Australian football surrounds the notion of socioeconomic status. Most parents and families from low-income backgrounds claimed that they felt socially subordinated by affluent parents in the context of junior Australian football. One parent commented 'sometimes they make you feel like a second class citizen,' while others labelled rich parents as 'snobs' and 'toffs' in response to a perceived divide between two social classes. Not only did this create a social hierarchy, it reduced the overall enjoyment of being involved in children's sport for many parents. The following quote epitomises this reductive aspect of junior Australian football:

There's definitely a big division with socioeconomic areas. Boral – rich area, Hanta – poor area and they really do come across as upper class, toffy sort of people. And you see that with the parents sitting all together, all rocking up in their BMWs and they really do snub others at the gate, at the canteen, just at the game and that.

Similarly, another low-income parent reflected on a recent experience that reinforces socioeconomic position as an agent for social alienation and segregation in junior Australian football:

Kate's son got injured last game, and some games the trainers, they will just run out and it doesn't matter what kid or what team, you run out to help because it's a kid that is hurt, but when her son got hurt badly, someone did finally run out from the other team (a 'rich' team), and said 'I shouldn't be out here because it's not our team' and I was like 'why would you say that?'... Fucking snobs!

While for some parents this was not problematic, for others the social isolation created a negative climate for parents to support junior sport and absorb the potential social benefits from their involvement. Nonetheless, these perspectives are crucial in understanding the meaning of junior Australian football as not only a sporting pursuit for children, but also an important event in the lives of parents and families.

CHAPTER SIX

Discussion

Introduction

This chapter will discuss the themes arising from the data in relation to the sport-parenting literature from a conceptual and theoretical perspective. Parents are integral to children's sport, and as such this discussion focuses on developing an understanding of parental influence in junior Australian football from the perspectives of those most intimately involved in children's sport experience. It is important to note that many of the themes surrounding parental influence (i.e., promoting participation) are not unique to the junior Australian football context and may also be evident in other sport settings. However, this is a study on the broad concept of sport-parenting in a specific Australian sporting code, and as such this discussion will examine the findings significant to parental influence in junior Australian football in South Australia. This original contribution to the literature is significant given the lack of evidence from an Australian perspective contributing to broader discussions around sport-parenting (Elliott & Drummond, 2013). The results showed that parents exerted a significant influence on children's sport experience, evidenced by a wide-range of positive and negative behaviours and attitudes within, and beyond the competitive setting. These findings are particularly important as they identify the role of parents in socially constructing meaning surrounding children's sport participation. They are also important as previous research has shown that sport-parenting is not always a positive aspect of children's sport (see literature review). The ensuing chapter is arranged in a manner that addresses the research objectives of the study, which were:

1. To develop an understanding of the ‘positive and ‘negative’ aspects of parental involvement in the junior Australian football experience.
2. To explore the ‘multiple perspectives’ and meanings attached to junior Australian football participation.
3. To understand how socially constructed parental behaviours are developed, maintained and perpetuated within the junior Australian football experience.
4. To identify key issues and challenges currently pervading the junior Australian football experience.

Research objective 1: develop an understanding of the positive and negative aspects of parental involvement in the junior Australian football experience.

Numerous studies have concluded that parents can exert a significant positive and negative influence in children’s sport. Omlil and Wiese-Bjornstal (2011) suggested that through the role of the ‘supportive parent’, the ‘demanding coach’, and/or the ‘crazed fan’, parents can demonstrate support, derogation and disruption within a single competitive sport experience, demonstrating the complexity of being a sport parent. Similarly, Merkel (2013) argues that parents can positively impact children’s physical, social and psychological development through sport by demonstrating various forms of support, but they can also comprise a negative source of pressure by placing inappropriate expectations on children’s sporting success. This perspective corroborates previous studies that have highlighted the supportive and pressuring nature of parental involvement in children’s sport (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2008; Kanters et al., 2008). The current study supports the contention that parents comprise

a source of positive and negative influence. However, it also provides a deeper insight into the embodiment of positive and negative influence within the junior Australian football experience. Specifically, positive and negative parental influence was most evident within the notions of parental verbal reinforcement and role modelling.

Verbal reinforcement

The current study produced evidence to suggest that verbal reinforcement is a significant aspect of parental influence in the junior Australian football experience. Within the competitive experience in particular, verbal reinforcement was a prominent parental behaviour that served to positively and negatively impact children's enjoyment and involvement. While many parents were perceived to demonstrate high levels of supportive and encouraging verbal behaviours, they were also perceived to engage in (though infrequently) highly audible negative verbal behaviour in the form of swearing, abuse, threatening comments and derogatory jokes about players and umpires. In this way, the current study reinforces previous research by Bowker et al. (2009) and Omli and LaVoi (2009), who argued that verbal abuse towards umpires and children, though infrequent, remains problematic in children's sport. Interestingly however, in this study sarcastic comments and momentary verbal 'outbursts' toward umpires were not considered forms of negative parental behaviour. For example, if a parent criticised an umpire in a sarcastic tone, this was not considered an example of negative parental influence, and therefore distinct from other verbal behaviours involving prolonged remarks comprising of critical comments and profane language. In this way, negative verbal reinforcement

did not necessarily exert a negative influence in junior Australian football providing that the comment was engendered a sarcastic tone.

Imperative to this perspective were the voices of children, who agreed that certain negative parental comments did not render a negative influence. This makes a contentious, yet significant contribution to the literature, as previous studies have simply aggregated criticism and abuse as characteristics of negative verbal behaviour (Kidman et al., 1999; Randall & McKenzie, 1987). However, from a socio-cultural perspective, it would appear that such categorisations are too simplistic and overlook the influence of broader society and culture, which may play a role in socially constructing certain negative verbal comments as somewhat acceptable. In Australian football in particular, fans and spectators often exhibit interwoven verbal behaviours that epitomise visceral ‘agony’ and ‘ecstasy’ (Klugman, 2010). It is therefore conceivable that verbal behaviours exhibited at the elite level, including satirical comments, play a role in normalising certain verbal behaviours in children’s sport, and thus may explain why aspects of negative parental verbal behaviour do not emerge as problematic in junior Australian football.

This finding is particularly contentious because it provokes inevitable discussions around where the line is drawn between acceptable and unacceptable parental behaviour in children’s sport. According to Holt, Black and Tamminen (2007), parents do not understand the impact of their own verbal behaviour, highlighting a major challenge for sport providers and policy makers in the context of children’s sport. The findings may further add confusion to the sport-parenting role, given that negative verbal comments under the guise of sarcasm do not necessarily exert a negative influence on children’s participation in junior Australian football. This is a

potentially dangerous notion in that it may perpetuate the view that tiers of negative verbal behaviour are permissible in children's sport. This could be interpreted as a 'green light' for engaging in other forms of negative verbal behaviour. However, such comments may still have inadvertent consequences given that research suggests that children prefer parents to avoid engaging in behaviours that draw attention to themselves (Knight et al., 2010). In this way, verbal reinforcement within the competitive experience remains a complex notion to fully understand within the sport-parenting role. Nonetheless, the findings indicate that parents do engage in verbally reinforcing behaviours during children's competitive sport, but not all negative comments appear to exert a negative influence.

Given the broad scope of the study, it was also possible to illuminate the positive and negative parental verbal behaviours in the pre- and post-game setting. Most observational (Kidman et al., 1999) and survey research (Shields et al., 2005; Shields et al., 2007) account for the nature of parental verbal behaviour within the 'siren-to-siren' experience and overlook parental influence before and after competitive sport from a verbal reinforcement perspective. In this way, the current study makes an important contribution to the literature by examining the range of parental verbal behaviours exhibited before and after competition and the influence they exert on children's involvement in sport. Specifically, parents generally engaged in a range of supportive and encouraging verbal behaviours in the pre-game setting, providing children with a significant amount of confidence and enthusiasm. Parents regularly offered children 'last minute' advice and encouragement in order to prepare children for the competitive nature of junior Australian football – an aspect of parental influence positively perceived by participants.

In the post-game setting, parents regularly engaged in debriefing strategies with children, which generally involved a layer of positive comments, followed by elements of constructive criticism relating to sports performance, and finally, further positive comments to conclude the debrief. Interestingly however, though a common parenting practice, debriefing was not always a positive experience, as children commonly perceived constructive criticism and advice as a source of negative feedback. This is consistent with claims that children prefer positive, realistic feedback after competitive sport, providing that parents do not focus too much on the negative aspects of performance (Knight et al., 2011). Given that one negative parental feedback statement can dramatically influence children's motivation and sport performance (Gershgoren et al., 2011), parents may therefore need to consider alternative approaches to debriefing if they wish to enrich their child's experience with junior Australian football. Yet, changing the nature of post-game debriefing may be difficult given that it is a deeply engrained parenting practice in children's sport (Gershgoren et al., 2011; Knight et al., 2011). Most parents engaged in debriefing with children because they experienced similar forms of parental involvement in their childhood. In this way, parents may believe that they are normalising children's sport experience. Consequently, sport providers and policy makers arguably face an enormous challenge in not only addressing the negative influence of parents in the post-game setting, but also the historical, cultural and social dimensions which normalise such behaviour.

Through verbal reinforcement, parents clearly have the capacity to impact children's sport experience within and beyond the competitive experience. These findings are important because they provide a closer examination of what positive and negative influence parents embody through verbal reinforcement. Critically, they challenge

the perception that parental verbal behaviour relates only to the competitive experience, and contests the view that all negative comments exert a negative influence.

Role models

From this study, there is evidence to suggest that parents exert considerable influence as role models in the junior Australian football experience. Anderssen and Wold (1992) stated that by serving as role models, parents play an important role in promoting children's physical activity. Fredricks and Eccles (2004) reiterate this claim, arguing that in addition to fulfilling the roles of provider and interpreter of sport experience, parents assume an important responsibility as role models in children's sport. Importantly, while the literature acknowledges the importance of parents as role models for positively influencing children's participation in sport, understanding what constitutes being a role model is not clear. The current study makes a significant contribution in this regard, suggesting that role modelling in junior Australian football assumes two primary forms: (1) active engagement via the domestic setting, and (2) visible behaviours and attitudes within the sport setting.

From the perspective of active engagement, the findings suggest that parental role modelling in the domestic setting was crucial for introducing children to junior Australian football. Parents were central to children's initial involvement by kicking the football at home and constructing 'backyard' games with children, thus, providing a significant early learning experience and initiating children's interest in junior Australian football. This reinforces the argument posited by Davison, Cutting and Birch (2003) who claimed that parents who explicitly use their own behaviour to support and encourage children to be active positively influence children's adherence

to sport and physical activity. However, parents assumed a less performative role in the home practice setting where children began to demonstrate greater competency, motivation and specialisation in junior Australian football. Consequently, opportunities for parents to role model active engagement in sport-related activities were reduced. Parents were therefore forced to assume a more traditional caregiving role by permitting children to engage in unsupervised home practices at the local oval. This distinction is critical as it contextualises the influence of parental role modelling in the early sporting experience via active involvement.

Despite fulfilling a reduced role as children progress beyond introductory participation, the findings also suggest that parental involvement in sport in the domestic setting is crucial for initiating children's interest in sport. This builds upon previous research that suggests that parents who actively role model athletic or voluntary behaviours in sport are highly likely (86%) to have children actively involved in organised sport (Kremarik, 2000). The home setting may therefore comprise a target area for sport providers and policy makers in devising new initiatives to encourage more families to be physically active. While schools and community sport clubs are also vital, it is apparent that the home setting cannot be overlooked.

The second form of role modelling concerned the parental attitudes and behaviours exhibited in competitive sport setting. By attending games throughout the competitive season, parents occupied a central place in the junior Australian football experience and subsequently assumed numerous opportunities to role model sport-related behaviour. These behaviours are considered highly significant because they have been found to impact children's behaviours and attitudes inside the sporting

domain as well as in wider society (Fraser-Thomas & Côté, 2006; Hartmann et al., 2011). The current study revealed that parents frequently demonstrate negative behaviours such as dissatisfied body language with coaches, umpires and children's performances and to a lesser extent, various degrees of aggressive behaviour, affirming the findings from previous studies (Shields et al., 2005; Shields et al., 2007). However, parents also modelled positive behaviours, which were perceived to educate children about winning and losing, sportsmanship and the notion of fair play. Inadvertently, by role modelling positive attitudes and behaviours, parents were perceived to also contribute to developing a 'good' culture in relation to the football club. Some parents organised and facilitated personal development sessions for children around 'healthy lifestyles' and 'responsible life choices', which were conducted through the football club and consequently enhanced their standing, through the eyes of their peers, as positive role models in the junior Australian football experience. This reiterates claims that positive parental role modelling not only encourages appropriate sportsmanship, but also positive values, attitudes, and behaviours that can assist children beyond the sporting domain (Sandford et al., 2008).

