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# Power, politics and professional contracts: an exploration of parenting in elite youth football

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# Power, Politics and Professional Contracts:

# An Exploration of Parenting in Elite Youth Football

by

Nicola Jane Clarke

A Doctoral Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of

Doctor of Philosophy of Loughborough University

August 2014

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## Abstract

The purpose of this research was to explore the phenomenon of parenting in English elite youth football and provide a rich, detailed description and nuanced interpretation of parenting in this highly challenging and competitive culture. The research positioned parenting in youth sport as a dynamic, culturally-situated process, constituted through interaction with significant others. This allowed for an in-depth understanding of how parenting was experienced in elite youth football that included children's accounts of their interaction with parents.

Using a phenomenological methodology, research was undertaken in three English professional football clubs to explore how parenting in elite youth football was experienced as lived. Parents of players registered to an elite youth football academy, players aged between 8 and 17 years and academy coaches participated in interviews. Participant observation was used to complement interview data. Embracing multi-perspectivalism (Kellner, 1995), multiple qualitative analytical techniques were used to explore data from different epistemological perspectives, providing sensitivity to the variation and subtlety of participants' experiences.

The findings from four empirical, qualitative research studies are presented. Firstly, an exploration of the experience of being a parent of an elite youth footballer described how parents were socialised into the academy culture, and experienced a change in identity and a heightened sense of responsibility to facilitate their child's football development. Secondly, an examination of elite youth footballers' experience of interaction with their parents demonstrated how players experienced their body as an object to be scrutinised and assessed when watched by parents, experienced conflict with parents from within a power relation, and ascribed meaning to their interaction with parents in relation to their goal of becoming a successful academy footballer. Thirdly, an idiographic analysis of parents' and players' individual and dyadic experiences of parent-player interactions highlighted how relationships were constituted by; relations with other family members; an embodied sense of closeness; the temporal significance of football transitions; and gender and power relations. Finally, an analysis of coaches' accounts of the parent-coach relationship in elite youth football demonstrated how parent-coach interactions occurred within an imbalanced power relation, which centred on establishing the rights to be responsible for player development. Together, these findings present a complex picture of parenting in elite youth football, as an embodied, temporal and culturally-situated experience, constituted through interaction and power

relations between parents, players, coaches and academies.

This research highlights the importance of conceptualising parenting in youth sport as a social, culturally-embedded process and supports the need to include children in research about issues that affect them. Extending this further, adopting a theoretical perspective that allows for the contextual power relations to be examined can further enhance understanding of parenting in youth sport. Finally, this research recommends that listening to and valuing the experiences of participants in the elite youth football culture, alongside open discussion and critical reflection upon academy practices, may have the greatest potential for enhancing the experiences of parents, players and coaches.

## Publications Arising from this Thesis

**Peer-reviewed journal articles:**

Clarke, N.J., & Harwood, C.G. (2014). Parenting experiences in elite youth football: A phenomenological study. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise, 15(5),* 528-537. doi:10.1016/j.psychsport.2014.05.004

**Conference proceedings:**

Clarke, N.J., Harwood, C.G., & Cushion, C. (2013, October). Children's experiences and constructions of playing early specialisation stage football. In C.G. Harwood (Chair), *Applied research in elite youth soccer: Embedding the scientist-practitioner model within a professional soccer academy development program.* Symposium conducted at the Association for Applied Sport Psychology Annual Conference, New Orleans, USA.

Clarke, N.J., Harwood, C.G., & Cushion, C. (2012, July). *Player and parent experiences of release from professional youth football academies.* Poster session presented at the British Psychological Society North East and North West Conference, Manchester, UK.

Clarke, N.J., Harwood, C.G., & Taylor, I.M. (2011, July). Parents' role perceptions in youth football academies: A qualitative application of role theory. In C.G. Harwood (Chair), *Towards optimal psychosocial environments in youth sport*. Symposium conducted at the FEPSAC European Congress of Sport Psychology, Madeira, Portugal.

Clarke, N.J., & Harwood, C.G. (2011, July). How can we increase parents' awareness of sport psychology? Lessons from a sport parent education programme. In M.A. Pain (Chair), *Talent development in soccer: The player, the parent, the coach*. Symposium conducted at the FEPSAC European Congress of Sport Psychology, Madeira, Portugal.

**Reports:**

Clarke, N.J. & Harwood, C.G. (2013, May) The 5 C's: Five essential mental skills for young footballers – Top tips for parents. *The Football Association*. Retrieved from http://www.thefa.com/news/st-georges-park/2013/may/a-psychological-focus

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# CHAPTER ONE Part A: Introduction

The following presents an extract from a New Statesman article, posted online 24th October 2013, by Gary Lineker, former England football player:

> Pushy parents screaming abuse from the sidelines are killing their kids' love of football.
>
> In this country, since footballs made from pigs' bladders were whacked into goals without nets, we've played on full-size pitches. *Whatever our age*. This is ludicrous. [...] This madness is only exacerbated by the maniacal parents on the touchline spouting nonsense at their children. The competitive nature of most mums and dads is astounding. The fear they instil in our promising but sensitive Johnny is utterly depressing. We need a parental cultural revolution. If we could just get them to shut the fuck up and let their children enjoy themselves, you would be staggered at the difference it would make.
>
> Having four boys myself, I have stood on the sidelines of countless games, spanning many years. Oh, the drivel I have heard, the abuse I have witnessed, the damage I have seen done. Promising young players barked at by clueless dad. "Don't mess with it there." "Just kick it." "Stop fucking about." I could go on. I have seen a father pick his son up by the scruff of the neck and yell in his face: "You'll never make it playing that crap".

This article reflects the widespread view that parents can be detrimental to their child's experiences and development in youth sport and was one I encountered regularly through the process of writing this thesis. Tell anyone you are researching "parenting in youth football" and a typical response will be "ooh, you mean pushy parents!" or "I suppose you meet those dads who are living their dreams through their kid?" Rarely was the initial perception of a parent of a young footballer positive. This prevailing cultural stereotype of the "pushy mother" or "failed footballer father" – over-involved, emotionally attached to their child's football, desperate for their child to succeed and above all, unaware of the impact of their behaviours – if taken seriously, may lead to the conclusion that parental involvement in youth sport should be "minimised or eliminated" (Green & Chalip, 1997 p.73).

The potential negative influence of parents on children in youth sport has led to a growth in the introduction of sports organisation policies designed to 'manage' parents. For example, requiring parents to sign behavioural pledges and attend mandatory sportsmanship training sessions were strategies used in recreational team sports in North America (Wiersma & Sherman, 2005). Youth football is no exception. In 2008, the English Football Association (the FA) launched their Respect programme, which included among its aims, to create "a step change in youth football as to what is acceptable and unacceptable behaviour from parents and spectators" (Youth football clubs guide to The FA's Respect programme, 2011). The FA released a series of resources for youth football clubs and leagues, which recommended the implementation of practical measures such as behavioural codes of conduct (which limit parents' involvement from the sideline; see Appendix A for an example) and designated spectator areas, which create a physical barrier between parents and the football pitch. Reporting mechanisms and disciplinary sanctions for misconduct were established and an FA Respect guide for parents and carers was developed, providing advice about how to give appropriate support to players. This explicit inclusion of parents in FA policy underlines the impact parents are perceived to have on players' football experiences and development. In responding to the behaviour of a minority of parents who act in a violent or aggressive manner on the sideline, the practices recommended in this programme reinforce the assumption that parents are unaware of what constitutes "appropriate" behaviour, and seek to regulate the behaviours of *all* parents.

And yet organised youth sport programmes rely upon the involvement of parents. Parents act as gatekeepers to children's experiences, structuring the amount and type of exposure to sporting environments. It is often parents who introduce their children to sport and the level of encouragement and positive reinforcement that parents provide can influence children's choices to continue their participation (Fredricks & Eccles, 2004). Parents can adopt a variety of supportive roles to facilitate their child's involvement in sport. For example, the tangible support that parents provide such as finance, time, and organisation of family schedules enables children's access to sporting opportunities (e.g. Kay, 2000; Weiss & Hayashi, 1995). Parents can also play an emotional supportive role by showing moral support through attending matches and providing comfort after disappointing performances (e.g. Keegan, Harwood, Spray & Lavallee, 2009; Wolfenden & Holt, 2005). This support can protect young athletes from potential negative effects of psychologically challenging situations, such as uncertainty about deselection from an elite squad (van Yperen, 1998). Furthermore, by communicating messages about children's competency in sport, placing

value on certain activities and offering attributions for sporting success and failure, parents assist children to interpret their experiences in sport (e.g. Babkes & Weiss, 1999; Fredricks & Eccles, 2004). Highly involved parents may regularly attend practices, training sessions and competitions; providing frequent opportunities to interact with their child. The degree to which a child interprets this involvement as supportive or pressurising can influence their sporting experiences, development and achievement (e.g. Côté, 1999; Lauer, Gould, Roman & Pierce, 2010a; 2010b; Wolfenden & Holt, 2005). In short, parents are an enduring feature of the youth sport landscape and a key influence in the lives of young athletes and players.

Youth sport is a high profile, publically visible and culturally valued activity. The professionalisation and commercialisation of youth sport has led to increasingly privatised, highly structured and performance orientated programmes, meaning sport has become a setting where children can achieve personal success and gain status among peers (Coakley, 2006). This is exemplified in English youth football, where the commercialisation and globalisation of football precipitated the professionalisation of youth player recruitment and development (Giulianotti, 1999). Alongside this, the rise in the neoliberal, meritocratic view in Western society, which values individualism, competition and personal responsibility, means parents are held directly responsible and accountable for their child's behaviour and achievement (Faircloth, 2014). Consequently, the moral worth of parents can be seen as contingent on their child's accomplishments. In youth sport, the success or failure of a child, which can be visibly judged and easily measured, may be attributed to parents – providing a mandate for organisations to regulate and guide the actions of parents.