These findings are important because they expand upon previous research, which accepts that parental role modelling concerns the behaviours modelled in the sport setting. For example, Casper (2006) discusses role modelling as parents' behaviours which serve to negatively influence children's competitive behaviour such as cheating and dishonesty during competition. The current study however, suggests that parental role modelling is not only generally positive; it also emerges in two distinct forms. That is via the home and sport setting. It is arguable that positive parental role modelling has the capacity to encourage other parents to support and

demonstrate similar behaviours. This may therefore improve the perceived culture of sport clubs, which could have positive implications for attracting new players and families. Furthermore, it may serve to discourage inappropriate and negative parental behaviours. By understanding the nature of role modelling, parents may be better positioned to positively enhance children's involvement in sport and the socio-cultural environment surrounding regular sporting activities.

Research objective 2: explore the meaning attached to junior Australian football participation.

Research and policy propagate the view that the purpose of children's sport is to provide fun and enjoyable experiences. However, the current research suggests that participation in junior Australian football assumes multiple meanings beyond this rhetoric, including the notions of 'winning', 'early specialisation', 'holistic goodness' and 'a game for parents'.

The competitively oriented sport climate

Crone (1999) cautions that an emphasis on winning can not only place unnecessary performance pressure on children, but also result in an increase in violent and abusive spectator behaviour. Research has also shown that children do not enjoy sport climates that heavily focus on winning (Cumming et al., 2007). Despite these concerns, sufficient evidence emerged from the study to suggest that parents play a central role in socially constructing winning as an important objective and outcome of participation in junior Australian football. While winning was predictably related to the final scores of competitive matches, it was also conceptualised in relation to children's competitive success in individual contests. Parents appeared to place a

heightened emphasis on winning the ‘one-on-one battles,’ evidenced by engaging in pre-game discussions with children about tactics and strategies to defeat their upcoming opponent. Although this was a positive aspect of parental involvement for many participants, it highlights the role of parents in reinforcing the importance of individual success as a tier of the winning ideology in junior Australian football. Parents further reinforced the winning ideology by providing children with advice and instruction during the game and the quarter-time breaks. While this was a positive experience for many participants, receiving instruction and advice during the game for many children added increasing pressure and anxiety when play recommenced. Knight et al. (2010) also found that children involved in tennis do not like to receive technical and tactical advice from parents because it provokes greater confusion. This suggests that in both individual and team sports parental instruction and advice is not necessarily conducive to children’s enjoyment and participation in sport.

Parents reinforced the notion of winning individual contests by deliberately underlining the importance of eating healthy and nutritious meals in the lead up to weekend sport. While the importance of healthy eating is clear, the parents in this research deliberately emphasised specific dietary behaviours in the pre-game setting as a means of encouraging children to be ‘at their best.’ This supports previous research indicating that parents regularly demonstrate a range of pre-performance behaviours such as focusing on winning and providing verbal encouragement (Harwood & Knight, 2009; Keegan, Harwood, Spray, & Lavalley, 2009). In this way, parents are not only highly involved throughout the junior sport experience, but also contribute to perpetuating individual success as a culturally significant part of the winning ideology.

The second manner in which parents perpetuated the notional importance of winning and competitive success was in relation to the ‘premiership window’ – a socially constructed participatory cycle whereby some teams are perceived more likely than others to win the premiership based on the age and playing ability of the team. Although winning was not perceived to be the ‘be all and end all,’ the current study found that winning is highly significant among participants in close proximity to the premiership window, demonstrated by heightened parental behaviours as the season peaked toward finals. This included degrees of frustration toward umpire decisions, negative reactions to opposition players and coaches, and a perceived increase in general verbal activity. Yet for those participants for whom winning was rarely achieved, such behaviours were not perceived as frequent. In this way, the possibility of winning a grand final appears to influence parental behaviours as the competitive season begins to culminate. Previous research has suggested that parental behaviour can change from support to discontent during games where children begin to lose (Harwood & Knight, 2009). However, the evidence from the current study also suggests that parental behaviours within the ‘premiership window’ can also fluctuate across the season, further preserving the winning ideology.

From a social constructionist perspective, broader society and culture plays critical a role in how parents contribute to maintaining the importance of winning in junior Australian football. For example, the media portrays Australian football at the elite level as a violent, abusive sport characterised by a ‘winning at all cost’ culture (Light & Pickford, 2004). Such attitudes toward winning are further perpetuated by a contemporary society that champion winning attitudes and competitive success in elite level sport. Sport-parenting within the ‘premiership window’ appears to mimic similar societal values and deeply-rooted sporting traditions in which winning

behaviours and attitudes are normalised and acculturated at the elite level. This however, can be problematic in the context of children's sport given that an over-emphasis on winning has been associated with poor parental behaviour (DeFrancesco & Johnson, 1997; Gould et al., 2006). The current study appears to support this perspective, especially *en route* to the finals series. Nonetheless, such a theoretical perspective encourages sport providers, policy makers and health promoters to look beyond the individual and consider the impact of society and culture in constructing and maintaining a focus on winning in sport, which arguably influences the socially constructed meaning given to children's sport.

Early specialisation

According to the Developmental Model of Sport Participation (DMSP) (Côté, 1999; Côté & Fraser-Thomas, 2007; Côté & Hay, 2002), fun and enjoyment are rhetorically significant throughout children's sport. This ideology is consistent with numerous studies that have identified the importance of fun and enjoyment in motivating children's involvement in organised sport (Bernstein, Phillips, & Silverman, 2011; Goral, 2010; Wall & Côté, 2007). From this study however, the evidence suggests that while fun and enjoyment are common experiences in junior Australian football, the meaning of participation also encompasses early specialisation behaviours. Most children claimed to possess an ambition to reach the AFL, and therefore chose to approach junior Australian football with what they perceived to be a more 'professional' attitude. This is evident in the range of specialised behaviours in which children are participating, such as highly deliberate forms of practice (i.e., pre-season training) and reduced involvement in other sports during the early sporting years. Children also demonstrated high levels of commitment and dedication by earning

their own money to purchase training items and engaging in rigorous fitness training regimes to prepare for the competitive season. Parents and coaches further reinforced such attitudes toward junior Australian football by encouraging children to dedicate their time and energy to junior Australian football as a means of supporting children's aspirations. Parents were also crucial in 'steering' children away from other sports so children could maximise their time, effort and concentration toward junior Australian football. While fun and enjoyment were still associated with children's participation, these findings reinforce the argument that children's sport is becoming increasingly 'professionalised' (Gould & Carson, 2004), or as described by De Knop (1996), 'institutionalised.'

From a conceptual perspective, the early onset of specialisation in junior Australian football challenges the assumptions of the DMSP and its major trajectory involving sampling to specialisation. According to Côté and Hay's (2002) DMSP, the sampling years involve a high amount of deliberate play, wide-ranging involvement in several sports and a high emphasis on fun and excitement for children aged six to 12 years. Children aged 13 to 15 years then typically progress into the specialising years, which are characterised by a high amount of deliberate practice, involvement limited to one sport, and an evident shift in emphasis toward sport achievement (Côté, 1999). Yet the current study, which consisted of participants located between the sampling and specialising years, indicated that nuances of early specialisation emerge earlier than suggested by the DMSP, thereby challenging the participatory assumptions of sampling and specialisation. This reiterates Light, Harvey and Memmert's (2011) contention that the DMSP is too rigid and may need to account for more variation from a social and cultural perspective. It also supports the suggestion that the transition between sampling and specialisation may be overlapping rather than

progressively sequential. Strachan, Côté and Deakin (2009) investigated the participatory differences during the sampling and specialising years and found that similar outcomes were experienced by all children involved in the sampling and specialising years. The current findings are therefore significant because they not only shed light on the meaning of participation in junior Australian football, but also because they further develop discussion around the current iteration of the DMSP from a socio-cultural perspective. Consequently, the DMSP may benefit from considering the social and cultural dimensions that play a role in prolonging or accelerating the nature of children's participation in sport.

Certainly from a developmental perspective there may be a concern that children who experience early specialisation will inevitably experience a declination in fun and enjoyment as a result of the increased focus on training and practice. Research has shown that children who engage in specialisation from a young age are more likely to drop out of sport (Wall & Côté, 2007). This is particularly concerning given that dropout in children's sport in Australia peaks at 13 years (Olds et al., 2009). While it is beyond the scope of the current study to identify a relationship between sport dropout trends among Australian children with early specialisation, it is clear that in junior Australian football, the meaning of participation extends well beyond the notions of fun and enjoyment. Conceptually this is significant for sport providers, coaches and parents striving to provide children with an enjoyable learning experience through sport. It would therefore appear useful for parents to support early specialisation only if children demonstrate a desire to dedicate their involvement in junior Australian football. Signs that children want to specialise their involvement include a self-motivated increase in deliberate practice. This notion is fraught with danger however, as some parents may promote early specialisation

prematurely by forcing children to engage in highly structured activities. Not only does this have the potential to reduce children's enjoyment, it may also discourage children's ongoing involvement in sport. In this way, parents may need to be aware that the nature of their involvement can change, and that their involvement can vary earlier or later according to children's sport participation.

Holistic goodness

While the meaning of winning and early specialisation were central to junior Australian football participation, so too was the belief that there was a holistic goodness that children could gain from active and ongoing involvement in sport. Coakley (2011, p. 306) reiterates this view, claiming that sport is widely believed to possess 'a fundamental and pure essence' which is passed onto those who partake in it. This belief is consistent with research that has found that parents perceive sport as a holistically health-enhancing activity among children and youth (Hamilton & White, 2010; Holt, Kingsley, et al., 2011). In Australia more specifically, research has also indicated that among small Indigenous communities, participation in Australian football can positively enhance life skills and lifestyle choices (Dinan-Thompson, Sellwood, & Carless, 2008), reaffirming the perception that there is an inherent 'goodness' contained within sport.

In the current study, junior Australian football was similarly perceived to embody a rich 'goodness' that children could extract from ongoing involvement. Participants widely claimed that involvement in junior Australian football was not only appropriate for maintaining cardiovascular health, but also for developing a suite of life skills such as commitment, perseverance, and leadership qualities. Sport programs within school settings have also been found to promote important life skills

including social interactions and respect (Holt, et al., 2011), reinforcing the suggestion that sport participation is universally beneficial for children. In pursuing the goodness entrenched within junior Australian football however, some children were forced to participate by parents who were motivated by the belief that children would gain a range of developmental benefits. This is a contentious finding as it may encourage parents to use inappropriate measures to coerce sport participation, which is unlikely to sustain children's long-term involvement. They may also coerce participation given that children's engagement in sport is now a baseline measure for good parenting in broader society and culture (Coakley, 2006). Consequently, and despite the socially constructed goodness associated with junior Australian football, pressuring children into sport may evoke counterproductive outcomes as negative early sport experiences have been shown to strongly predict discontinuation in sport and physical activity into adulthood (Thompson et al., 2003). Nonetheless, the current study has found that not all children are free from pressure to participate in sport. In this way, it is arguable that parents contribute to the socially constructed meaning of junior Australian football as a critical vehicle for children's holistic development by maintaining the perception that sport engenders an inherent 'goodness'. In a contemporary society, in which the importance of health cannot be underestimated, the meaning of children's sport participation appears to extend beyond the philosophical tenets of fun and enjoyment, comprising a legitimate and necessary developmental experience in the eyes of parents.

A game for parents

The meaning of junior Australian football participation also included the idea that children's sport can be equally beneficial for parents, thus, the theme 'a game for

parents'. The current study found that while parents did not 'hijack' the experience, they did take advantage of the opportunities that provided them social and financial gain. For example, many parents viewed junior Australian football as an opportune time to socialise with other parents in the community. While weekend sport comprised an important part of children's lives, it was also an integral part of parents' and coaches' weekly routines, providing an opportunity to disengage from what they claimed to be 'the laborious nature of work' and engage in social interactions with other parents and children. This is consistent with previous research, which has identified the importance upon which parents place interacting with other parents and members of the local community through children's sport (Wiersma & Fifer, 2008).

Through social interactions, opportunities also emerged for some parents to buy and sell business and trade with the local community, further reinforcing the notion that children's sport is 'a game for parents'. Participants often discussed the opportune nature of children's sport in expanding business opportunities and meeting potential clients. While they did not actively pursue such opportunities, they emerged from attending games and inadvertently meeting other sport-parents. In this way, junior Australian football not only assumes an important social meaning for parents, but also significant potential for financial gain.

The objective of understanding the meaning attached to junior Australian football participation was premised on the belief it may assist sport providers and policy makers in enhancing the quality of children's sport and sport-parenting. From a socio-cultural perspective, it is clear that the socially constructed meaning of

participation in junior Australian football is complex and that parents are essential in their social construction and perpetuation.

Specifically, the current study shows that junior Australian football engenders multiple meanings. The notion of winning is significant because it progresses the conceptual view that winning is score-dependent. Rather, winning assumes heightened meaning in relation to the socially constructed premiership window and in the context of winning individual contests during games. Similarly, the meaning of early specialisation is critical, because it challenges the conceptual and philosophical underpinnings of children's sport. While children were also pivotal in constructing the notion of early specialisation, parents assumed an inadvertent supporting role, thus reinforcing their central status in the junior sport experience. Furthermore, parents were critical to maintaining the belief that junior Australian football possesses an inherent goodness that children could gain from participation. Such meaning is paradoxically significant. On the one hand, it reinforces the belief that sport is holistically health-enhancing. On the other hand however, the broad-ranging benefits may encourage inappropriate parental behaviours that pressure children's involvement. This notion alone is of vital importance for sport providers and health promotion professionals who perceive children's sport as an essential vehicle for encouraging physical activity. Finally, the potential benefits of children's sport extend to parents and coaches, reiterating the view that the meaning of children's sport can be considered a game for parents. Indeed, the evidence from this study suggests that there is considerable potential for parents to extract immense social and financial gain from children's participation in junior Australian football.

It is through these findings that the meaning of junior Australian football participation can be understood. The primary advantage of understanding the complex meaning given to children's sport is that sport providers and policy makers may be better prepared to enhance the quality of children's sport and sport-parenting. In this way, parents, children and coaches alike may benefit from a rich, inclusive and socially appropriate sport experience. However, it is also important to appreciate how parents contribute to the social construction of multiple meanings attached to children's sport – meanings that may not only provide an explanation for certain behaviours and attitudes that emerge within the sport context, but also serve to sustain particular discourses throughout the overall sport experience.

Research objective 3: understand how parental behaviours are developed, maintained and perpetuated in the junior Australian football experience.

Previous studies (for example, Goldstein & Iso-Ahola, 2008) have taken a more psychological perspective toward viewing the nature of parental behaviour in children's sport. However, such an assessment does not consider the social and cultural dimensions that may also play a role in shaping behaviours and attitudes that emerge in and through children's sport. The current research produced considerable evidence to suggest that the influence of history, culture and broader society is central to developing, maintaining and perpetuating parental behaviour in the junior Australian football experience. This was most evident in the way that parents promoted participation, contributed to distinguishing acceptable parent and coach behaviours, and in the social construction of a rewards culture.

Promoting participation

In moving beyond the previously discussed meaning of participation in junior Australian football, a broader health discourse underlined the ways in which parents promoted children's introduction to sport. Indeed, most children were self-motivated and therefore required little encouragement from parents. Others, however, experienced a range of potentially negative, coercive parental behaviours, which were rationalised from a health perspective. Parents readily reminded children about the physical benefits of playing sport as well as the social (i.e., establishing new friends) and psychological (i.e., gaining confidence) advantages that could be gained from sustained involvement. This knowledge was subsequently used as a form of intellectual capital to convince children to initiate and maintain their involvement. Yet for some parents, more forceful behaviours were used to promote children's participation. Interestingly however, nuances of coercive parental behaviour were not always negatively perceived. Central to this perspective were children who, at a basic level, understood the relationship between sport participation and general health and therefore recognised that forceful parental behaviours were underpinned by a broader health-related motive. Despite some suggestions that parents may lack a holistic understanding of the benefits of sport participation (Velardo et al., 2010), the current study found that parents possessed a solid understanding of the potential benefits associated with sport involvement, and used this knowledge to coerce initial and continued engagement in junior Australian football. Hamilton and White (2010) also found that parents recognise a wide suite of positive outcomes from sport beyond merely the physical benefits, including general health, improved wellbeing and improved social life.

This finding is significant because it challenges the conceptual view that forceful and pressuring parental behaviours epitomise negative parental influence in children's sport. Hellstedt (1988) has long held concerns that forceful and pressuring parental behaviours are detrimental to children's enjoyment and continuation in sport. Research has since provided support for Hellstedt's claims. For example, Anderson et al. (2003) found that as parental pressure increases, children's enjoyment decreases, while a more recent study has similarly found that parental pressure can provoke high levels of competitive anxiety among children (Bois, Lalanne, & Delforge, 2009), reinforcing the view that forceful and pressuring parental behaviours do not positively contribute to children's sport experience. The current findings, however, suggest that orientations of forceful and pressuring parental behaviours are somewhat socially acceptable if they are underpinned by a health-related motive.

The second way that parents promoted sport participation was by demonstrating substantial sacrifice to enable participation. The major form of parental sacrifice in the broader literature concerns the financial costs associated with children's sport. Merkel (2013) noted that vacations, savings and normal family structure are often sacrificed in order to support children's sport. Research has also indicated that parents have refinanced their homes to support children involved in exclusive sport programs (Harwood & Knight, 2009). However, the current study found that while financial sacrifices were evident, the most common form of sacrifice surrounded time commitments such as travel and canteen duty, which impacted family routines, work schedules and financial decisions in the domestic setting. This supports previous studies that have identified a range of social consequences as a result of the time demands of children's sport (Kirk et al., 1997b; Wiersma & Fifer, 2008).

Importantly however, children were found to also sacrifice time and money to promote their own participation in junior Australian football. Many children sacrificed time in order to earn money that could then be used to acquire expensive sporting apparel such as compression garments, contesting the notion that sacrifice is significant to only parents in the context of children's sport.

Again, the health discourse may play a role in encouraging parents and children to commit high amounts of time to sport. Without these sacrifices, it is arguable that the quality of sport experience is reduced, which may have long-term consequences for children. However, it is also arguable that parents carry the time and financial sacrifices that enable sport participation because 'good' parenting practices according to broader society revolve around the need to account for children's actions and development (Coakley, 2006). Sport therefore provides a legitimate vehicle for parents to promote children's physical activity while also meeting their social responsibilities as parents (Trussell & Shaw, 2012).

The contemporary coach and the contemporary parent

One of the significant findings from the current research concerned the distinction between socially acceptable parental behaviours as a sport-parent and as a sport coach. This not only influenced the overall sport experience for children, but the way in which parents were perceived through various roles. For example, parents were mindful of how children perceived their behaviour, while sport coaches were more concerned about how other parents would perceive them, particularly in terms of being a 'fair' coach. Coaches employed numerous strategies to enhance the way that they were perceived by adopting a strict rotation policy to ensure equal playing time, evenly distributing post-game encouragement awards throughout the course of the

season, and employing a 'tough' approach toward coaching their own child to avoid perceived favouritism. The latter is paradoxically significant given that being unfair to their own child was crucial to being perceived as a fair coach in the eyes of other parents. While parents were condemned for engaging in highly critical behaviours toward children, coaches were afforded greater autonomy where their own child was concerned. In this way, under the guise of coaching, tiers of negative parental influence are somewhat socially and culturally acceptable in junior Australian football in the pursuit of being perceived as a 'fair' coach. According to previous research, most concerns with coaches in children's sport surround an over-emphasis on winning (Hastie, 1991) and the encouragement of cheating behaviour (Shields et al., 2005). However, these findings suggest that parents can exert a negative influence toward their own children via the contemporary coaching role.

One of the major distinctions between coaches and the contemporary sport-parent also surrounded the construction of socially appropriate and inappropriate behaviour toward umpires and officials. While coaches were negatively perceived if they exhibited behaviours such as swearing, derogatory comments and general abuse toward umpires, parents were afforded some leniency in this regard. While participants held a 'zero tolerance' view around aggressive behaviour, nuances of negative parental influence toward umpires were not always considered problematic. As one participant claimed, it 'is forgotten in 10 seconds.' This highlights an inconsistency in the way that parental behaviours are socially constructed in children's sport. This not only has the short term potential to impact children's enjoyment, but in the longer term, may continue to reinforce the notion that nuanced negative parental influence, though infrequent, is a socially constructed norm in children's sport. Consequently, it may be important to challenge the social and

cultural practices in broader society and culture that perpetuate inconsistencies in parental behaviour.

The social construction of a rewards culture

The literature suggests that parents often provide children with extrinsic rewards in the form of money, confectionary and video games to ‘incentivise’ participation (Fraser-Thomas & Côté, 2009; Keegan et al., 2009). Although this form of parental influence is founded on the premise that children are motivated by the possibility of attaining extrinsic rewards (McCarthy & Jones, 2007), research has previously suggested that coercive behaviours are not an effective strategy for promoting long term sport involvement (Anderson, Lorenz, & Pease, 1986). More recently, Keegan et al. (2009) concluded that the provision of extrinsic rewards and added financial incentives often resulted in children suffering from increasing pressure to perform.

In the current study, fast foods were used as a form of performance reward, but also as a generic reward for children’s participation in sport. In this way, fast foods comprised part of a broader rewards culture in the junior Australian football experience. The rewards culture was reinforced by coaches in distributing best player and encouragement awards in the post-game setting, which usually comprised of fast-food vouchers. However, the rewards culture was also reinforced by parental attitudes and behaviours that permitted children to binge on junk food in return for participating in weekend sport. While this contradicts the ideology that sport is holistically health-enhancing, the rewards culture demonstrates another conduit through which parents influence the junior Australian football experience, and highlights an understudied, yet significant, discourse in the sport-parenting literature that warrants further attention.

Money was also a prominent part of the rewards culture. Parents regularly provided children money, which enabled them to make their own food-related decisions in the post-game setting. However, money was also used as a form of extrinsic reward by some parents to provide an incentive to perform well. Yet unlike previous research (Fraser-Thomas & Côté, 2009), the nature of financial incentives in junior Australian football did not appear to place pressure on children's performance, as it was socially constructed as a fun 'bonus' of participation rather than an extrinsic source of pressure. Some children received money if they kicked a goal, while others received money if they attained a high number of possessions. There were some concerns that monetary incentives may teach children selfish game play, yet many participants perceived money as a particularly important incentive for children with low playing ability to encourage continuation. Nonetheless, money reflected a broader rewards culture in junior Australian football, corroborating previous research in swimming (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2008), rugby, soccer, hockey and netball (McCarthy & Jones, 2007).

Research objective 4: identify key issues and challenges currently pervading the junior Australian football experience.

The significance and effectiveness of sport policy

A range of salient issues emerged from the current study in relation to sport policy. Despite the numerous examples of positive parental involvement in children's sport, and the perception that parental behaviour had improved dramatically over recent seasons, there were still instances of abuse, aggression, and intimidation. This highlights an important notion that sport policy is insufficient to guarantee behaviours that positively influence the junior sport experience. Holt et al. (2008)

argued that it is important to ‘not only consider why policies are created, but how they are communicated and received’ (p. 679). The current study suggests that society and culture comprise a fundamental barrier to the perceived significance and effectiveness of sport policy, and are therefore central to the construction and maintenance of behaviours that emerge in children’s sport. For example, Malina (2009) voiced concerns around the influence of spectator behaviours at the elite level, which can ‘trickle down’ to the youth sport context. Through the media, elite level sports such as Australian football are often represented by images of violence, high levels of verbal abuse and a ‘win at all cost’ culture (Light & Pickford, 2004). In this way, the media offers merely one example of how broader society and culture contributes to the social construction of sport related behaviours, and thus, provides a scope for understanding how particular parental behaviours and attitudes emerge in the youth sport context. This was evident among participants who claimed that poor parental behaviour in youth sport, whilst undesirable, was a ‘normal part of human nature’: ‘it happens in every sport.’ Subsequently, sport policies such as the code of behaviour may have a limited impact in curbing negative parental behaviour in junior Australian football, given that traditional sporting practices such as verbal abuse are deeply-rooted and commonly practiced at the elite level of sport and, therefore, maintained in broader society and culture. However, it is these socially constructed behaviours that assume different meaning in children’s sport, highlighting the socio-cultural barrier that undermines the effectiveness of sport policy in children’s sport.

The current findings also suggest that the existing scope of sport policy is limited. At present, sport policies consist of ‘during competition’ behavioural guidelines and overlook the need to provide guidelines for parental influence in the pre- and post-game setting. The current study suggests that parents can be an influential factor

before and after competition. This may consequently encourage policy makers to consider broadening the scope of sport policy in pursuit of improving the nature of children's sport to extend beyond the 'siren-to-siren' experience. Given that the nature of parental involvement varies before, during and after competition, it may be appropriate to develop policy guidelines that are specific to the pre-, during, and post-game settings to encourage only parental behaviours that positively contribute to the overall sport experience. This perspective reinforces the argument that a single set of rules may not be appropriate to govern parental behaviour (Knight et al., 2011).