The moral imperative for parents to maximise their child's development in sport can encourage parents to engage in strategies such as "concerted cultivation" – constant efforts toward developing children's talent and skills (Lareau, 2003), or "helicopter parenting" – hovering over their child and closely monitoring their progress (Stearns, 2009), to meet this cultural expectation of parenting and develop their identity as a 'good parent' (Faircloth, 2014). This suggest that in youth sport environments such as football, parents may be criticised for displaying behaviours perceived to be associated with over-involved parenting, yet are held accountable for their child's development and progression. They must follow policies and guidance for their behaviour at sports competitions but must also negotiate modern-day cultural expectations for good parenting in this setting.

This begins to illustrate some of the tensions that parents may have to manage in youth sport settings and the complexities of the parenting experience, beyond the stereotyped view of parents as problematic. I observed some of this complexity upon my first visit to a

professional football club academy. I met Liz, a single mother of a nine year old academy football player. She described to me the anxiety she experienced as to whether the "high risk high reward" elite football environment and style of coaching was suitable for young children, yet praised the discipline and coping skills that her son had learnt from playing at the academy. Without a co-parent at home to play "good cop bad cop", Liz described encountering difficulty instilling the importance of school to her son, because his aspiration to play football meant he was not motivated to practice his spelling. She discussed her understanding of her son's temperament and explained how she had advised the coaches to talk sternly to him as he "responds better to this". However, this openness was contrasted with her experience of feeling like she was "second-guessing what the coaches are thinking", which meant she sometimes questioned whether it would be better if she dropped her son off and was not involved at all. I was left affected by the ambiguity, ambivalence and complexity of her account and a desire to understand more about what it was like for parents.

Turning to the academic literature, I found this complexity was obscured by the predominant focus of sport parenting research, which historically has been on identifying the "optimal" behaviours for parents that, if adopted, will result in positive child outcomes (e.g. Gould, Lauer, Rolo, Jannes & Pennisi, 2006; 2008; Knight & Holt, 2014; Wuerth, Lee & Alfermann, 2004). In youth sport settings, child outcomes are defined in terms of both talent development; achievement and successful progression in sport, and positive youth development; acquisition of psychological competencies and life skills (Harwood & Knight, in press; Holt, 2008). Studies of this nature are implicitly underpinned by the positivist assumption that parenting behaviours and child outcomes are causally related and have aimed to theorise and explain this relationship. This research, however, has often overlooked the social interaction and cultural norms and values of the sport context in which parenting behaviours occur (through the use of cross-sectional correlational study designs e.g. Babkes & Weiss, 1999; Bois, Lalanne & Delforge, 2009; LaVoi & Babkes-Stellino, 2008), or have framed social and contextual influences on the parenting process within a discussion of the determinants of parents' behaviours and associated child effects (e.g. Harwood & Knight, in press; Holt, Tamminen, Black, Sehn & Wall, 2008; Knight & Holt, 2013a). By isolating parenting from its culturally and historically situated, interpersonal context, parenting can be turned from a relationship into a set of tasks to be achieved (Faircloth, Hoffman & Layne, 2013; Lee, 2014; Ribbens McCarthy & Edwards, 2011).

Furthermore, the dominance of the behaviourist perspective in youth sport parenting research has focused attention on what parents *do*, rather than *what it is like* for parents. The

concern with explaining parent-child relationships in youth sport research has meant descriptions of first-person accounts of parenting are limited, and therefore the extent to which descriptions of optimal behaviours reflect parents' everyday experiences of supporting a child to participate in sport is unclear. An understanding of how parenting is subjectively experienced and how parents make sense of their child's sporting participation within their own lives remain relatively unexplored within the current literature; yet are essential to understanding this complex phenomenon (Dorsch, Smith & McDonough, 2009; Goodnow & Collins, 1990).

Therefore, research which understands parenting as a subjective experience, situated within a social process and specific cultural contexts, can offer a more nuanced perspective of youth sport parenting and address some of the limitations of the existing literature. Studies of this nature can provide vital insight which can be used to inform the design of initiatives targeted at parents and potentially identify ways to facilitate positive experiences for all those involved in youth sport.

Within this thesis, a phenomenological research approach was adopted to explore parenting in elite youth football in England. Elite youth football offers a unique research setting in which to study parenting. The high profile, mass participation, culturally revered nature of English football means that parenting in youth football has become politically-sensitive (as illustrated through the inclusion of parents in youth football policies) and a focus of media attention (exemplified through the New Statesman article on p.1).

The youth football player recruitment and talent development system in England is managed by a network of professional football clubs, which provide intensive training and competition programmes to players who are selected to attend. Young male footballers are scouted and contracted to play for professional clubs from the age of eight. These elite players attend a football academy; a training environment which aims to "produce home grown[1] players for the professional game" (The Premier League Elite Player Performance Plan (EPPP), 2011 p.5). Although academies offer a potential route in to the professional adult game, squad places are contingent on players continually meeting expected performance standards. Players are regularly reviewed and assessed annually by coaches. Individual players who are judged to have not met the required criteria are deselected or "released" by the club. Throughout the season, potential new players are invited to train

[1] A 'home grown' player is defined by the Premier League as a player who, irrespective of their nationality or age, has been registered with any club affiliated to the FA or the Football Association of Wales for a period, continuous or not, of three seasons or 36 months prior to their 21st birthday.

alongside academy squads “on trial”, further increasing the competition for places. Uncommonly for youth sport, football coaching, kit and tournaments are funded by the professional clubs, as youth player development is perceived as a financial investment. When academies meet their aim and successfully produce players for the professional game, these players acquire a market-centred meaning as ‘assets’ which can be sold to generate income, reflecting the professionalisation and commodification of elite youth football (Giulianotti, 1999; 2002).

Research has begun to illustrate some of the challenges of parenting in this highly challenging, competitive youth sport culture (Harwood, Drew & Knight, 2010; Holt & Dunn, 2004; Mills, Butt, Maynard & Harwood, 2012). Becoming a professional footballer is a common aspiration among young players who love the game and perceive that being successful in football would bring financial rewards and recognition from significant others, meaning that in academies players are striving to ‘make it’ into the professional game (Cushion & Jones, 2006; Holt & Dunn, 2004; Swain, 2000). Yet few players will progress through the academy system to be offered a professional full-time playing contract (Cushion & Jones, 2006). For parents, managing the time and financial commitment required for their son to participate in academy training and competition programmes, together with the emotional demands of preparing their son for the potential of release, can be a stressful experience (Harwood et al., 2010). Furthermore, underlying tension within the relationship between parents and coaches in youth football has been indicated (Harwood et al., 2010) and for coaches, how to work effectively with parents remains an ever present challenge (Holt & Dunn, 2004; Mills et al., 2012). General guidance for parents in football is available (Howie, 2004); however tailored support provided by academies varies. By exploring parenting in elite youth football, recommendations can be made to assist practitioners to find ways to enhance the experiences of parents, players and coaches.

Methodologically, the phenomenological approach adopted in this thesis allowed for the personal, social and contextual aspects of parenting in elite youth football to be examined. Phenomenology is a qualitative research tradition concerned with the study of experiences and how people attach meanings to their experiences (Langdridge, 2007; Spinelli, 2005). The focus on understanding *how* parenting is experienced contributes to the descriptive stage of youth sport parenting research, which has been overlooked by the aspiration to explain parental influence on child outcomes. Phenomenology has been advocated as an approach which has much to offer the study of sport, through its focus on experience and meaning as lived, but continues to be an under-utilised methodology (e.g. Allen-Collinson, 2009; Kerry

& Armour, 2000). Importantly, phenomenological research findings can ensure that understandings of subtle and nuanced psychological phenomena, such as parenting in elite youth sport, remain connected to people's everyday lived-experiences, as opposed to developing overly-abstracted theories which are no longer context-sensitive (Todres & Wheeler, 2001).

Drawing upon a symbolic interactionist perspective (Blumer, 1969), Poczwardowski, Barott and Jowett (2006) described interpersonal relationships as "a dynamic product of social interaction in which interpretations and meanings are actively negotiated by social actors" (p.130). Applying this definition to parenting, parenting can be viewed as a dynamic process, constituted through interaction with significant others and the specific cultural context. Within this thesis, it was therefore my intention to move beyond a behaviourist conceptualisation of parenting in youth sport, which reduces the act of parenting from a relationship to a set of tasks, to understand how parenting is *experienced* as a personal, social and cultural phenomenon. Responding to the criticism of the assumptions of developmental psychology which underpin traditional parenting research; that position children as passive, asocial and as objects of adult's socialisation efforts (Burman, 1994; Mayall, 2002 – to be further discussed in the literature review, see p.22), an alternative approach to understanding how children interpret parenting in elite youth football is provided. Acknowledging the tensions between parents and coaches in this setting, the influence of the parent-coach relationship on parenting in elite youth football is also considered. From this I endeavoured to achieve a richer, more complex understanding of parenting in elite youth football. This research aims to contribute to existing knowledge of parenting in youth sport by providing an exploration of parenting in the unique context of elite youth football, which seeks to describe what it is like for parents rather than what parents do, and is underpinned by a conceptualisation of parenting as a dynamic, social, culturally-embedded process.