Club culture

One of the overarching challenges for children's sport includes providing a safe sport environment. The findings indicate that the social landscape of junior Australian football can be problematic as a result of alcohol consumption and illicit substance misuse in close proximity to the playing environment. While not all clubs were perceived to engender a poor club culture, parents played an important role in the way that club culture was socially constructed. Most concerning was that some parents were perceived to perpetuate a poor club culture by not only engaging in behaviours that normalised alcohol in the community sport setting, but also by promoting underage drinking by purchasing alcohol for children. While the short-term implications are obvious, this is especially concerning as children may learn to appreciate unhealthy lifestyle behaviours in conjunction with sport, undermining the potential of the sport for health ideology. It is also concerning because it highlights yet another conduit through which parents can negatively impact the junior Australian football experience. Even indirectly, parents who engage in these lifestyle

behaviours arguably contribute to the construction of an alcohol-oriented sport culture.

It is also problematic because there are a number of factors that reinforce the culture of alcohol in the junior Australian football setting. Drummond et al. (2013) noted that nearly all community Australian football clubs are financially strained. Alcohol is a major source of revenue for community sport clubs, making it difficult to enforce restrictions or limit access and availability. In the remote setting, this is substantiated by structural constraints whereby the junior Australian football competition precedes the senior adult competition. This places children's sport within an adult context, in which the consumption of alcohol is embedded in Australian adult society and culture. In this way, the structural environment plays a role in maintaining the presence of alcohol in the sport setting. This not only demonstrates another potential aspect of negative parental influence, it contributes to the social construction of a poor club culture. Consequently, prospective families may be deterred from trying junior Australian football as a preferred sport choice during childhood. This poses a major challenge for sport providers and policy makers because it not only implicates current participants, but also the next generation of potential participants and their families.

Coaches and parents

Kirk and MacPhail (2003) stated that coaches are uniquely positioned at the sharp end of sport because they interact directly with children, parents, club officials, and with opposition coaches. In this role, coaches readily experience satisfaction from being involved with children's development (Drummond, et al., 2013; Kirk & MacPhail, 2003). Research also indicates that coaches constantly face challenges

dealing with negative parents (Weiss & Fretwell, 2005; Wiersma & Sherman, 2005). The current study concurred, demonstrating that nearly all coaches enjoyed seeing children improve their skills, but experienced the persistent challenge of dealing with frustrated parents, leading to tension between parents and coaches. Although the incidents of tension between parents and coaches were not frequent, the issues that did emerge were highly visible, confirming Elliott and Drummond's (2013) argument that most issues between parents and coaches transpire through face-to-face interactions. Issues commonly revolved around the provision of equal playing time and coaching disciplinary practices towards children at training and during games. Interestingly however, the findings also suggest that social media, to a lesser extent, is used as an alternative platform for parents to criticise coaches and vent their frustrations, thereby exacerbating the perceived tensions between parents and coaches. This is a significant challenge for sport providers and policy makers. In one regard, sport policies on parental behaviour do not consider the influence of parental behaviours that emerge outside the game and on social media. Given that children do not prefer parental behaviours that attract excessive attention during competition (Knight et al., 2011), social media provides a less visible alternative for parents to express their frustration and criticisms toward coaches. However, this remains a problematic aspect of the contemporary coaching role. Furthermore, issues between parents and coaches exhibited in the actual sport setting or on social media may discourage other parents from fulfilling other voluntary duties necessary to enable the competition to function. Attracting and retaining volunteers into roles such as umpiring, time keeping and team managing remains a challenge for sport clubs (Drummond et al., 2013). The consequence of tensions between coaches and parents may conceivably exacerbate this situation, which has the capacity to limit the actual

sport experience for children. Moreover, it is important to note that the contemporary issues facing coaches are not necessarily unique to junior Australian football. In this way, it is imperative to diversify the examination of the relationship between parents and coaches from a socio-cultural perspective in order to understand how these problematic behaviours are maintained in sport culture. One poignant example surrounds children who shake hands with opposition players at the conclusion of a game, as this is not always the case between coaches and parents. This standalone concept may represent a significant cultural discourse, which contributes to how coaches and parents interact in children's sport. Nonetheless, it is clear that parents comprise a central part of the challenging and demanding nature of being a contemporary sport coach.

Research strengths and limitations

Although comprehensive in many respects, the current study is not without its limitations. For example, in attempting to understand the junior Australian football experience, the current study overlooked other potential key stakeholders such as umpires, siblings, and club officials (i.e., the president, football director). Alternative voices may have provided a richer understanding of parental influence in junior Australian football, highlighting a focus area for future research. Nonetheless, the findings from this study emerge from a large sample comprising of the most intimately involved participants in the junior sport experience; that is, parents, children and coaches. Previous studies have primarily investigated sport-parenting from children's (for example, Fraser-Thomas & Côté, 2009) or parents' (Dorsch et al., 2009) perspectives, but more recently there has been a shift toward researching children and parents together (see Holt, et al., 2011; Wheeler, 2011). The current

investigation goes beyond this by combining the perspectives of coaches, children and parents from three demographically diverse contexts. While it is arguable this study does not give voice to all persons involved in children's sport, the voices of those most involved in junior Australian football were captured within the study design.

Another possible limitation is that the nature of sport-parenting from an Australian perspective may not be entirely represented through the junior Australian football context alone. That is, parental influence in other Australian sport settings such as soccer, netball, swimming and cricket may be distinct from the junior Australian football context, and therefore offer a different perspective to broader discussions around sport-parenting, thus reiterating the need for wider research across different sport contexts (Knight et al., 2011).

Consequently, and consistent with the qualitative research tradition, generalisability does not apply. Despite canvassing a range of voices from various demographic sites, only the principle of naturalistic generalisability can be applied, in that the findings may apply to similar participant cohorts in similar situations. However, junior Australian football is highly affordable and accessible to Australian families and one of the most popular sporting preferences among children (Olds et al., 2009). Therefore, while it is beyond the scope of the study to make explicit claims for generalisability, it is arguable that these findings may provide important insight to other popular, mainstream sporting pursuits involving children.

Given that most participants were male, a final potential limitation surrounds the notion that female voices are not adequately represented in the findings. The recruitment process yielded a high number of male participants ($n=95$) and only a

small number of female participants ($n=7$). Furthermore, the female participants involved in the study were all mothers. In this way, a female voice is absent in interpreting coaches and children's perceptions of parental influence. Consequently, understanding parental influence as a 'collective' aspect of the junior sport experience may require further examination with more deliberate sampling techniques to ensure that female voices are adequately represented. However, it is also arguable that the high number of male participants indeed reflects the typical male-to-female ratio in junior Australian football as it is considered a hyper-masculine contact sport (Hickey, 2008).

An important strength of the study surrounded the social constructionist theoretical framework employed to interpret the findings. Most research in the sport-parenting literature emerges from psychological theory such as achievement-motivation theory and self-determination theory (Goldstein & Iso-Ahola, 2008). While these studies have made significant inroads toward understanding parental behaviour in children's sport, they inherently overlook the socio-cultural imperatives, and therefore apply only to understanding the cognitive aspects of sport-parenting. Such theoretical frameworks are limited in that the implications rarely extend beyond the individual. The current study, however, is distinct in that it employs a sociological lens through which to view the sport-parenting phenomenon, thus providing a broader understanding of how society and culture play a role in reinforcing, maintaining and perpetuating the nature of parental influence in children's sport. In this way, the findings assume relevance for sport clubs, policy makers and sport providers concerned with improving the quality of children's sport by enhancing the positive aspects of sport-parenting that are constructed socially, historically, and linguistically.

Unique to this study was that all 102 participants were currently involved in junior Australian football for 12 or 13 year old children, representing a focused and conceptually significant age range. In contrast, Omli and Wiese-Bjornstal (2011) employed much wider age ranges (7–14 years) to understand parental influence in children's sport. Similarly, Light et al. (2011) investigated the competitive swimming context among children aged 9–12 years, further demonstrating the wide age range commonly employed in children's sport literature. However, it is arguable that a more focused age range may provide a richer understanding, as the participatory experiences are likely to engender similar structural influences. For example, the duration of a junior Australian football match among 7 year old children will vary greatly compared to 14 year old children and the modifications of rules are also likely to vary. The age range within this research allows a deeper insight into the nature of sport-parenting, based on the assumption that the structural elements of the sport experience are somewhat similar. Furthermore, given that sport dropout peaks at 13 years in Australia (Olds et al., 2009), understanding the nature of parental influence in children's sport for 12 and 13 year old children is certainly justified.

A final strength of the study surrounds methodological rigour. Numerous techniques contributed to increasing the trustworthiness of the findings. While expert academic guidance was integrated into this process by means of inter-coder reliability, the participants were also involved in enhancing methodological rigour via member checking, thus shifting the validation process away from the researcher. These strategies complimented the techniques of methodological triangulation (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011) and manual transcription (Poland, 1995), which are also considered acceptable methods for enhancing the reliability and trustworthiness of qualitative data. Furthermore, the collective-case study design enabled an

additional layer of theming to emerge from cross-case examination, thus providing a much stronger overall narrative of sport-parenting in the junior Australian football experience.

Summary

Guided by the objectives of the research, this chapter has comprehensively discussed the key findings in relation to the sport-parenting literature. The literature identified a number of unanswered questions and highlighted aspects of the sport-parenting paradigm that lacked coherence. At the heart of this chapter, such questions are addressed as the findings provide a closer examination of the conduits through which parents can exert a positive and negative influence in the junior Australian football experience. Specifically, this chapter articulated the significance of role modelling and verbal reinforcement as the major aspects of parental involvement in junior Australian football. Within these roles, this chapter has made a distinct contribution to the literature by distinguishing varying forms of verbal reinforcement and role modelling behaviour which can positively and negatively impact children's sport. Furthermore, this chapter has discussed how parents play a vital role in giving junior Australian football participation meaning, including the notions of 'holistic goodness', 'winning', 'early specialisation', and 'a game for parents'. Parents also influenced the junior Australian football experience by contributing to the construction and maintenance of a rewards culture, behaviours that promote participation and socially acceptable coach and parental behaviours. Finally, this chapter explored a range of issues and challenges for junior Australian football including sport policy, club culture and the interactions between parents and coaches. The strengths and limitations of the study were also considered.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Conclusion

Introduction

Throughout this thesis, I have been surprised by the number of people who resonate with issues relating to parents in sport. While my thesis has captured the attention and interest of popular media, including social media, newspapers and radio, it has been everyday conversations that have depicted the significance of my research to so many people. In pursuing this thesis, almost every person I have encountered has a story to share about an incident of poor parental behaviour during their childhood sporting years. Even at international conferences where more scholarly conversations were possible, the anecdotal evidence was significant. Noticeably, nearly all discussions about sport-parenting in which I have been involved have been devoid of any stories of positive parental behaviour. This has been consistent with the Australian (and indeed international) news media's portrayal of parental behaviour in children's sport as largely problematic – a notion that has, until recently, gone unchallenged. While most of these 'everyday' conversations have elicited questions that extend well beyond the scope of the study (i.e., is poor parental behaviour worse in certain sports in Australia?), research relating to sport-parenting is clearly both culturally and academically important. Therefore, the ultimate goal of this research was to provide a basis of evidence relating to parental influence in children's sport in Australia to contextualise the discussion and provide important perspective to a seemingly salient issue. This chapter provides a summary of the main findings from the data analysis by outlining the nature of parental influence in the junior Australian football experience from a social constructionist perspective. Based on the evidence,

this chapter will then discuss some important implications for future research, policy and practice, and provide a concluding summary of the research.

A summary of the main findings

This thesis offers insight into the ways that parents influence the junior Australian football experience. In addressing these objectives, a number of important summary findings shed light on how parents impact children's sport. These include:

- High levels of parental support and encouragement are evident in the pre-game sport setting, evidenced by assisting children with organising uniforms and equipment, providing transport and offering supportive advice and instruction. Importantly, this aspect of parental influence is evident in the off-season, the night before weekend sport and during the final moments leading up to the commencement of formal competition.
- The home setting is a crucial context in which parents positively engage in practice activities that serve as an important introductory sport experiences for children. It also serves as a fundamental site for deliberate play and practice relating to the development of football-specific physical competencies and initial interest and desire to become involved in an organised competition.
- Parents positively impact club culture by engaging in activities within the football club that promote the holistic development of young children. Through some football clubs, parents facilitate programs, personal development sessions and team building

exercises, which provide immense benefit to children's social competence and sense of belonging within the sport community.