**Research Questions**

The purpose of this research was to explore the phenomenon of parenting in elite youth football. In this thesis, the following research questions were addressed.

1. What are the experiences of parents of elite youth footballers?
2. What are the experiences of elite youth footballers' interaction with their parents?
3. How is the parent-child relationship experienced in the context of elite youth football?
4. How are the experiences of parents of elite youth footballers shaped by the parent-coach relationship?

**Structure of Thesis**

Following a critical review and interpretation of the youth sport parenting literature, chapter two details the methodology and theoretical positioning of this research. Chapters three, four, five and six present the empirical qualitative studies which have been undertaken to respectively address the four research questions. Each empirical chapter follows the same structure. Firstly, an additional interpretation of the literature relevant to the specific research question is provided. Next, as a variety of data collection and analytic methods were incorporated in this research, details of how techniques were applied in the particular study are described. The research findings are then presented and discussed in relation to theory and current literature. Chapter seven concludes the thesis, by outlining the theoretical, methodological and practical implications arising from this research.

## CHAPTER ONE Part B: Review of Literature

This chapter provides an overview of the literature pertaining to parenting in youth sport. In line with the research questions of this thesis, this review is delineated to youth sport parenting research and as such does not include studies that have investigated parental influence in physical activity or exercise settings (see Edwardson & Gorely, 2010 for a review). Particular attention is paid to research which has been undertaken in youth football settings, but is complemented by relevant literature from other contexts to present a comprehensive overview of parenting in youth sport. Additional interpretations of research studies, relevant to each research question, are provided in the respective findings chapters.

### Definitions of Key Terminology

In the context of this research, "parent" is an identity term, used to refer to an adult who has a particular connection with an individual child (Ribbens McCarthy & Edwards, 2011). It is a gender neutral term and therefore "mother" and "father" are also used to indicate the gender of the parent where relevant. "Parental" is a term denoting belonging to a parent (e.g. parental responsibility). "Parenting" describes the practices and activities that parents engage in, in relation to their child. It is important to note, however, that in other contexts this term may be imbued with cultural understandings of the role and expectations of parents (Lee, Bristow, Faircloth & Macvarish, 2014), which has important consequences for interpreting the literature and will be elaborated on in chapter five.

Poczwardowski et al.'s (2006) definition of interpersonal relationships as "a dynamic product of social interaction in which interpretations and meanings are actively negotiated by social actors" (p.130) is used to differentiate between the terms "relationship" and "interaction" throughout the thesis. A distinction is also drawn between the "elite youth football" and "football academy" cultures, where the latter is a subculture of the former.

### An Overview of Parenting Research in Youth Sport

Given parents' unique influence in the sporting lives of young athletes, it is perhaps unsurprising that the role of parents in sport has increasingly received attention from researchers and practitioners alike. To understand parenting in youth sport, research has focused on identifying the "optimal" parenting involvement that will enhance children's experiences, development and achievement in sport. Studies have examined child outcomes associated with parenting styles; the overall emotional climate a parent creates, and parenting practices; the specific behaviours of parents directed towards their child. This literature review begins by demonstrating how this research, individually and taken together, has made an important contribution to understanding the role of parents in sport. However, it is argued

in this chapter, that the reductionist and deterministic approach of this body of work distances the act of parenting from the family milieu and social context, and is underpinned by the assumption that all children will respond to parental involvement in a similar manner. Next, studies which have alternatively explored the experiences of youth sport parents are discussed. This research has described the complexities and challenges involved in supporting young athletes and begun to illuminate the influence of social and contextual factors on parenting, but remains limited, as few studies have examined first-person accounts of parental experiences.

**Parenting Styles Research in Youth Sport**

How variation in parenting styles affects child outcomes has received some attention in the youth sport literature (Holt, Tamminen, Black, Mandigo & Fox, 2009; Juntumaa, Keskivaara & Punamäki, 2005; Sapieja, Dunn & Holt, 2011). Parenting styles categorise parents into 'types' according to their overall approach to parenting. From a review of studies which investigated global parent characteristics, Darling and Steinberg (1993 p.493) provided a useful definition of parenting style: "a constellation of attitudes toward the child that are communicated to the child and that, taken together, create an emotional climate in which the parent's behaviors are expressed." The authors suggested that the general emotional climate that parents create can influence how children perceive specific parenting behaviours, and the effectiveness of those behaviours on facilitating desired child outcomes. Investigating parenting styles in a sport context therefore appears to offer a useful starting point for understanding how differences in parenting can shape the development of young athletes.

Parenting styles research has attempted to identify the key qualities or 'dimensions' which reflect a parent's overall approach. For example, the extent to which parents show warmth, love and acceptance towards their child, provide structure and guidance and promote autonomous behaviours in their child have all been used by researchers to assess parenting style, although there is still debate as to which dimensions best represent overall parenting style, and how these should be measured (Silk, Morris, Kanaya & Steinberg, 2003; Skinner, Johnson & Snyder, 2009). Combinations of dimensions are linked together to describe typologies of parents, which in turn have been associated with socialisation outcomes in children (e.g. Baumrind, 1971; Grolnick & Ryan, 1989; Maccoby & Martin, 1983).

The most extensively applied typology in developmental psychology is that developed by Baumrind (1971). From behavioural observations of 146 American preschool children and their parents over a three to five month period, Baumrind defined three global parenting styles that differentiated between the extent parents displayed authority and control:

authoritarian, authoritative and permissive parenting. Authoritarian parents shaped, controlled and evaluated their child's behaviour, held high expectations, valued obedience and used punitive behaviours. In contrast, permissive parents accepted, rather than controlled their child's behaviour, allowed self-regulation and independence, and rarely used punishment. The third typology – authoritative parents; who guided their child's behaviour through open communication and reasoning, and promoted independence within established boundaries – was associated with the highest levels of children's competence, defined in terms of independent, achievement-orientated and friendly, cooperative behaviours (Baumrind, 1971). Further research applying this typology has consistently identified the authoritative parenting style as most associated with positive child outcomes across a range of domains (see Holt & Knight, 2014 for an overview).

Building on this work using self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985), Grolnick and Ryan (1989) sought to further differentiate between parental control and support for independence, and proposed three dimensions of parental style: autonomy-support, or oppositely parental control; structure; and parental involvement, and demonstrated a positive relationship between parental autonomy-support and children's self-regulation and competence in school. Autonomy-support was described as the "degree to which parents value and use techniques which encourage independent problem-solving, choice and participation in decisions", as compared to using controlling, pressuring or disciplinary techniques (Grolnick & Ryan, 1989 p.144). The provision of clear and consistent guidelines and expectations was referred to as structure, and parental involvement defined as the "extent to which parents are interested in, knowledgeable about, and takes an active part in the child's life" (p.144). Using this framework in a sport context, Holt et al. (2009) examined the parenting styles (interpreted as autonomy-supportive, controlling or mixed style) used by parents of under-12 and under-14 age group female football players. A combination of participant observation and interviews with parents and players was used to gather data pertaining to parents' styles and associated practices. Parents classified as consistently adopting an autonomy-supportive style described involving their daughters in decision making about sport, letting their child learn from mistakes and providing appropriate structure through clear boundaries. In these families, players were willing to engage in open communication and parents were able to read their child's mood and recognised when to provide feedback. Conversely, controlling parents did not rate their ability to read their child's mood highly or engage in open communication. Post-match feedback from parents was often not positively received by players. These families tended to emphasise control

rather than structure and gave examples of enforcing extra football practice at home, and using punitive behaviours if children did not meet expectations. In contrast, some participants were classified as having a mixed parenting style. These parents either perceived that they adopted a different style to their co-parent, or described using autonomy-supportive behaviours in some situations and controlling behaviours in others. This supports Darling and Steinberg's (1993) postulate that parenting styles and behaviours are determined by parent's socialisation goals for their child and will therefore vary across situations.

Holt et al.'s (2009) findings provided insight into how specific parenting behaviours in a sport context were expressed within the overall emotional climate that parents created. The use of fieldwork observations alongside qualitative interviewing strengthened this study and enabled a comprehensive pattern of the parenting practices associated with parenting styles to be described and presented in relation to parents' own perceptions of their behaviours. The presence of mixed parenting styles illuminated the situated and interpersonal nature of parenting, which emphasises the need to understand parent-child interaction in the context of family relationships. However, this study was limited by not fully exploring children's perceptions of their parent's styles or practices. The players were interviewed for the purposes of triangulating parents' descriptions, rather than to represent children's perspectives of parenting. An additional finding of Holt et al.'s (2009) study was that children reciprocally influenced parenting styles and practices, when they demonstrated responsibility, or challenged unsupportive comments for example. This supports a bidirectional view of parent-child relationships and highlights the importance of considering children's perceptions and preferences of parenting in research.