- Mothers and fathers are central to children's sport experience. While they fulfil different voluntary and support roles on game day, mothers and fathers equally share responsibility for debriefing, providing transport, and reinforcing the rewards culture. They are also imperative as active role models in the home practice setting, which strongly influences children's desire to initiate and maintain their involvement in junior Australian football.
- Sideline behaviour represents a real concern for children, parents and coaches. Poor sideline behaviour, including swearing and verbal abuse appear particularly problematic toward umpires and toward children and coaches as the competitive season progresses toward its culminating event (finals and end of season carnivals). The root of the problem is linked to broader society and culture, in which the winning discourse has been reinforced and maintained throughout history, and thus remains a chief characteristic of competitive sport, even at the junior level. The findings suggest that aspects of poor parental behaviour have become normalised in the junior Australian football experience.
- Tension between parents and coaches exist and can manifest in public verbal exchanges. Disagreement and criticism toward coaches have also begun to emerge via social media, transposing tensions between parents and coaches beyond the sport setting. The main issues surround the perceived amount of playing time children receive.

- Debriefing in the post-game setting represents a common aspect of negative parental involvement. The provision of constructive criticism, advice and instruction, and general performance feedback demonstrated a high potential for reducing children's enjoyment, confidence and satisfaction of sport participation.
- Parents directly contribute to the promotion of poor dietary behaviours in the post-game setting. While social and environmental factors further reinforce this aspect of the junior Australian football experience, parents convey conflicting health-related messages under the guise of a reward ideology, evidenced by their attitudes and behaviours toward nutrition before and after competitive sport.
- The use of substances, cigarettes and alcohol, and engagement in overt spectator behaviour represent the major socio-cultural issues encountered by many football clubs across remote, regional and metropolitan South Australia. Though not embedded throughout the entire sport experience, parents among others demonstrate poor lifestyle and sport-related behaviours in the sport setting.
- Parents convey confusing messages about the importance of winning and competitive success, evidenced by a contradiction in attitude, body language and spectator behaviour. Parents readily abate the significance of winning by expressing the importance of effort and enjoyment, yet undermine such assertions by demonstrating contrary behaviours. Disapproval with umpiring decisions, the provision of unsolicited advice and instruction during the breaks in play, and a persistent need to debrief children's sport performance are all prominent examples of parental influence which

convey a high regard for individual and team-oriented winning and competitive success.

- Time and financial commitments remain the most difficult forms of parental sacrifices to enable children's involvement in junior Australian football. In particular, time commitments represent the greatest challenge for parents in organising the family for weekend sport, transporting children to training and competition venues, and fulfilling volunteer roles necessary for sport to optimally function.
- A strong aspirational culture exists in junior Australian football for children, coaches and parents. The possibility of playing at the highest level of the Australian Football League (AFL) serves as a strong motivation for children to engage in highly specialised behaviours from a young age. Coaches and parents perpetuate an aspirational culture by harbouring personal ambitions to be involved in the development of a potential AFL player. The role of parents and coaches in the construction and maintenance of an aspirational culture is a generally positive aspect of the junior sport experience. Furthermore, virtually no evidence was found to support the notion that parents vicariously live through their own children's sport involvement.
- Junior Australian football is an inclusive pursuit which not only has the capacity to provide a multitude of positive experiences for children, but also for coaches and parents who are emotionally, financially and socially invested in its existence. However, it can also be an unenjoyable experience for parents and coaches due to tensions with other parents and coaches.

- The meaning of junior Australian football relates to the perception that children will gain, through continued involvement, adaptable life skills that are necessary for beyond the sport setting. It is this optimistic belief which influences certain parental behaviours intended to promote participation (i.e., pressure and coercion) in order to sustain children's sport participation.
- Embedded within the junior Australian football experience are numerous examples of positive parental behaviour in the competition setting. While the antecedents of abuse and criticism are still prevalent, a range of supportive behaviours toward children exist, particularly toward children from opposition teams, comprising a significant and positive aspect of the contemporary sport-parenting role.
- The social and cultural importance of sport policy (i.e., code of behaviour) is not maintained across the competitive season. It assumes a high level of significance in the lead up to the commencement of the season, yet decreases in relevance as the season peaks toward finals. While some clubs are consistent with reinforcing policy throughout the season, most clubs fail to advocate behavioural guidelines beyond the beginning of the season.
- There are very few signs that children do not enjoy the overall junior Australian football experience. High levels of fun and enjoyment are extracted from not only participation in sport, but also from the increased social interactions that are possible through sport.

Recommendations

The following section details a range of important recommendations for policy, research and practice specific to the junior Australian football context. However, given that parental influence is significant to most sports involving children, the following recommendations may also be of interest to a broader audience.

Recommendations for future research

Given that the Australian context is underrepresented in the broader sport-parenting literature, multiple opportunities exist for wider research. For example, the current study did not set out to quantify parental influence in junior Australian football. The use of enumerate instruments such as the Parental Involvement in Sport Questionnaire (PISQ) (Lee & MacLean, 1997) may be useful in obtaining empirical evidence to learn about the prevalence and frequency of sport-related parental involvement in Australia. Similarly, observational instruments such as the Parental Observational Instrument at Sporting Events (POISE) (Kidman et al., 1999) may further progress a quantitative agenda around the nature of parental influence in children's sport. However, such approaches are likely to capture only the competition experience. Parents also play a key role in influencing the pre- and post-game experience, which means that the use of quantitative instruments such as the PISQ and the POISE may require modification to optimise utility and add to the current body of literature.

Another recommendation for future research is to examine a broader cohort. While the current study has given voice to those most intimately involved, a number of perspectives are not represented in the data. Siblings, sport administrators, umpires and children who have dropped out of sport due to negative parental influence may

offer a different insight into discussions of parents in sport, thereby presenting an important consideration for future investigations. Furthermore, while the research purposefully sampled both male and female participants, the sample reflects an unintended overrepresentation of boys and fathers in the data. A possible direction for future research might include a more critical inquiry into the nature of sport-parenting from a domain such as netball, in which young girls and mothers are more likely to be involved. Such an approach may not only illuminate cultural nuances of sport-parenting from a gendered perspective, but may also encourage the use of alternative sociological frameworks to understand the sport-parenting phenomenon (i.e., post-modern feminist theory).

Another prospective area for scholarship is to replicate the study with a younger age group. The transitional period examined in the current study (12–13 years) is significant, but it may be worthwhile reproducing a similar qualitative inquiry with children aged 10 and 11 years, given that nuances of specialisation were found to occur earlier than conceptually prescribed by Côté and Hay (2002). The implications would be significant to not only the body of sport-parenting literature, but also for conceptual frameworks such as the DMSP, which is widely used in children's sport research.

Recommendations for practice

On the basis of the inquiry, parents may benefit from being proactive in discussing how they can best support their involvement with children. By asking children about preferred behaviours and expectations, parents may be better positioned to address behaviours that pose a potentially negative influence, particularly in the post-game setting. Through such discussions, parents may also begin to understand how

children interpret their behaviour and involvement. An extension of this might also include engaging in dialogue with coaches, clubs and sporting organisations, which may help parents obtain greater clarity into how to best optimise their involvement in children's sport. It is also important for parents to learn more about when to adopt certain behaviours in order to be more consistent with their support and encouragement. This is certainly the case with, for example, the notion of verbal reinforcement and the provision of advice.

Coaches often encounter tensions with parents surrounding the provision of equal playing time for children and concerns about their coaching pedagogy. It is therefore recommended that parents in the coaching role embrace all opportunities to communicate their coaching experience, philosophies and developmental goals to parents and children. By establishing a consistent line of communication with parents at training and on game day, coaches may minimise potential issues with parents by listening to their ideas and feedback. More importantly, it may provide coaches an opportunity to explain to parents about their strengths and weaknesses as a coach and what can be reasonably expected from them. It also provides coaches an opportunity to reaffirm the philosophy of junior sport, which may support the way in which they coach children.

It is also recommended that coaches enter dialogue with opposition coaches prior to, and throughout the competitive season to develop a greater consistency in philosophy and address behavioural issues that may be problematic. Convening with other coaches may also provide an important opportunity to discuss strategies and approaches for dealing with parents who are negatively involved in children's sport.

Coaches also need to understand and appreciate the social and cultural significance of being a sport coach. The role assumes great meaning in the lives of children and parents, and indeed in broader society and culture. Completion of relevant coaching courses would not only provide prospective coaches with a greater understanding of the role from a socio-cultural perspective, but would enable them to develop other proficiencies in terms of coaching pedagogy and athlete development. Given that most coaches are parents fulfilling a voluntary role, proactive behaviours toward professional development and accreditation training are fundamental.

Sport providers and organisations need to consider modifying, where possible, the delivery of sport in a way that discourages negative parental influence. For example, by modifying the selection of foods and beverages available in the sport context, sport clubs may encourage parents to promote healthy dietary behaviours in the post-game setting. In partnership with other community groups such as schools and other sporting codes, sport providers may also enhance the junior sport experience by providing healthy development sessions for young athletes. This initiative not only reinforces the sport for health rhetoric, but also encourages parents and children to learn about the many health-related advantages of sustaining their involvement in sport. Furthermore, from a behavioural perspective, sport providers may wish to reconsider the way in which sport policy is disseminated and reinforced. It is recommended that sport policy should be not only introduced at the beginning of the season, but at various stages throughout the season leading up to the culminating event as an educative tool for parents and spectators.

Recommendations for policy

While sport-related policies such as the code of behaviour are important, greater consideration needs to be given to the scope of sport policy. Guidelines refer only to the game-day behaviours and conduct that are necessary during competition. However, it is clear that parents also exert influence prior to, and after the completion of competition. In this way, sport policy makers may need to consider the development of sport policy that promotes the positive involvement of parents across the entire experience, rather than focusing on merely the competitive setting. Furthermore, sport policy makers need to examine the way in which policy is reinforced. A systematic approach may be needed to ensure that parents and spectators not only understand, but also advocate positive sport behaviours throughout the course of the season. Sport policy makers need to consider the way that culminating events assume significant meaning to parents, coaches and children, and may therefore need to develop policy frameworks specific to the finals so as to promote a safe, enjoyable sport experience for all.

Concluding summary

This thesis makes a significant and original contribution to the sport-parenting literature. From a methodological perspective, it progresses the qualitative trend in contemporary sport-parenting research. Most studies emerge from a quantitative orientation and employ observational (Arthur-Banning et al., 2009; Bowker et al., 2009; Kidman et al., 1999) or survey designs (Ede et al., 2012; Wuerth et al., 2004) to examine parental involvement in children's and youth sport. Furthermore, most research surrounding children's motivational and dropout behaviour tends to emerge from a psychological perspective (Côté, 1999; Fraser-Thomas et al., 2008; Wall &

Côté, 2007). More recently however, there has been a growing interest in the use of sociological concepts within a qualitative paradigm to develop a greater understanding of parental involvement in children's sport. Light, Harvey and Memmert (2011) argue that while far less attention has been paid to the socio-cultural context of children's sport, it is nonetheless important to address this imbalance in the literature. To some extent, this view has gained momentum. For example, Walters and colleagues (2012) employed a Foucauldian discourse analysis to explore children's experiences of organised team sports, while Elliott and Drummond (2013) utilised a social constructionist theoretical perspective to explore self-perceived parental involvement in junior Australian football. This thesis progresses this movement, but distinguishes itself from previous sociological studies by capturing the voices of parents, children and coaches within a collective-case study design. In contrast, Walters et al. (2012) considers only children's perspectives, while Elliott and Drummond (2013) consider merely parental perceptions, in relation to parental involvement in sport. In this way, this thesis contributes a broader understanding of parental influence in children's sport.

In addition to the theoretical and methodological uniqueness of this research, the primary contribution of this thesis is that it adds clarity to the notion that parents critically influence children's sport experience. The centrality of parents in children's sport has been recognised by academics for over forty years (Snyder & Spreitzer, 1973). However, there has remained a fundamental lack of clarity in understanding what, for example, constitutes parental support and pressure (Wheeler, 2011). That is, while it is well established that parents can be essentially 'good' and 'bad' influences in children's sport, greater understanding of what this looks like is necessary. This study sheds light on *how* parents impact the entire sport experience

by exploring the embodiment of positive and negative parental influence in the junior Australian football context.

On the basis of the evidence derived from this investigation, parents clearly contribute to a sport experience that engenders both positive and negative consequences for children's enjoyment and participation. Parents exert a significant positive influence in introducing children to sport via the domestic setting, and play a crucial role in enabling subsequent opportunities by making a range of time and financial sacrifices. Parents also have a strong potential for enhancing the quality of the junior sport experience by engaging in pre-game discussions and contributing to the construction of a positive club culture. They also play a supporting role in nurturing an aspirational culture that children enjoy and find motivating. In this way, the vital role of parents in positively shaping children's experiences of junior Australian football should not be overlooked.

Notwithstanding the positive influence of parents, it is also necessary to point out that the junior Australian football experience is not devoid of negative parental influence, which can manifest in various forms. Though infrequent, evidence did emerge relating to the notion of 'ugly parent syndrome' – overt, negative parental behaviours – which tends to peak toward the climax of the season. The incidence of verbal abuse and in one case, physical threats toward children were low, but still comprised a noteworthy aspect of negative parental influence. This is understandably concerning, as one incident can potentially be witnessed by an entire sport community given the public nature of organised sport. However, parents also have a unique capacity to negatively impact the junior Australian football experience beyond merely the competitive behaviours that epitomise verbal abuse and

aggressive behaviour. Some of the more visible examples include the provision of advice and instruction during competition and in the post-game setting via debriefing. Parents also demonstrate a potential negative influence by forcing children's participation and by contributing to the broader construction of a negative football culture. For instance, parents are central to reinforcing a post-game rewards culture in which poor dietary health is encouraged under the guise of a 'reward for effort' ideology. While this is a positive aspect of participation for many children, from a health perspective the encouragement of high-calorie, low nutrition food undermines the premise that sport is conceptually all health-enhancing. Parents also contribute to reinforcing negative club culture by engaging in and/or encouraging poor lifestyle behaviours such as smoking, alcohol consumption and substance misuse. Even the attitudes and behaviours demonstrated toward team and individual success furthers the social and cultural importance of winning in children's sport, which for many is considered the origin of most issues relating to poor parental behaviour. This is evident in the way that parents interact with coaches and other parent-spectators during the competitive season and during finals. In fact from a coaching perspective, the most negative aspect of junior Australian football relates to poor sideline behaviour in which parents demonstrate behaviours that undermine the notions of enjoyment and fun.

While this thesis provides a deeper understanding of parental influence in the context of junior Australian football, it also adds depth toward understanding *how* certain attitudes, behaviours and beliefs emerge in children's sport, and the role of parents in reinforcing such cultural and social constructions. There are clear social and cultural imperatives that shape the construction of children's sport, such as the media, elite level sport and the high cultural significance of health and physical activity in

contemporary society. These influences play a central role in shaping parental attitudes and behaviours toward children's sport, providing a sociological perspective for understanding how parents involve themselves in junior Australian football. In this way, parents are not only influenced by broader social constructions, but also maintain them in and through the context of children's sport. There are clearly many wonderful examples of positive parental influence in the junior Australian football experience. However, the way that sport is socially constructed in broader society also plays a role in normalising and reinforcing certain attitudes and behaviours that are not conducive to a positive junior sport experience. Therefore, to address the negative aspects of parental influence in children's sport, it may be necessary to challenge the deeply rooted values and beliefs that are socially and culturally preserved by broader social practices. In this way, it may be possible to optimise the aspects of parental influence that positively shape children's sport, while discouraging other aspects that serve to limit the participatory experience.

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APPENDIX A

Ethics Approval Report

Flinders University and Southern Adelaide Local Health Network

SOCIAL AND BEHAVIOURAL RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

Research Services Office, Union Building, Flinders University
GPO Box 2100, ADELAIDE SA 5001
Phone: (08) 8201 3116

Email: human.researchethics@flinders.edu.au

FINAL APPROVAL NOTICE

Principal Researcher:	Mr Sam Elliott				
Email:	sam.elliott@flinders.edu.au				
Address:	School of Education				
Project Title:	Parental influence on the junior sport experience: a collective case study				
Project No.:	5460	Final Approval Date:	1 December 2011	Approval Expiry Date:	31 December 2013

The above proposed project has been **approved** on the basis of the information contained in the application, its attachments and the information subsequently provided.

If you have any outstanding permission letters (item D8), that may have been previously requested, please ensure that they are forwarded to the Committee as soon as possible. Additionally, for projects where approval has also been sought from another Human Research Ethics Committee (item G1), please be reminded that a copy of the ethics approval notice will need to be sent to the Committee on receipt.

In accordance with the undertaking you provided in your application for ethics approval for the project, please inform the Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee, giving reasons, if the research project is discontinued before the expected date of completion.

You are also required to report anything which might warrant review of ethical approval of the protocol. Such matters include:

- serious or unexpected adverse effects on participants;
- proposed changes in the protocol (modifications);
- any changes to the research team; and
- unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project.

To modify/amend a previously approved project please either mail or email a completed copy of the Modification Request Form to the Executive Officer, which is available for download from <http://www.flinders.edu.au/research/info-for-researchers/ethics/committees/social-and-behavioural-research-ethics-committee/notification-of-committee-decision.cfm>. Please ensure that any new or amended participant documents are attached to the modification request.

In order to comply with monitoring requirements of the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (March 2007)* an annual progress and/or final report must be submitted. A copy of the pro forma is available from <http://www.flinders.edu.au/research/info-for-researchers/ethics/committees/social-behavioural.cfm>.

Your first report is due on 1 December 2012 or on completion of the project, whichever is the earliest. Please retain this notice for reference when completing annual progress or final reports. If an extension of time is required, please email a request for an extension of time, to a date you specify, to human.researchethics@flinders.edu.au before the expiry date.



Andrea Mather
Executive Officer
Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee
2 December 2011

c.c. A/Prof Murray Drummond, murray.drummond@flinders.edu.au
Mr Shaun Fikault, shaun.fikault@flinders.edu.au
Dr Claire Drummond, claire.drummond@flinders.edu.au

APPENDIX B

Letter to Western Border Junior Football League



Flinders
UNIVERSITY



Professor Murray Drummond, PhD
Professor (Sport, Health and Physical Education)

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CRICOS provider no: 00114A

Letter seeking permission

Dear Western Border Junior Football League,

This letter is to introduce Mr Sam Elliott who is PhD research student in the School of Education at Flinders University. He will produce his student card, which carries a photograph, as proof of identity.

Sam is undertaking research leading to the production of a thesis or other publications on the subject of *Parental influence on the junior sport experience*. His research will attempt to explore, from children's, parents and coaches perspectives, how parents influence children's sporting experiences, with specific focus on the junior Australian football setting. With assistance from the South Australian National Football League and the Glenelg Football Club, this research will make a valuable contribution to the field of parent-sport literature.

This research has been approved by the Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee at Flinders University, and will be supervised by myself, Dr. Shaun Filiault, and Dr. Claire Drummond.

Sam would be most appreciative if the Western Border Junior Football League granted him permission to conduct his research with parents, coaches and children from football clubs affiliated within your league. The research process would involve a series of focus group interviews with parents, coaches and children, and would be completed within a one week period. Sam's project is contingent upon accessing these participants, and is therefore seeking permission from the Western Border Junior Football League to continue his research.

You can be certain that any information provided will be treated in the strictest confidence and that the Western Border Junior Football League and the affiliated football clubs will not be identifiable in the resulting thesis, report or other publications.

To advise Sam of your decision, you can notify him via email sam.elliott@flinders.edu.au, or by telephone on 08 8201 3471. Upon request, Sam would be more than willing to discuss the broader scope of his research to help inform your decision. Any other enquiries you may have concerning this project should be directed to me at the address given above or by telephone on 08 8201 5306, by fax on 08 8201 5387 or by email murray.drummond@flinders.edu.au.

Thank you for your attention and assistance.

Yours sincerely,

Professor Murray Drummond
School of Education
Faculty of Education, Humanities and Law

This research project has been approved by the Flinders University Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee (Project Number 5460). For more information regarding ethical approval of the project the Executive Officer of the Committee can be contacted by telephone on 8201 3116, by fax on 8201 2035 or by email human_researchethics@flinders.edu.au.

APPENDIX C

Letter to Southern Football League



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Professor Murray Drummond, PhD
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CRICOS provider no: 00114A

Letter seeking permission

Dear Southern Football League,

This letter is to introduce Mr Sam Elliott who is PhD research student in the School of Education at Flinders University. He will produce his student card, which carries a photograph, as proof of identity.

Sam is undertaking research leading to the production of a thesis or other publications on the subject of *Parental influence on the junior sport experience*. His research will attempt to explore, from children's, parents and coaches perspectives, how parents influence children's sporting experiences, with specific focus on the junior Australian football setting. With assistance from the South Australian National Football League and the South Adelaide Football Club, this research will make a valuable contribution to the field of parent-sport literature.

This research has been approved by the Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee at Flinders University, and will be supervised by myself, Dr. Shaun Filiault, and Dr. Claire Drummond.

Sam would be most appreciative if the Southern Football League granted him permission to conduct his research with parents, coaches and children of football clubs affiliated within your league. The research process would involve a series of focus group interviews with parents, coaches and children, and would be completed within a one week period. Sam's project is contingent upon accessing these participants, and is therefore seeking permission from the Southern Football League to continue his research.

You can be certain that any information provided will be treated in the strictest confidence and that the Southern Football League and the affiliated football clubs will not be identifiable in the resulting thesis, report or other publications.

To advise Sam of your decision, you can notify him via email sam.elliott@flinders.edu.au, or by telephone on 08 8201 3471. Upon request, Sam would be more than willing to discuss the broader scope of his research to help inform your decision. Any other enquiries you may have concerning this project should be directed to me at the address given above or by telephone on 08 8201 5306, by fax on 08 8201 5387 or by email murray.drummond@flinders.edu.au.

Thank you for your attention and assistance.

Yours sincerely,

Professor Murray Drummond
School of Education
Faculty of Education, Humanities and Law

This research project has been approved by the Flinders University Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee (Project Number 5460). For more information regarding ethical approval of the project the Executive Officer of the Committee can be contacted by telephone on 8201 3116, by fax on 8201 2035 or by email human.researchethics@flinders.edu.au.

APPENDIX D

Letter to Kangaroo Island Football League



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CRICOS provider no. 00114A

Letter seeking permission

Dear **Kangaroo Island Football League**,

This letter is to introduce Mr Sam Elliott who is PhD research student in the School of Education at Flinders University. He will produce his student card, which carries a photograph, as proof of identity.

Sam is undertaking research leading to the production of a thesis or other publications on the subject of *Parental influence on the junior sport experience*. His research will attempt to explore, from children's, parents and coaches perspectives, how parents influence children's sporting experiences, with specific focus on the junior Australian football setting. With assistance from the South Australian National Football League and the South Adelaide Football Club, this research will make a valuable contribution to the field of parent-sport literature.

This research has been approved by the Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee at Flinders University, and will be supervised by myself, Dr. Shaun Filauff, and Dr. Claire Drummond.

Sam would be most appreciative if the **Kangaroo Island Football League** granted him permission to conduct his research with parents, coaches and children from football clubs affiliated within your league. The research process would involve a series of focus group interviews with parents, coaches and children, and would be completed within a one week period. Sam's project is contingent upon accessing these participants, and is therefore seeking permission from the **Kangaroo Island Football League** to continue his research.

You can be certain that any information provided will be treated in the strictest confidence and that the **Kangaroo Island Football League** and the affiliated football clubs will not be identifiable in the resulting thesis, report or other publications.

To advise Sam of your decision, you can notify him via email sam.elliott@flinders.edu.au, or by telephone on 08 8201 3471. Upon request, Sam would be more than willing to discuss the broader scope of his research to help inform your decision. Any other enquiries you may have concerning this project should be directed to me at the address given above or by telephone on 08 8201 5306, by fax on 08 8201 5387 or by email murray.drummond@flinders.edu.au.

Thank you for your attention and assistance.

Yours sincerely,

Professor Murray Drummond
School of Education
Faculty of Education, Humanities and Law

This research project has been approved by the Flinders University Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee (Project Number 5460). For more information regarding ethical approval of the project the Executive Officer of the Committee can be contacted by telephone on 8201 3116, by fax on 8201 2035 or by email human.researchethics@flinders.edu.au.

APPENDIX E

Letter of Interest to Clubs in Western Border Junior Football League



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ORCID iD provider no: 00114A

Letter of Interest

Dear [Name of football club],

This letter is to introduce Mr Sam Elliott who is PhD research student in the School of Education at Flinders University. He will produce his student card, which carries a photograph, as proof of identity.

Sam is undertaking research leading to the production of a thesis or other publications on the subject of *Parental influence on the junior sport experience*. His research will attempt to explore, from children's, parents and coaches perspectives, how parents influence children's sporting experiences, with specific focus on the junior Australian football setting. With assistance from the South Australian National Football League and the Glenelg Football Club, this research will make a valuable contribution to the parent-sportfield of literature.

This research has been approved by the Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee at Flinders University, and will be supervised by myself, Dr. Shaun Filiault, and Dr. Claire Drummond.

Sam would be most appreciative if you would volunteer to assist him in the recruitment of parents, children and coaches for the study. Sam would require your football club, if interested, to make information surrounding the study available to potential participants. Sam would print, organise and post-mail this information to your club for you to place in a public area that parents, coaches and children can access, i.e., the clubrooms. Alternatively, Sam would be more than happy to visit your club and personally distribute the information to potential participants under your guidance.

You can be certain that any information provided will be treated in the strictest confidence and that your football club will not be identifiable in the resulting thesis, report or other publications. You are, of course, entirely free to withdraw your football club's involvement at any stage of the research process without consequence.