Indeed, a wider criticism of the parenting styles approach is that it over-simplifies the complex process of parental influence by assuming a unidirectional relationship between parents and children (Holden, 2010). For example, the constructs of "autonomy" and "choice" are framed as bestowed on children by parents, rather than something that may be requested by children and negotiated through interaction. Furthermore, the idea that parenting styles are shaped by parents' socialisation goals, which vary according to the context of the interaction (Darling & Steinberg, 1993), has been under-utilised in youth sport parenting styles research. Studies using cross-sectional designs to classify parents and examine the impact of parenting styles on child outcomes (e.g. perfectionism, satisfaction and norm-breaking behaviour) have not accounted for the mediating role of the social context (Juntumaa et al., 2005; Sapieja et al., 2011). In addition, this research has failed to acknowledge the cultural assumptions which underpin dimensions of parenting styles. The

authoritative (Baumrind, 1971; Maccoby & Martin, 1983) and autonomy-supportive (Grolnick & Ryan, 1989) typologies have been recognised as the optimal parenting styles for enhancing child outcomes in sport (e.g. Harwood & Knight, in press; Sapieja et al., 2011). Both are entrenched in neoliberal values of Western society, which emphasise the development of autonomy, individualism and personal responsibility, compared to the collective, interdependence and cohesiveness generally valued in Eastern cultures (Burman, 1994; Lee, Beckert & Goodrich, 2010), yet optimal parenting climates are held to be universal by researchers. This also assumes that all children will respond similarly to particular parenting styles, which distances children from their historical, cultural and social context.

In summary, parenting styles offers a useful but limited understanding of parenting in youth sport. Importantly, this approach fails to adequately recognise the bidirectional nature of parent-child relationships and children's active role in the parenting process, and assumes that all children will respond more positively to behaviours expressed within an authoritative or autonomy-supportive climate. Moreover, the reductive approach to classifying parents according to a typology isolates the act of parenting from the family milieu and does not account for variations in parenting depending on the situational context. Finally, parenting styles presents a universal view of effective parenting which is based on unexamined cultural assumptions.

**Parenting Practices Research in Youth Sport**

In addition to the general emotional climate that parents create, the specific behaviours of parents directed towards their child have been a focus in sport psychology research. These behaviours, or practices, will be guided by a parent's goal for their child's socialisation and will vary according to the context of the parent-child interaction (Darling & Steinberg, 1993).

**Parenting practices during competition.** The media focus on unsporting behaviour at youth sport matches has prompted researchers to examine parenting practices during competition. Kidman, McKenzie and McKenzie (1999) observed 147 youth sport matches across seven team sports to describe the nature of parents' verbal comments. Using pre-determined descriptions, 47.2% of parents' comments were categorised by researchers as positive (praise or motivational in nature), 34.5% as negative (correctional or critical comments) and the remainder as neutral. In a more recent study using researcher observations, which also recorded to whom comments were directed, 64% of parents' remarks at youth ice-hockey games were coded as positive (Bowker et al., 2009). Although

55% of negative comments were targeted at referees, it was noted that more negative comments were made by parents at competitive games compared to recreational matches. The authors concluded that parents should be educated to reduce the overall number of negative comments, which were assumed to be potentially harmful to young athletes' motivation (Bowker et al., 2009; Kidman et al., 1999). These observational studies demonstrated that parents' comments were generally positive; challenging the media stereotype of the prevalence of violent and aggressive behaviour at youth sport competitions. However, categorising parents' comments as "positive" or "negative" based on researcher-constructed descriptions, offers a simplistic account of the nature of parental behaviour at competitions, as observations were not contextualised. Without understanding why parents respond in certain ways while watching their child perform, education strategies designed to limit parents' comments at competitions may have little impact.

Holt et al. (2008) extended this research by employing a grounded theory methodology to examine factors that accounted for parents' verbal reactions at youth football matches (male and female under-10 to under-14 age group players) in Canada. The inductive approach allowed a more complex description of comments to unfold. From analysing interviews with parents from four families, audio diaries (which parents completed after games for six weeks) and researcher observations at matches, parents' comments in reaction to their children's performance behaviours were presented as ranging on a continuum from more supportive to more controlling. Exploring this further, factors that accounted for parents' reactions included spectator behaviour policies (e.g. sanctions for negative comments towards referees), and parents' empathy with child, emotional intensity experienced and perceived football knowledge. In situations where parents felt empathetic towards their child and became emotionally involved in the game (see also chapter one p.21), the overall amount of parents' comments increased and showed a tendency to become more controlling. When parents perceived that they were knowledgeable about football, parents felt able to provide more performance contingent feedback during matches.

Holt et al.'s (2008) findings begin to shed light on the personal and contextual factors that shape parents' involvement at youth sport competitions, by understanding parents' comments in relation to policy issues and parents' own experiences of watching their child compete. Additional research may help to explicate this complex relationship further. However, by relying on researcher coding, the findings tell us little about how comments were interpreted by players. The impact of a specific parenting behaviour will vary in the meaning it holds for the parent and the child (Holden, 2010) and consequently children may

interpret parental behaviours differently to how the parent intends. Therefore, it is important to consider the extent to which children interpret parenting practices as supportive or pressuring in research.

**Perceptions of parenting practices.** Describing parents', children's and coaches' perceptions of parenting behaviours in specific sport settings has also received attention from researchers (e.g. Côté, 1999; Gould et al., 2006; 2008; Keegan et al., 2009; Keegan, Spray, Harwood & Lavallee, 2010; Lauer et al., 2010a; 2010b). These studies have delineated the spectrum of behaviours that parents may adopt to support their child's participation and illustrated how parents' roles can evolve as a child progresses in sport.

Highlighting the significant influence of parents on children's development in sport, Côté (1999) delineated three stages of sports participation – the sampling, specialising and investment years – during which families support young athletes. From interviews with four Canadian elite athletes (aged 18 years, from rowing and tennis), their parents and siblings, Côté described how, in the sampling stage (where children took part in a wide range of sporting activities), parents emphasised the importance of play and enjoyment and recognised that their child had a 'natural talent' for sport. As young athletes began to focus on one or two sports during the specialising years, parents became more involved as the financial and time commitment required to support their child's participation increased. In the investment years, where young athletes committed to achieving an elite level of performance in a single sport, parents' emotional support role involved helping their child deal with injury and setback, and offering advice regarding their child's future in sport. Although limited by the use of retrospective data, this study illustrated how the supportive role of parents changed as their child progressed in sport, and provided a model of talent development that has been widely used in youth sport parenting literature (e.g. Harwood et al., 2010; Keegan et al., 2009; 2010 Knight et al., 2011).

From interviewing professional American tennis players (aged 16 to 24 years), their parents and their coaches retrospectively about parents' involvement in a player's career, Lauer et al. (2010b) described the parenting behaviours that were perceived to have impacted on player development relative to Bloom's (1985) early, middle and elite stages of talent development. Specific "positive" (e.g. practicing tennis with child, teaching respect) and "negative" (e.g. criticising performances and overemphasising winning) parenting behaviours, and how these changed across the career of the players were outlined, further demonstrating how parents' involvement can vary depending on an athlete's age and development stage. For example, during the middle years when the pressure of competing,

gaining ranking points and developing talent increased, parents were more likely to focus on winning and be more controlling of their child's tennis experience. This indicates how the sport culture can influence parents' behaviours over time. However, like Côté (1999), hindsight may have prevented Lauer et al. (2010b) from understanding how and why parents adapted their practices (in the present) as their child's tennis commitment increased, or how parents were socialised by the sport environment.

Other studies have considered the perceptions of coaches on the parenting practices that influenced young athletes' development in sport (e.g. Gould et al., 2006; 2008). Investigating coach perceptions of the role of parents in tennis development, Gould et al. (2008) conducted focus group interviews with 24 tennis coaches experienced in working with nationally ranked players in America. Following a content analysis, lists of specific positive and negative parent-player interactions in youth tennis as perceived by tennis coaches were presented. Positive parent-player interactions included parenting practices such as modelling good sportsmanship and providing emotional, tangible and informational support for their child. Overemphasising winning and performance, undermining coaching and poor match behaviour were considered negative parental practices by the coaches. The specific parenting practices outlined in this study provided sensible suggestions for what parents could try to follow or avoid in youth tennis. The coaches had personal experience of how parents interacted with players to draw from; however their perspectives on the parent-child relationship were limited in that coaches only observed interactions in a tennis context. The dynamics between coaches in the group interviews were not explored meaning how coaches interacted to undermine or qualify perceptions of parent-child interactions was unclear. In addition, it was not specified by Gould et al. (2008) whether the coaches perceived certain parent behaviours as negative because they impacted on the player or on the coach themselves. Further research is therefore required to understand how interactions between parents and coaches are perceived by coaches to impact on the coaching process.

Studies that employed questionnaire designs to investigate the effects of parenting practices on child outcomes have reported incongruence between parents' self-reported behaviour and children' perceptions of these behaviours, highlighting that children's perceptions of what parents do are important to understanding children's psychological responses to parent practices (e.g. Wuerth et al., 2004; Babkes & Weiss, 1999). Responding to this finding, researchers have used qualitative methods to explore children's preferences for parenting practices in sport (Knight, Boden & Holt, 2010; Knight, Neely & Holt, 2011; Omli & Wiese-Bjornstal, 2011). These studies identified the specific parental behaviours

before, during and after competitions that young individual and team sport players perceived as either helpful or hindering, concluding that children wanted their parents to be involved, but in a supportive, rather than pressurising manner. For example, female Canadian team sport players (aged 12 to 15 years) in the specialising stage of sport development wanted their parents to help them prepare physically and mentally before competitions (Knight et al., 2011). During matches, players preferred parents to encourage and praise the effort of the whole team and keep their emotions under control, rather than behaving in an embarrassing or distracting manner, or trying to coach the team. After competitions, players liked to receive balanced and honest individual feedback from parents. Knight et al. (2011) concluded by recommending that parents reflected on whether their behaviours matched those favoured by their child and postulating that by adjusting behaviours to meet child preferences, players may view their parent's practices more positively.

Together, this literature has described detailed examples of parental practices in sport settings. However, there has been a tendency to present research findings in list formats, identifying what parents should or should not do to effectively facilitate their child's development in sport (e.g. Gould et al., 2008; Knight et al., 2011; Lauer et al., 2010b). This reflects a deterministic view of parenting, which assumes that child outcomes are directly determined by the actions of their parents (Furedi, 2002). Moreover, this distances parenting from its relational context, failing to recognise that parents can modify their behaviours in response to their child, and instead constructs parenting as a set of tasks to be achieved in order to parent effectively (Grusec & Davidov, 2010; Faircloth et al., 2013). Illustrating the problematic nature of this assumption, despite gathering a comprehensive picture of parenting behaviours from young athletes in the sampling and specialising stage in team and individual sports, Keegan et al. (2009; 2010) were unable to associate practices with a consistent effect on athletes' motivations, attributing this to the various contextual, interpersonal and intrapersonal factors which moderate the influence of specific parental behaviours on child outcomes.

The focus on explicating specific parenting practices has made an important contribution to understanding the role of parents in youth sport and how this may change over time. However, the extent to which descriptive lists of behaviours reflect parents' unique, everyday experiences of supporting a child to participate in sport is unclear. Or, from a practical perspective, whether these are useful pedagogical tools for parents, or merely function to regulate behaviour. The distinction between parenting which is "good" and "bad", "positive" and "negative", or "appropriate" and "inappropriate" – language which pervade

studies of youth sport parents' behaviour – creates expectations which are assumed to be applicable to all parents, in all situations, and constructs a dichotomy from which others can assess and judge parents. This is underpinned by the recommendations often made by authors that there is a need to educate parents to enhance awareness of their behaviours and the impact of these on their child (e.g. Bowker et al., 2009; Gould et al., 2008; Knight et al., 2011).

Acknowledging this limitation, Wiersma and Fifer (2008) recommended that theoretical links between parent and child behaviours should be supplemented with research that seeks to understand why or how parents adopt certain behaviours. An alternative approach to studying parenting in youth sport, therefore, is to focus on understanding the experiences of parents themselves.

**Parental Experience Research in Youth Sport**

Exploring the subjective experiences of parents can shed light on how parents perceive their role and what being a 'sport parent' means to individuals. This approach can illuminate the complexity of parental influence by considering parenting involvement in the context of the parent-child relationship and the sport setting. For Goodnow and Collins (1990 p.10), a focus on parents is essential:

> For us an exclusively child-centred focus is limited. Child development is not the whole of developmental psychology. Moreover parents are interesting in their own right. Their experiences, satisfactions and development are topics to be explored without any necessity to justify the exploration on the grounds of effects on children.

Although it is important not to discount children's experiences, understanding how parents interpret and make sense of their child's sport participation can identify ways in which parents' experiences can be enhanced (Knight & Holt, 2013a). For example, in-depth descriptions of how a parent experiences their role can encourage coaches and practitioners to empathise with the demands of being a sport parent (Harwood et al., 2010; Harwood & Knight, 2009a; 2009b). Research that has investigated parental experiences in sport has provided detailed insight into what it is like for parents (Dorsch et al., 2009; Harwood et al., 2010; Harwood & Knight, 2009a; 2009b; Wiersma & Fifer, 2008). However, only a small number of studies have thus far examined first-person accounts of parental experiences, meaning parents' voices in youth sport research are currently underrepresented. In particular, research in elite youth sport contexts is limited by the specific focus on exploring parental

experiences of stress (Harwood et al., 2010; Harwood & Knight, 2009a; 2009b).

**Parental experiences of satisfaction and stress.** In one of the few studies that cite giving parents a voice in the purpose of their research, Wiersma and Fifer (2008) held focus group interviews to understand parental involvement in youth sport from the parent's perspective. Participants for this study were recruited from American organised youth sport leagues. Parents described the satisfaction they experienced from the increased opportunity to interact with their child and the vicarious experience of observing their child learning, enjoying, and being successful in sport. They recognised that their children were developing a wide range of life skills from their sport participation (e.g. self-confidence, sportsmanship and teamwork); reflecting a view of sport as a vehicle for preparing children for their adult lives. Coakley (2006) and Kay (2009) both suggested that the cultural belief that sport automatically promotes positive developmental experiences means that parents can feel they have successfully met their responsibilities as parents by supporting their child's involvement in sport – illustrating the influence of wider societal expectations on parents' experiences. Wiersma and Fifer (2008) also outlined the difficulties parents faced, including providing effective emotional support to their child in challenging situations (such as dealing with injury or a lack of motivation) and helping young athletes cope with the demands of their sport. These findings suggest that parents were aware of the roles they performed to support their child's development in sport. Consequently, the authors proposed that parent education needs to move beyond merely explaining the parenting practices associated with positive youth outcomes in sport and focus on helping parents address specific challenges such as handling child disappointment and self-regulating behaviour in competitive environments.

Wiersma and Fifer's (2008) study described the experiences of parents' involvement in the sampling stage of youth sport. Parents whose children are in the specialising or investment stages may have a different perspective on their role and how it has changed as their child's involvement in sport has increased. Parental experiences across the sampling, specialising and investment development stages of sport have been explored by examining parental stress in youth football and tennis (Harwood et al., 2010; Harwood & Knight, 2009a, 2009b). These studies identified a range of stressors that parents experienced in relation to the development stage of their child.

Harwood et al. (2010) explored the stressors experienced by parents of elite young male footballers in the early (aged 8 to 11 years) and late phase (aged 12 to 15 years) of the specialising stage of development. Organisational, competitive and developmental dimensions of stress were presented from a series of focus group interviews with parents.

Stressors related to academy processes, in particular a perceived lack of communication and feedback on their child's progress, were a prominent aspect of parents' everyday experience, which meant parents felt unable to assist their son's football development. In addition, late phase specialising stage parents experienced uncertainty in regards to their child's performance in matches, which Harwood et al. postulated as reflective of the increased focus on older players retaining their place in the academy squad (see chapter one p.5). Parents across the focus groups discussed how the time and financial demands of their child's football commitments impacted on their family routines and lifestyle. For example, parents with other children described feeling guilty about not giving equal attention to their children, a finding which was corroborated in Harwood and Knight's (2009a) study of parents of young tennis players. This emphasises the importance of understanding parenting within the family context. In addition, as there were stressors unique to parents in football and tennis; for example uncertainty over player deselection was encountered by football parents (Harwood et al., 2010); these studies also highlighted the need to understand parents' experiences in the context of the specific youth sport culture. This research called on practitioners to empathise with parents and the difficulties involved in supporting a young athlete. Some parents described how they had learnt to cope through experience, whereas others felt they had been unable to develop sufficient resources to deal with role related stress (Harwood et al., 2010; Harwood & Knight, 2009a). Informing parents earlier about the emotional demands of youth sport and the stage-specific stressors they may encounter could therefore help to better support parents.

Studies which solely examine parental experiences of stress may not fully explore the meaning of being a parent in sport to individuals, but nonetheless have illustrated some of the complexities and challenges involved in supporting elite young athletes and players. For elite youth football, this means that an in-depth account of the everyday experiences and meanings of parenting in this setting is missing from the literature.

**Factors influencing parental experiences.** Research which has explicated parenting styles and practices in youth sport has often overlooked the social and subcultural context in which these behaviours occur (see chapter one p.4). In addition to understanding what it is like for parents, a focus on parental experiences allows for an interpretation of why parents may adopt certain behaviours and how this is shaped by the interpersonal relationships and cultural practices within the youth sport context. The influence of interaction with significant others and contextual factors on parents' experiences has begun to be explored within the literature.

From interviews with groups of parents of children aged 6 to 15 years involved in organised team sport summer programmes in America, Dorsch et al. (2009) illustrated that parents' behaviour, cognition and affect changed in response to their child's participation in sport. Parents described how they had adapted their own goals to their child's; altering the importance they placed on their child's sport participation, and experienced pride, anger and embarrassment as a result of their child's performances, but had learnt to adjust their reactions to matches in response to emotional cues from their child (Dorsch et al., 2009). This study illustrated how children can influence parents' experiences in sport; a finding which has been supported by Knight and Holt (2013a), who identified that children's performances, on-court behaviours and emotional reactions to matches affected parents' experiences of watching junior tennis tournaments, and were in fact a source of stress for some parents (Harwood & Knight, 2009a; 2009b).

Relationships with parent peers have been identified as a common feature of youth sport parenting experiences. Previous research has indicated that parents valued the support and social networking offered by peers, but could experience feelings of exclusion when cliques formed, were acutely aware of the impressions of their peers, and judged other parents who were not perceived to provide appropriate support (Dorsch et al., 2009; Knight & Holt, 2013a; Trussell & Shaw, 2012). These exploratory, interview studies point toward the significance of interactions with significant others in sport settings, but did not explicitly examine parents' experiences of social interaction within the scope of their research.

By aiming to identify the factors which impacted upon parents' experiences at youth sport competitions, the influence of contextual factors on parents' experiences has also been highlighted. Watching a child participate in a sport event can be an emotional experience for parents, increasingly so as parents invest more in their child's sport over time (Dorsch et al., 2009). Holt et al. (2008) observed that parents' emotions at youth football matches were intensified by contextual factors including crowd segregation, sideline disputes and the game situation, which in turn influenced the nature of their sideline comments (see also chapter one p.14). Similarly, from an analysis of parents' accounts of "a time when you became angry during a sport event that your child was participating in", Omli and LaVoi (2012 p.13) highlighted that parents (of athletes aged 5 to 19 years) experienced anger in situations when behaviours of the coach, referee, athlete or other parents were perceived to be unjust, uncaring or incompetent. These studies suggest that situational triggers can influence parents' behaviour and emotions when watching their child perform.