If you are interested in assisting Sam with the recruitment of parents, coaches and children, please contact him in the first instance by email sam.elliott@flinders.edu.au or alternatively, by telephone on 08 8201 3471. Any other enquiries you may have concerning this study should be directed to me at the address given above or by telephone on 08 8201 5306, by fax on 08 8201 5387 or by email murray.drummond@flinders.edu.au.

Thank you for your attention and assistance.

Yours sincerely,

Professor Murray Drummond
School of Education
Faculty of Education, Humanities and Law

This research project has been approved by the Flinders University Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee (Project Number 5460). For more information regarding ethical approval of the project the Executive Officers of the Committee can be contacted by telephone on 8201 3116, by fax on 8201 2035 or by email human_researchethics@flinders.edu.au.

APPENDIX F

Letter of Interest to Clubs in Southern and Kangaroo Island Football Leagues



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CRICOS provider no: 00114A

Letter of Interest

Dear **[Name of football club]**,

This letter is to introduce Mr Sam Elliott who is PhD research student in the School of Education at Flinders University. He will produce his student card, which carries a photograph, as proof of identity.

Sam is undertaking research leading to the production of a thesis or other publications on the subject of *Parental influence on the junior sport experience*. His research will attempt to explore, from children's, parents and coaches perspectives, how parents influence children's sporting experiences, with specific focus on the junior Australian football setting. With assistance from the South Australian National Football League and the South Adelaide Football Club, this research will make a valuable contribution to the parent-sport field of literature.

This research has been approved by the Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee at Flinders University, and will be supervised by myself, Dr. Shaun Filiault, and Dr. Claire Drummond.

Sam would be most appreciative if you would volunteer to assist him in the recruitment of parents, children and coaches for the study. Sam would require your football club, if interested, to make information surrounding the study available to potential participants. Sam would print, organise and post-mail this information to your club for you to place in a public area that parents, coaches and children can access, i.e., the clubrooms. Alternatively, Sam would be more than happy to visit your club and personally distribute the information to potential participants under your guidance.

You can be certain that any information provided will be treated in the strictest confidence and that your football club will not be identifiable in the resulting thesis, report or other publications. You are, of course, entirely free to withdraw your football club's involvement at any stage of the research process without consequence.

If you are interested in assisting Sam with the recruitment of parents, coaches and children, please contact him in the first instance by email sam.elliott@flinders.edu.au or alternatively, by telephone on 08 8201 3471. Any other enquiries you may have concerning this study should be directed to me at the address given above or by telephone on 08 8201 5306, by fax on 08 8201 5387 or by email murray.drummond@flinders.edu.au.

Thank you for your attention and assistance.

Yours sincerely,

Professor Murray Drummond
School of Education
Faculty of Education, Humanities and Law

This research project has been approved by the Flinders University Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee (Project Number 5460). For more information regarding ethical approval of the project the Executive Officer of the Committee can be contacted by telephone on 8201 3116, by fax on 8201 2635 or by email human.researchethics@flinders.edu.au.

APPENDIX G

Letter of Introduction for Parents and Coaches, Western Border Football League



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CRICOS provider no: 00114A

Letter of Introduction

Dear [parent or coach],

This letter is to introduce Mr Sam Elliott who is PhD research student in the School of Education at Flinders University. He will produce his student card, which carries a photograph, as proof of identity.

Sam is undertaking research leading to the production of a thesis or other publications on the subject of *Parental influence on the junior sport experience*. His research will attempt to explore, from children's, parents and coaches perspectives, how parents influence children's sport experience, with specific focus on the junior Australian football setting. With assistance from the South Australian National Football League and the Glenelg Football Club, this research project will make a valuable contribution to the research field of parent-sport literature.

Sam would be most appreciative if you would volunteer to assist in this project, by participating in a focus group, which discusses certain aspects around this topic. No more than one hour on one occasion would be required. Up to four additional participants will also be part of the focus group discussion.

You can be certain that any information provided will be treated in the strictest confidence and none of the participants will be individually identifiable in the resulting thesis, report or other publications. You are, of course, entirely free to discontinue your participation at any time of the focus group or refrain from contributing to any part of the ensuing discussion. Participants will verbally agree to maintain the anonymity of other participants and confidentiality of the discussion.

Sam intends to make an audio recording of the interview; he will seek your consent, on the attached form, to record the interview, to use the recording or a transcription in preparing the thesis, report or other publications, on condition that your name or identity is not revealed.

Any enquiries you may have concerning this project should be directed to me at the address given above or by telephone on 08 8201 5306, by fax on 08 8201 5387 or by email murray.drummond@flinders.edu.au. Alternatively, if you wish to participate in the study, please contact Sam directly (details overleaf).

Thank you for your attention and assistance.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. Drummond'.

Professor Murray Drummond
School of Education
Faculty of Education, Humanities and Law

This research project has been approved by the Flinders University Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee (Project Number 5460). For more information regarding ethical approval of the project the Executive Officer of the Committee can be contacted by telephone on 8201 3116, by fax on 8201 2035 or by email human.researchethics@flinders.edu.au.



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Professor Murray Drummond, **Project Supervisor**

: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX H

Letter of Introduction for Children, Western Border Football League



Professor Murray Drummond, PhD
Professor (Sport, Health and Physical Education)

Faculty of Education, Humanities and Law
Flinders University

GPO Box 2100
Adelaide SA 5001

Tel: 8201 5306
Fax: 8201 5387

murray.drummond@flinders.edu.au

www.flinders.edu.au

CRICOS provider no: 00114A

Letter of Introduction for children

Dear [Name of parent/guardian and/or child],

This letter is to introduce Mr Sam Elliott who is PhD research student in the School of Education at Flinders University. He will produce his student card, which carries a photograph, as proof of identity.

Sam is undertaking research leading to the production of a thesis or other publications on the subject of *Parental influence on the junior sport experience*. His research will attempt to explore, from children's, parents and coaches perspectives, how parents influence children's sport experience, with specific focus on the junior Australian football setting. With assistance from the South Australian National Football League and the Glenelg Football Club, this research project will make a valuable contribution to the research field of parent-sport literature.

Sam would be most appreciative if you could assist by agreeing for [Name of child], aged [age], to participate in one focus group interview with up to four other children of similar age. The focus group would take less than one hour. I should also point out that participation is entirely voluntary. [Name of child] is able to freely withdraw from the study at any time without consequence. [Name of child] can, at any time, choose not to answer any questions or to stop the interview.

If you, [Name of parent], and [Name of child] agree, Sam intends to make an audio recording of the interview; he will seek your consent, on the attached form, to record the interview, to use the recording or a transcription in preparing the thesis, report or other publications, on condition that your name or identity is not revealed.

You can be certain that any information provided will be treated in the strictest confidence and none of the participants will be individually identifiable in the resulting thesis, report or other publications. Participants will verbally agree to maintain the anonymity of other participants and confidentiality of the discussion. For your convenience, an information sheet is also attached which provides more details around participation in the study.

Any enquiries you may have concerning this project should be directed to me at the address given above or by telephone on 08 8201 5306, by fax on 08 8201 5387 or by email murray.drummond@flinders.edu.au. Alternatively, if you wish to participate in the study, please contact Sam directly (details overleaf).

Thank you for your attention and assistance.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. Drummond'.

Professor Murray Drummond
School of Education
Faculty of Education, Humanities and Law

This research project has been approved by the Flinders University Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee (Project Number 5460). For more information regarding ethical approval of the project the Executive Officer of the Committee can be contacted by telephone on 8201 3116, by fax on 8201 2035 or by email human.researchethics@flinders.edu.au.



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derstands what is
involved and freely consents to participation.

Researcher's name: Sam Elliott

Researcher's signature: _____ **Date:** _____

APPENDIX I

Letter of Introduction for Parents and Coaches, Southern and Kangaroo Island Football Leagues



Professor Murray Drummond, PhD
Professor (Sport, Health and Physical Education)

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CRICOS provider no: 00114A

Letter of Introduction

Dear [parent or coach],

This letter is to introduce Mr Sam Elliott who is PhD research student in the School of Education at Flinders University. He will produce his student card, which carries a photograph, as proof of identity.

Sam is undertaking research leading to the production of a thesis or other publications on the subject of *Parental influence on the junior sport experience*. His research will attempt to explore, from children's, parents and coaches perspectives, how parents influence children's sport experience, with specific focus on the junior Australian football setting. With assistance from the South Australian National Football League and the South Adelaide Football Club, this research project will make a valuable contribution to the research field of parent-sport literature.

Sam would be most appreciative if you would volunteer to assist in this project, by participating in a focus group, which discusses certain aspects around this topic. No more than one hour on one occasion would be required. Up to four additional participants will also be part of the focus group discussion.

You can be certain that any information provided will be treated in the strictest confidence and none of the participants will be individually identifiable in the resulting thesis, report or other publications. You are, of course, entirely free to discontinue your participation at any time of the focus group or refrain from contributing to any part of the ensuing discussion. Participants will verbally agree to maintain the anonymity of other participants and confidentiality of the discussion.

Sam intends to make an audio recording of the interview; he will seek your consent, on the attached form, to record the interview, to use the recording or a transcription in preparing the thesis, report or other publications, on condition that your name or identity is not revealed.

Any enquiries you may have concerning this project should be directed to me at the address given above or by telephone on 08 8201 5306, by fax on 08 8201 5387 or by email murray.drummond@flinders.edu.au. Alternatively, if you wish to participate in the study, please contact Sam directly (details overleaf).

Thank you for your attention and assistance.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. Drummond'.

Professor Murray Drummond
School of Education
Faculty of Education, Humanities and Law

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: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX J

Letter of Introduction for Children, Southern and Kangaroo Island Football Leagues



Flinders
UNIVERSITY



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Professor (Sport, Health and Physical Education)

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CRICOS provider no: 00114A

Letter of Introduction for children

Dear [Name of parent/guardian and child],

This letter is to introduce Mr Sam Elliott who is PhD research student in the School of Education at Flinders University. He will produce his student card, which carries a photograph, as proof of identity.

Sam is undertaking research leading to the production of a thesis or other publications on the subject of *Parental influence on the junior sport experience*. His research will attempt to explore, from children's, parents and coaches perspectives, how parents influence children's sport experience, with specific focus on the junior Australian football setting. With assistance from the South Australian National Football League and the South Adelaide Football Club, this research project will make a valuable contribution to the research field of parent-sport literature.

Sam would be most appreciative if you could assist by agreeing for [Name of child], aged [age], to participate in one focus group interview with up to four other children of similar age. The focus group would take less than one hour. I should also point out that participation is entirely voluntary. [Name of child] is able to freely withdraw from the study at any time without consequence. [Name of child] can, at any time, choose not to answer any questions or to stop the interview.

If you, [Name of parent], and [Name of child] agree, Sam intends to make an audio recording of the interview; he will seek your consent, on the attached form, to record the interview, to use the recording or a transcription in preparing the thesis, report or other publications, on condition that your name or identity is not revealed.

You can be certain that any information provided will be treated in the strictest confidence and none of the participants will be individually identifiable in the resulting thesis, report or other publications. Participants will verbally agree to maintain the anonymity of other participants and confidentiality of the discussion. For your convenience, an information sheet is also attached which provides more details around participation in the study.

Any enquiries you may have concerning this project should be directed to me at the address given above or by telephone on 08 8201 5306, by fax on 08 8201 5387 or by email murray.drummond@flinders.edu.au. Alternatively, if you wish to participate in the study, please contact Sam directly (details overleaf).

Thank you for your attention and assistance.

Yours sincerely,

Professor Murray Drummond
School of Education
Faculty of Education, Humanities and Law

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derstands what is
involved and freely consents to participation.

Researcher's name: Sam Elliott

Researcher's signature: _____ **Date:** _____

APPENDIX K

Information Sheet for Participants from Western Border Football League



Flinders
UNIVERSITY



Professor Murray Drummond, PhD
Professor (Sport, Health and Physical Education)

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CRICOS provider no: 00114A

Information sheet

My name is Sam Elliott and I am a PhD research student within the School of Education at Flinders University. This information sheet is intended to help you make an informed decision when deciding to participate in this study. This research surrounds junior Australian football and the influential role of parents within the experience. A unique aspect of the research is that it provides a voice for parents, coaches and children, across a range of remote, regional and metropolitan areas in South Australia. This is important because there is currently a relatively limited body of knowledge and understanding around the junior sport experience from an Australian context. Additional information below is provided to help you understand the broader scope of the inquiry and serve to assist your decision to participate in the research.



What is this project?

It's a study which explores how parents influence the junior sport experience. It specifically focuses on how parental influence is experienced and perceived in junior Australian football.

What is my role in the research, if I wish to participate?