Dorsch et al. (2009) recommended that future parenting research include the sport

context within its focus. Although studies have highlighted contextual influences on parents' experience of watching their child perform in competition (e.g. Holt et al., 2008; Omli & LaVoi, 2012) and of stress (Harwood et al., 2010; Harwood & Knight, 2009a; 2009b), a broader investigation of the influence of the sport setting on parents' experiences presents a gap in the literature. Therefore, in order to address the limitations of the existing literature, and enhance understanding of the influence of the social and cultural context on parenting in youth sport, chapter three presents an exploration of parenting experiences in the context of elite youth football.

**Children in Youth Sport Parenting Research**

As the parental experiences literature has begun to illustrate, youth sport parenting can be understood as a social process, shaped by interaction with significant others within the specific sport context. In consideration of the dynamic nature of relationships between parents and children, and that children interpret and attach meaning to interactions with their parents, it is vital to include children in parenting research (Jeanes, 2009; Mayall, 2002; Piggott, 2010). Listening to and representing young people's voice in research (and in practice) is essential to ensure children are not reduced to being "seen but not heard" in sport (Pitchford et al., 2004 p.43). However, first-person accounts of children's experience of interactions with parents within specific sport contexts are rare.

One method of investigating children's experience of interactions with parents in sport has been to look at the relationship between young athletes' psychological constructs and their perceptions of parenting. For example, studies using quantitative methods and cross-sectional correlational designs, have found significant positive relationships between parental presence at matches and pre-competitive anxiety in young tennis players (Bois et al., 2009), between perceived parent-initiated worry conducive motivational climate and poor hockey behaviours (LaVoi & Babkes-Stellino, 2008) and between children's enjoyment of football and perceived parental positive beliefs about their football competence (Babkes & Weiss, 1999). This research has increased understanding of the effect of parental behaviours on child outcomes, but methodologically has limited children's experiences to certain psychological constructs (e.g. anxiety, motivation, enjoyment) and restricted children's responses to predetermined questionnaire items. Furthermore, studies of this nature are underpinned by the assumptions of developmental psychology, which has been criticised for positioning children as 'unfinished' adults and objects of socialisation efforts, and for its focus on factors that lead to good and bad child outcomes (Burman, 1994; Mayall, 2002). This approach largely ignores the social and subcultural context in which parent-child

interactions occur and does not acknowledge the role children play in constructing their own world (Jeanes, 2009).

Moving away from the traditional developmental psychology and socialisation research, sociologists have argued for understanding children as competent social actors, who should be studied "in the present not only in relation to their future" (Brannen & O'Brien, 1996 p.xi), rather than as incomplete adults and passive recipients of adults' socialisation efforts. This approach therefore recommends that it is crucial to understand how children interpret and make sense of their worlds in their own right, and to seek their views on their position within families and issues that affect them (Jeanes, 2009; Mayall, 2002; Piggott, 2010). Yet children's agency in the parenting process continues to be a neglected area of research (Faircloth et al., 2013).

Researchers in sport psychology have begun to investigate parent-child interactions from the child's perspective, by exploring their preferences for parenting behaviours at youth sport competitions (Knight et al., 2010; 2011; Omli & Wiese-Bjornstal, 2011; see chapter one p.16). Although there were patterns in athletes' preferences for their parents' behaviours, variations between individual children also existed. For example, team sport players generally wanted their parents to help them prepare mentally for competitions, but while some liked their parents to help them feel confident, others preferred not to talk about games with their parents beforehand (Knight et al., 2011). The timing of parents' actions also affected how children responded, suggesting that for practices to be positively received parents needed to appreciate their child's individual preferences, such as knowing when their child liked to receive feedback after games (Knight et al., 2011).

These findings highlighted how individual children interpreted parenting behaviours differently, and importantly contributed to representing children's voices in research (Knight et al., 2010; 2011; Omli & Wiese-Bjornstal, 2011). However, these studies were limited by a narrow focus on parent behaviours at sport competitions. Children also interact with their parents during training and practice, as well as at home. Therefore, an approach that examines perceptions of parents' behaviours at competitions only represents a limited aspect of children's experience. Furthermore, this research is underpinned by the assumption that parenting behaviours can be universally constructed as either positive or negative (or preferred or not preferred), which raises the question of whether the purpose of such research is to represent children's preferences and views, or to produce knowledge designed to regulate and change parents' behaviours in sport.

Exploring how children experience interactions with their parents can allow a deeper

understanding of parent-child relationships (Mayall, 2002) and provides an alternative to studying children's perceptions of parenting practices. Although not an explicit aim of their research, findings from a series of studies exploring the positive and negative experiences of Canadian adolescent competitive swimmers offered some insight into how children experience interaction with parents in sport settings (Fraser-Thomas & Côté, 2009; Fraser-Thomas, Côté & Deakin, 2008a; 2008b). Young athletes (aged 14 to 18 years) described that participation in swimming provided the opportunity to bond and develop close relationships with their parents, through travelling together and sharing the highs and lows of competition (Fraser-Thomas & Côté, 2009). When considering quitting swimming, children (who later withdrew from competitive swimming) experienced pressure to continue to be as successful as their parent had been, or because they had access to opportunities that their parents had not had (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2008b). This suggests that family history can influence how children interpret their interaction with parents. Also investigating the experiences of adolescent swimmers, but with a focus on perceptions of social support availability, Hassell, Sabiston and Bloom (2010) highlighted how the tangible support provided by parents contributed to swimmer's self-worth as it meant they felt loved and valued. Yet this support was also interpreted as a source of pressure when swimmers experienced guilt over the demands required of their families, highlighting the complex meanings that children attached to parents' supportive behaviours.

In summary, research that has focused on quantitatively examining the relationship between young athletes' psychological constructs and perceptions of parenting, through cross-sectional correlational study designs, has largely overlooked the influence of the family context and institutional norms and values of the sport setting in which parent-child interactions occur, and positioned children as passive objects of socialisation efforts. Alternatively, studies have begun to explore how children interpret their interaction with parents in more depth using qualitative methods. Currently this area of research is limited by its focus on adolescent athlete populations and individual sport settings (with the exception of Knight et al., 2011 who explored preferences for parenting at team sport competitions) and has predominately been undertaken in North America (Fraser-Thomas & Côté, 2009; Fraser-Thomas et al., 2008a; 2008b; Hassell et al., 2010; Knight et al., 2010; 2011), meaning the question of whether findings have resonance outside of this culture remains. Therefore, there is a paucity of research which explores children's first-person accounts of parent-child interactions in different sport contexts. Chapter four of this thesis addresses this gap in the literature by examining children's subjective experiences of parenting and the meaning they

attach to interactions with their parents, in the context of English elite youth football.

**Parent-child Relationships in Youth Sport**

The interest in delineating parental involvement which promotes positive child outcomes in sport means that a focus on understanding parent-child relationships from a dyadic perspective in this domain has been neglected. A limited number of studies have to date presented findings describing the nature of parent-child relationships (Dorsch et al., 2009: Kay, 2009; Lauer et al., 2010a). Although the parent-child relationship was not explicitly examined by Dorsch et al. (2009; see chapter one p.21), parents described how their involvement in their child's sport participation provided the opportunity for additional and enhanced communication, which led to a perceived higher quality parent-child relationship. Relationships were described as fluid and dynamic, as friction between parent and child could also be encountered. Dorsch et al. (2009) concluded by recommending that the quality of the relationship and the youth sport context where the relationship exists should be considered in future sport parenting research.

Examining the extent to which fathers can fulfil contemporary expectations of fathering through youth sport, Kay (2009) highlighted that fathers perceived that their son's participation in junior grassroots football provided an opportunity to develop a shared interest and connect emotionally with their sons. Football was an activity through which fathers could become more involved with their son's lives and experience "male bonding" (p.114). As none of the participants had any prior direct involvement with football, Kay (2009) interpreted that fathers became involved through their desire to be a good parent and develop an involved and emotionally close relationship with their son – reflecting the prevalent societal expectations for fathering (Dermott, 2003; Henwood & Procter, 2003). This illustrates the influence of cultural constructions of parenting on the meanings parents attach to their relationships with their child.

In a retrospective interview study, Lauer et al. (2010a) identified that parents, through their behaviours, facilitated smooth, difficult or turbulent development pathways for young tennis players. Although many of the observations made in this study focused on parenting behaviours and the impact of these on player outcomes, other findings reflected aspects of the parent-child relationship. For example, the presence of frequent or unresolved conflict (arising from parents' desire to control the tennis experience, or players failing to respond to parents' advice) led to strained relationships and regret in later years, with some players perceiving that parents' love and support were conditional on tennis success. This highlights the importance of understanding how conflict within the parent-child relationship is

experienced and negotiated by *both* parents and players. Exploring parent-child interactions in the present, rather than retrospectively, may also contribute to extending knowledge of this relationship in sport.

The predominant focus on parenting involvement and associated child outcomes in youth sport has meant an understanding of parent-child relationships in this setting is missing from extant literature. Research has begun to describe aspects of this relationship, highlighting that relationship quality, the youth sport context in which interactions occur, and both parents' and players' experiences of interaction should be considered in future research (Dorsch et al., 2009: Kay, 2009; Lauer et al., 2010a), yet an examination of the parent-child relationship in youth sport was not a specific aim of these studies. Therefore, chapter five of this thesis presents an exploration of children's and parents' experience of their relationship, in the context of elite youth football.