If you are interested in participating, you would be invited attend a once-only small group discussion with similar participants. For example, a child participant would be invited to participate in a focus group discussion with other children; a coach participant would be invited to participate in a focus group discussion with other coaches; a parent participant would be invited to participate in a focus group discussion with other parents. Your role would be to talk about aspects relating to junior Australian football and the role of parents within this setting.

What happens if I consent to participation, but then change my mind?

All participants have the right to withdraw at any stage prior to, or during the focus group discussion. While all recorded data can be used in the resulting thesis and/or publications, your participation is entirely voluntary and you can withdraw from, or not answer questions in the focus group. In summary, you decide how much you want to participate.

How will the research be monitored?

The research will be monitored in the first instance by the principal researcher (details overleaf) in conjunction with project supervisor Professor Murray Drummond (details overleaf), the South Australian National Football League [SANFL] and the Glenelg Football Club.

Are there any other invested organisations or persons of interest that should be declared?

No other sponsors, institutions or organisations are involved, and no persons other than the researcher will be involved in the data collection process.

Do we get re-imbursment for participation?

As this study requires voluntary participation, no financial re-imbursment will be made to participants.

What about my privacy and confidentiality?

The privacy and confidentiality of all participants is assured throughout the entire research process. A verbal agreement will be made to avoid using names or real identities before focus groups commence as a step to ensure privacy and anonymity. In the results, discussions and final components of the study, all privacy rights will be upheld to ensure confidentiality. Only the researcher will have access to the recorded data and is responsible for the strictest use of that data for only the purpose of the study. The data will be stored in a de-identifiable format, and stored securely in a locked cabinet within the principal researcher's locked office. Your consent forms will be handled by only the researcher, thereby safeguarding your names and signatures of consent. The consent forms will also be stored in a locked cabinet within the principal researcher's secure office space.

Tell me more about how the results will be used?

The thesis is a seventy to one-hundred thousand word document that highlights the key findings that emerge from the focus group discussions. Participants can view and comment on the accuracy of the data before results are produced. If a publication opportunity presents itself that requires the use of some findings from the research, such data would be accurately used without editing and /or dissemination, whilst maintaining all privacy rights.

How will this benefit the wider community?

This research will be one of the first projects in Australia to explore parental influence in the junior sport experience, and also one of the first to explore the socio-cultural aspects of junior Australian football. This study may benefit the wider community by increasing awareness of parental influence in junior Australian football, and may also serve to inform current junior sport policy. Sport providers, policy makers, coaches, educators and parents may also be better positioned to enhance the positive aspects of sport involvement that promote continuation across the lifespan.

Are there any potential risks to participants?

In the very unlikely event that a parent, coach or child is psychologically or emotionally affected from the focus group discussion, a range of support and counselling services information will be provided to each participant before the focus groups commence. While every endeavour is made to ensure that all information provided is treated with the strictest confidence, disclosure of information related to illegal activities (i.e. child abuse) will be reported.

Anything else to consider?

Locations for the focus groups will be most likely held at the designated football clubrooms. However, the exact time, date, and location will be determined once sufficient numbers are achieved. This research provides a great opportunity for coaches, parents and children to discuss all things to do with junior Australian football, with an emphasis on parental influence on the overall experience.

If I am interested, and want to participate, what do I do?

If you want to participate, please read and sign the consent form overleaf, and contact myself (Sam) to register your interest. For children who wish to participate, you will need to obtain parental consent in addition to your own signature of consent before you can participate in the study. For parents and coaches (over 18 years of age), you will need to read and sign the consent form overleaf. If you have any other questions, feel free to contact myself (Sam) in the first instance, or the project supervisor.

Contact details?

Mr Sam Elliott, Principal Researcher	Phone: (08) 8201 3471 Mobile: 0419 832 373	Email: sam.elliott@flinders.edu.au
Professor Murray Drummond, Project Supervisor	Phone: (08) 8201 5306	Email: murray.drummond@flinders.edu.au

This research project has been approved by the Flinders University Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee (Project Number 5460). For more information regarding ethical approval of the project the Executive Officer of the Committee can be contacted by telephone on 8201 3116, by fax on 8201 2035 or by email human.researchethics@flinders.edu.au.

APPENDIX L

Information Sheet for Participants from Southern and Kangaroo Island Football Leagues



Flinders
UNIVERSITY



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Professor (Sport, Health and Physical Education)

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CRICOS provider no: 00114A

Information sheet

My name is Sam Elliott and I am a PhD research student within the School of Education at Flinders University. This information sheet is intended to help you make an informed decision when deciding to participate in this study. This research surrounds junior Australian football and the influential role of parents within the experience. A unique aspect of the research is that it provides a voice for parents, coaches and children, across a range of remote, regional and metropolitan areas in South Australia. This is important because there is currently a relatively limited body of knowledge and understanding around the junior sport experience from an Australian context. Additional information below is provided to help you understand the broader scope of the inquiry and serve to assist your decision to participate in the research.



What is this project?

It's a study which explores how parents influence the junior sport experience. It specifically focuses on how parental influence is experienced and perceived in junior Australian football.

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If you are interested in participating, you would be invited attend a once-only small group discussion with similar participants. For example, a child participant would be invited to participate in a focus group discussion with other children; a coach participant would be invited to participate in a focus group discussion with other coaches; a parent participant would be invited to participate in a focus group discussion with other parents. Your role would be to talk about aspects relating to junior Australian football and the role of parents within this setting.

What happens if I consent to participation, but then change my mind?

All participants have the right to withdraw at any stage prior to, or during the focus group discussion. While all recorded data can be used in the resulting thesis and/or publications, your participation is entirely voluntary and you can withdraw from, or not answer questions in the focus group. In summary, you decide how much you want to participate.

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Are there any potential risks to participants?

In the very unlikely event that a parent, coach or child is psychologically or emotionally affected from the focus group discussion, a range of support and counselling services information will be provided to each participant before the focus groups commence. While every endeavour is made to ensure that all information provided is treated with the strictest confidence, disclosure of information related to illegal activities (i.e. child abuse) will be reported.

Anything else to consider?

Locations for the focus groups will be most likely held at the designated football clubrooms. However, the exact time, date, and location will be determined once sufficient numbers are achieved. This research provides a great opportunity for coaches, parents and children to discuss all things to do with junior Australian football, with an emphasis on parental influence on the overall experience.

If I am interested, and want to participate, what do I do?

If you want to participate, please read and sign the consent form overleaf, and contact myself (Sam) to register your interest. For children who wish to participate, you will need to obtain parental consent in addition to your own signature of consent before you can participate in the study. For parents and coaches (over 18 years of age), you will need to read and sign the consent form overleaf. If you have any other questions, feel free to contact myself (Sam) in the first instance, or the project supervisor.

Contact details?

Mr Sam Elliott, Principal Researcher	Phone: (08) 8201 3471 Mobile: 0419 832 373	Email: sam.elliott@flinders.edu.au
Professor Murray Drummond, Project Supervisor	Phone: (08) 8201 5306	Email: murray.drummond@flinders.edu.au

This research project has been approved by the Flinders University Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee (Project Number 5460). For more information regarding ethical approval of the project the Executive Officer of the Committee can be contacted by telephone on 8201 3116, by fax on 8201 2035 or by email human.researchethics@flinders.edu.au.

APPENDIX M

Consent Form for Parents and Coaches

CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH

(FOCUS GROUPS FOR PARENTS/COACHES)

I
being over the age of 18 years hereby consent to participate as requested in the 'Letter of Introduction' and/ or the 'Information Sheet' for the research project on *Parental influence on the junior sport experience*.

1. I have read the information provided.
2. Details of procedures and any risks have been explained to my satisfaction.
3. I agree to audio recording of my information and participation.
4. I am aware that I should retain a copy of the Information Sheet and Consent Form for future reference.
5. I understand that:
 - I may not directly benefit from taking part in this research.
 - I am free to withdraw from the project at any time and am free to decline to answer particular questions.
 - While the information gained in this study will be published as explained, I will not be identified, and individual information will remain confidential.
 - I may withdraw at any time from the session or the research without disadvantage or consequence.
6. I have had the opportunity to discuss taking part in this research with a family member or friend.

Participant's signature.....**Date**.....

I certify that I have explained the study to the volunteer and consider that she/he understands what is involved and freely consents to participation.

Researcher's name... **SAMUEL KIM ELLIOTT**.....

Researcher's signature.....**Date**.....

APPENDIX N

Consent Form for Children

CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH

(FOCUS GROUPS FOR CHILDREN)

I, being a parent/guardian over the age of 18 years, hereby consent my son/daughter, aged, to participate in the focus group interview as requested in the 'Letter of Introduction' and/ or the 'Information Sheet' for the research project on *Parental influence in the junior sport experience*.

1. My son/daughter and I have read the information provided.
2. Details of procedures and any risks have been explained to my sons/daughters and my own satisfaction.
3. My son/daughter and I agree to audio recording of my child's information and participation.
4. My son/daughter is aware that I should retain a copy of the Information Sheet and Consent Form for future reference.
5. My son/daughter and I understand that:
 - My son/daughter may not directly benefit from taking part in this research.
 - My son/daughter is free to withdraw from the project at any time and can decline to answer any particular question/s.
 - While the information gained in this study will be published as explained, my son/daughter will not be identified, and individual information will remain confidential.
 - My son/daughter may withdraw at any time from the session and/or the research without disadvantage or consequence.
6. My son/daughter and I have had the opportunity to discuss taking part in this research with a family member or friend.

Parent/Guardians signature.....Date.....

Additional Parent/Guardians signature (optional)Date.....

Child participant's signature.....Date.....

I certify that I have explained the study to the volunteer and consider that she/he understands what is involved and freely consents to participation.

Researcher's name: SAMUEL KIM ELLIOTT.....

Researcher's signature.....Date.....

APPENDIX O

Generic Questioning Guide for Parents and Coaches

Generic questioning guide for focus groups and individual interviews

Introduction questions around 'junior sport' and junior football

- Please tell me a bit about your role in junior sport?
- What are some of the most enjoyable aspects of being a parent in junior sport? Least enjoyable?
- Why do you believe children play football?
- In what ways do you encourage participation?
- What benefits do children gain from participating in junior football?
- What is the purpose of junior sport?

Questions around parental involvement

- How would you describe your own involvement in junior football?
- In what ways do you support/encourage their participation (Temporally and overall)?
– repeat question (simplify in terms of temporal support encouragement)
- What are your perceptions of other parents' involvement in football?
- Have there been any instances that you can recall of poor parental behaviour? Discuss

Broader questions

- How important is winning and competition in junior football?
- What does success mean to you?
- How would you describe your involvement in junior sport?
- What is an appropriate level of parental involvement? Why?
- What type of behaviour is acceptable in junior football?
- What are your thoughts on parents giving advice from the sideline?
- What do you think about the coaches?
- When an umpire makes a perceived error, how do parents usually react?
- How frequent is parental verbal behaviours? In what form?

Summary questions

- How would you describe parental influence in junior football?
- Is there anything else you wish to share with the group?

APPENDIX P

Modified Questioning Guide for Children

Modified questioning guide for children

Introductory questions

- What is your name and how old are you?
- Who do you play football for and how long have you been playing?
- How often do you train and play?
- What is the most enjoyable part of playing football? Least enjoyable?
- Which of your parents is most involve in football? (In all additional questions make specific reference to the parent (mother or father) the child identified.)

Transition questions: Parental influence at games

First I would like to talk generally about parents' behaviour during sport events.

- When you have been playing football, have you ever seen examples of really good parents that are supportive? Can you describe what you have seen?
- What makes these good things?
- Have you ever seen bad examples? Can you share? What makes these bad things?

Their own parents

- How do you feel about your parents coming to watch you play? (What are the good things/bad things about their attendance?)
- Do you look at your parents when you are playing?
- Can you hear any comments when you are playing? (If so, what kind of comments?)

- *Probe for thoughts and feelings around these comments*
- Do you ever notice parents' body language when you play? (facial expressions, how they are sitting, if they are moving their arms around)
- Do your parents treat you any differently if you win or lose?

Slightly longer questions

- What are some of the best things your parents do while you are competing? What do you like about them?
- Are there any things you would prefer your parents to do differently?
- Do you think your parents or other parents can influence your own enjoyment/performance? (Why/why not, how?)
- Do your parents reward you for playing football? In what ways, and what for?
- How serious do your parents take it?
- In what ways do your parents help you before games?
- What sort of things do your parents do that you like at the end of the game?
- Have you ever seen someone embarrassed by their parents?
- Have you ever seen a parent misbehave at football? How did this make you feel?

Summary

- **Overall**, how would you describe parents influence in junior football?
- What sort of things can parents do to better support your football?
- Is there anything else you wish to discuss?
-