**Parent-coach Relationships in Youth Sport**

Youth sport coaches play a pivotal role in the development of young athletes and players and can shape children's experiences in sport settings (e.g. Poczwardowski et al., 2006). Coaching is recognised as an inherently social, culturally-embedded process (Jones, Armour & Potrac, 2002). Interaction between coaches and parents, therefore, forms part of the complex social-cultural context of youth sport. Research has demonstrated that parents and coaches can reciprocally influence each other's experiences (Harwood et al., 2010; Harwood & Knight, 2009a; 2009b; Knight & Holt, 2013a; Omli & LaVoi, 2012) and that parent-coach interaction can impact upon children's development and experiences (Jowett & Timson-Katchis, 2005; Wolfenden & Holt, 2005; Lauer et al., 2010a). This indicates that coaches should not be overlooked in research which seeks to understand parenting in youth sport settings.

Research has predominantly problematised the parent-coach relationship, emphasising the negative aspects of parent-coach interaction and the potential consequences for player development (Holt & Knight, 2014). For example, from focus group interviews with 70 sampling, specialising and investment stage tennis coaches, Knight and Harwood (2009) identified that coaches experienced a range of stressors from their interactions with parents. Coaches described experiencing stress arising from the perceived negative effect of parents on player development, as if parents inhibited players from improving, coaches could appear less effective professionally. Yet in tennis, coaches' livelihoods depended on parents' willingness to pay for their child's coaching, which meant they also encountered stress related to providing a service that met parents' expectations. Furthermore, disagreements

over squad selection and a child's ability were complicated by a perceived lack of trust and respect for coaches' role and expertise. These findings indicate that in youth tennis, coaches experienced conflict with parents in regards to their respective roles related to player development.

These tensions appear to be present in elite youth football settings too. Parental support was identified by coaches (experienced in facilitating the development of players who transitioned to the professional level) as integral to successful player progression into full-time football (Mills et al., 2012). Supportive parents were described by coaches in interviews as "low maintenance" (p.1600). These parents were seen to trust the coaches' methods, not be over-involved and provide appropriate emotional and tangible support to their son. Contrastingly, parents could be perceived as detrimental to the player development process if they held unreasonable expectations of success, exerted pressure on their son, provided inappropriate coaching advice or lived vicariously through their child. Coaches also cited that conflict arose when parents interpreted that their son was underperforming, suggesting that interaction between parents and coaches may be influenced by their respective perceptions of players' ability. These findings were supported by Holt and Dunn's (2004) grounded theory study of player competencies associated with success in the professional development phase of elite football (in England and Canada), which identified parental social support as a factor associated with success in this phase, and oppositely, parental pressure as a potential obstacle. Again, the perception of parents living vicariously through their child was discussed, as illustrated by an English football academy coach:

> Parents push too much. Parents will push and push and push, and if you just watch youngsters playing on a Saturday, it's the parents just wanting to live their life through them. (Holt & Dunn, 2004 p.211)

Notably, in Mills et al.'s (2012) research, the coaches' responses reflected positive or negative perceptions of both parent-player interactions and parent-coach interactions, indicating that the relationship between parents and coaches itself was perceived as important to player development.

The significance of the parent-coach relationship to coaches' experiences has also been highlighted. Using Goffman's (1959) concept of performativity to interpret the behaviours of elite youth football coaches, Partington and Cushion (2012) described how coaches' perception of parents' expectations of coaches meant that they presented an idealised impression of coaching when in front of parents. For example, interjecting during

matches was used to ‘perform’ coaching to the ‘audience’ of parents, players and other coaches to demonstrate that coaching was taking place. Coaches perceived that their performance affected parents’ opinion of them; less experienced coaches strived to look and act “like a ‘traditional’ coach” (p.101) to be accepted by parents and gain professional respect.

From the parents’ perspective, in Harwood et al.’s (2010) study of parental stress in elite youth football, interaction with coaches was cited as a common source of tension. Parents struggled to accept coaching practices which prioritised player development over winning and felt that their role in supporting their child was not acknowledged or appreciated by coaches. Although parents expressed some empathy toward the role of coaches, in particular in regard to the decisions coaches were required to make about player retention, this did not counteract the tension between parents and coaches that arose from the academy practice of releasing players who were deemed by coaches not to have met performance standards on a yearly basis (see chapter one p.5). Parents perceived that they were unlikely to receive forewarning from coaches if their son was going to be released, meaning they experienced limited control to be able to prepare their son. The perceived lack of feedback from coaches on their child’s progress heightened parents’ uncertainty. These findings highlighted how the systems and practices of football academies can contribute to conflict in the parent-coach relationship.

In summary, research has indicated the presence of underlying tension within the parent-coach relationship – both depend on each other in the youth sport setting, yet both are evaluating and judging each other by their own set of (sometimes conflicting) expectations for roles and behaviours. Given the complex, dynamic and interdependent nature of this relationship (Jones et al., 2002), it is essential that research considers how this influences parenting in youth sport settings. Therefore, chapter six of this thesis presents an analysis of parent-coach relationships in elite youth football.

**Summary and Research Approach**

Parents have a unique influence in the sporting lives of children and are an enduring feature of the youth sport landscape. Existing youth sport parenting research has made an important contribution to understanding the types of roles that parents adopt to support their children’s participation in sport, and the complexities and challenges involved in being a ‘sport parent’. However, current research is limited by the dominant focus on identifying optimal parenting involvement which enhances child outcomes, meaning there is a lack of research which explores how parenting is experienced as a personal, social-cultural

phenomenon. Specifically, an in-depth understanding of how parenting is experienced within elite youth sport settings has not been considered in current research. In addition, first-person accounts of children's experiences of their interaction and relationship with parents are missing from the youth sport literature. To address these limitations, the purpose of the present research was to explore the phenomenon of parenting in elite youth football. By understanding parenting as a dynamic, social, culturally-embedded process, this research aims to offer a more nuanced perspective of parenting in elite youth football and contribute to knowledge which can be used to inform initiatives designed to facilitate positive experiences for parents, players and coaches in football.

Given that little is known about parenting in elite youth football, it is relevant to first seek a rich, detailed description and understanding of parents' and players' experiences. A phenomenological approach was therefore selected for this research. Phenomenological research aims to understand how the social and material world is experienced by people in particular bodies, in particular places, at particular times – as lived – rather than trying to describe a world as separate from people experiencing it. Like other qualitative approaches, phenomenology is interested in exploring the meanings people attach to their experiences. However, rather than meaning being created through a cognitive process, or as a response to a behaviour, phenomenology assumes that meaning is constructed from within the relationship between a person and their world. This dissolves the view of subject (person) and object (world) as distinct and separate from each other. In doing so, phenomenology places social interaction and the cultural context at the heart of the research endeavour, while retaining the assumption that people are conscious beings, who actively construct their world. Accordingly, this research explores how participants' experiences shape, and are shaped by the personal, social and cultural context of elite youth football. In this thesis, experience refers to participants' subjective, lived-experience of the phenomenon under investigation; parenting in elite youth football.

# CHAPTER TWO: Methodology

This chapter details the methodological and theoretical positioning of the research in this thesis. Given the variety of approaches to phenomenological research, I begin by outlining the key tenets of phenomenology and explaining the position that I have adopted within this tradition, so that the reader may understand the decisions that were made during the research process. The theoretical frameworks that guided the interpretation of data, and the philosophical assumptions which underpin these are then described, to explain how knowledge was constructed. Next, the methods section details the recruitment of participants, data collection techniques and ethical procedures used in this research, followed by a discussion of how I endeavoured to enhance research quality. Finally, acknowledging my role in the research process as a "passionate participant" (Sparkes & Smith, 2014 p.10), I provide some personal reflections on the research process.

## Phenomenology

> Back to the 'things themselves' (Husserl, 1970 p.168).

A phenomenological methodology involves the adaptation and application of the phenomenological philosophy originally developed by Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) to research. As a philosophy, phenomenology is concerned with the study of experience and understanding the nature of phenomena by focusing on the intentional relationship between a person's consciousness and the object (phenomenon) to which it is directed (Giorgi, 2009). The notion of intentionality is crucial to phenomenological work, as it assumes that our consciousness is always directed towards *something* and that experience is interpretative. Phenomenology therefore rejects the subject-object dualism that underpins traditional positivist and post-positivist psychological research, and instead seeks to explore how the world, or 'things' appear to people, from the perspective of a co-constitutive relationship between person and world. As Merleau-Ponty in his influential work, the *Phenomenology of Perception* (1962 p.499-500), explains:

> The world is inseparable from the subject, but from a subject which is nothing but a project of the world, and the subject is inseparable from the world, but from a world which the subject itself projects.

This thesis explores how the phenomenon of parenting in elite youth football appears to parents and players, and how meaning is constructed through the intentional relationship between participants and this phenomenon.

**Phenomenological Psychology**

Phenomenological researchers share a commitment to understanding people's experience in the world, yet there are many variations in how researchers apply phenomenological philosophy to the study of psychology. Each variation entails different epistemological and ontological assumptions, emphases on the aspects of experience the researcher attends to, and positions on the role of the researcher. Therefore it is important that researchers clearly articulate their position within the tradition.

In this thesis I have drawn from a number of phenomenological psychology frameworks. The diverse array of approaches to phenomenological research allows the most appropriate methods to be selected for the specific research question. As Garza (2007 p.338) notes, "[t]he flexibility of phenomenological research and the adaptability of its methods to ever widening arcs of inquiry is one of its greatest strengths". However, there are key features of this tradition that without which a methodology may be considered more 'phenomenologically inspired' rather than phenomenological (Finlay, 2009). These are; the adoption of a *phenomenological attitude* (including the practices of bracketing, reduction, and horizontalisation) and a commitment to description (Allen-Collinson, 2009; Finlay, 2009; 2014; Langdridge, 2007; 2008; Spinelli, 2005). It is the engagement with these techniques which differentiates the phenomenological tradition from other qualitative approaches which seek to explore experience and subjective meaning. These will be briefly described to enable the reader to judge for themselves whether the research presented in this thesis is indeed 'phenomenological'.

**The phenomenological attitude.** This describes the endeavour to be continually open to different ways of understanding phenomenon throughout the research process. Finlay (2014 p.122) has described the phenomenological attitude as "seeing afresh"; meaning researchers must embrace the challenge of finding ways to make the familiar, unfamiliar. The bracketing (or epoché) process involves the researcher setting aside the *natural attitude* (the everyday view and taken-for-granted assumptions about the world) to remain open to things in their appearing. This entails being aware of, and aiming to put aside as much as possible, presuppositions of scientific theories, knowledge and explanations about the world and the phenomenon under investigation, and personal views and experiences of the researcher (Ashworth, 1996). Within this research, participating in a bracketing interview and keeping a research diary facilitated this process and are described on p.43. Although Husserl's notion of bracketing completely to achieve a transcendental 'God's eye view' of phenomena has been widely criticised, as we cannot stand outside our historical and cultural selves, it does

encourage a more self-critical and reflexive approach to research (Allen-Collinson, 2009).

An essential part of undertaking phenomenological research is performing the reduction, which requires the researcher to stay meticulously close to how participants present their experience and ensure that descriptions are still recognisable following any interpretation. Using the practice of horizontalisation, researchers aim to treat all aspects of experience with equal significance and avoid creating hierarchies of meaning in the early analytical stages (Langdridge, 2007; Spinelli, 2005). Line-by-line data analysis was a technique used in this thesis to avoid privileging some data over others. Including an initial descriptive stage of coding ensured interpretations were grounded in participants' experiences and did not move beyond the data (see chapter three p.53, chapter four p.81, chapter five p.108 and chapter six p.142).

**Description.** Phenomenological accounts aim to provide rich, textured, detailed descriptions of people's lived-experience of phenomena, to understand more about how the world appears and what it means to people. The most informative descriptions are those which illuminate *how* the phenomena is experienced, rather than simply reporting what participants say about a phenomena (Dahlberg, Dahlberg & Nyström, 2008). The goal of producing rich descriptions of people's experiences is, therefore, to "understand them in new, subtle and different ways and then use this new knowledge to make a difference to the lived world of ourselves and others" (Langdridge, 2007 p.9). In this thesis, participants' descriptions of how parenting in elite youth football was experienced as lived are presented, interpreted and considered in relation to the potential implications for future research and applied practice in this area. The theoretical, methodological and practical implications arising from this research are discussed in the concluding chapter of this thesis (see p.163).

**The Phenomenological Positioning of this Thesis**

I began by following a descriptive, or empirical phenomenological approach in chapter three (see p.51); a branch of phenomenology developed by Amedeo Giorgi, heavily influenced by the philosophy of Husserl (Giorgi, 2009; Giorgi & Giorgi, 2008a; 2008b). Descriptive phenomenological research seeks to identify the essential, invariant qualities of experience – or essences of the phenomenon – that "make a phenomenon what it is and without which the phenomenon could not be what it is" (van Manen, 1990 p.107), and to produce a general structure of the essences. The focus on examining first-person accounts to describe (rather than explain) phenomena meant that this approach was a suitable starting point for studying the experience of parenting in elite youth football, as the descriptive stage of sport parenting research has been somewhat neglected (see chapter one p.6). Description is

fundamental to any scientific enquiry in order to achieve a detailed understanding of what is happening before researchers can build theory and attempt to explain phenomena (Sandelowski, 2000; 2010).

In recognising the limitations of descriptive phenomenology, I adopted an existential phenomenological approach for the research presented in chapters four and five of this thesis (see p.73 and p.105 respectively). The commitment of descriptive phenomenology to produce a general structure of the essences of phenomena means the capacity to represent individual variations in the meanings individuals attach to their experience is limited. The differences in how participants experienced being the parent of an elite youth footballer presented in chapter three (p.55), highlighted the problematic nature of this assumption. Indeed, Ashworth (2003a; 2003b) argued that researchers should set aside the assumption that a general structure of phenomena is attainable, in favour of a more idiographic approach. Moreover, Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), who built upon Husserl's original phenomenological philosophy, asserted that empirical research can only ever reveal expressions of the nature of being (the *ontic*) rather that the essential structures of existence (the *ontological*) – a position that underpins existential phenomenology. It was only through philosophy he claimed, that the ontological status of existence could be understood. As such, various phenomenological philosophers have delineated this fundamental structure of existence, conceptually in terms of *Dasein*, meaning being-in-the-world (Heidegger, 1962), or the *lifeworld* (Ashworth, 2003a; 2003b; van Manen, 1990), emphasising features such as temporality (the lived-sense of past, present and future), relationality (our experience in relation to other people) and discourse (how meaning is expressed through language). Therefore, in chapters four and five, existential phenomenology, guided by Ashworth's lifeworld approach (2003a; 2003b), was used to explore participants' phenomenological descriptions in relation to universal ontological features assumed to underpin all lived-experience, and enhance understanding of how the phenomenon of parenting in elite youth football was lived.

**The Role of Interpretation and Theory**

The tension between description and interpretation has been discussed and debated at length by phenomenologists, in part due to the criticism levelled at phenomenological research that it is too descriptive to offer anything of substance to psychology (see Finlay, 2009; Langdridge, 2007; 2008; Spinelli, 2005). Giorgi (2012 p.6) differentiates between description as "the use of language to articulate the intentional objects of experience" and interpretation as "the adoption of a non-given factor to help account for what is given in experience". Giorgi argues for a version of phenomenology that remains focused at the

descriptive level (while recognising that a form of reflection is still involved in producing general structures of experience) and resists the imposition of any external theoretical frameworks. Alternatively, more interpretative approaches have been developed which align with the existential perspective of Heidegger (e.g. Ashworth, 2003a; 2003b; van Manen, 1990), claiming that there can be no description without interpretation, as all understanding is historically and culturally situated.

Others have proposed that description and interpretation can be viewed as a continuum (e.g. Finlay, 2009; Langdridge, 2008) and I adopt the position that description and interpretation can be viewed as complementary, rather than mutually exclusive. Following Langdridge's (2007; 2008) interpretation of Ricouer's (1970) concept of *hermeneutics* (meaning interpretation) to phenomenological social psychology, in this thesis I moved dialectically between describing and interpreting people's lived-experiences to illuminate the phenomena of parenting in elite youth football. Firstly, a hermeneutic of *faith* or *meaning-recollection* was engaged in, which aimed to identify and highlight meanings from participants' descriptions, by bringing an empathetic understanding and respect to the content of experiential accounts. This grounded analysis in descriptive phenomenological terms, as I sought to "render the implicit explicit" (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2008b p.45). Following this, a hermeneutic of *suspicion* was applied, which involved interpreting the function of participants' accounts and offering a critical perspective on how wider social and political influences may have influenced what was said and when, through the application of different theoretical frameworks to the data, which are described below (Langdridge, 2007; 2008). This enabled a more complex, multi-layered understanding of participants' lived-experiences to be constructed. By moving flexibly within and between the hermeneutic interpretations, I ensured that participants' descriptions were still recognisable following analysis.

Specifically, my interpretations were influenced by a range of phenomenological theories, most notably Merleau-Ponty's (1962) work on the role of the body in constituting experience (for examples see chapter three p.68 and chapter four p.93). For Merleau-Ponty, the body is our "point of view upon the world" (p.81), which is pre-reflective and permanently present. He suggests, therefore, that it is the intentional relationship between a person's embodied consciousness, situated in a particular space and time, and the world which allows us to create meaning. Drawing upon Merleau-Ponty's writing, Ashworth (2003a; 2003b) described seven essential, universal features or 'fractions' of the lifeworld, which I used as a heuristic device to enrich analysis and critically examine how experiences – which may be imbued with power and politics – are lived (see chapter four p.80 and chapter

five p.108). The seven lifeworld fractions are;

- selfhood (what the phenomenon means for social identity, agency and voice);
- sociality (how the phenomenon affects relations with others);
- embodiment (the role of the body in experiencing the phenomenon, including gender and emotion);
- temporality (the lived-sense of past, present and future);
- spatiality (meanings of space and place in relation to the phenomenon);
- project (how the phenomenon affects people's ability to pursue life activities); and
- discourse (how language is drawn upon to describe the phenomenon).

As the influence of social interaction and institutional power in shaping the experiences available to participants became more apparent through my phenomenological interpretations, I attended more explicitly to understanding the role of language and discourse in constituting experience. In particular, I drew upon Michel Foucault's (1926-1984) theory of the body as a site for the expression of power relations, specifically his ideas in relation to bio-power and the social control of bodies (Foucault, 1978; 1982; see chapter four p.94, chapter five p.122 and chapter six p.139).

**Philosophical Assumptions**

This thesis is located within a constructivist paradigm (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011) and commits to the multiple and constructed nature of reality. The phenomenological interest in existence as it is experienced is founded on the ontological assumption that the world comes into being through the intentional relationship between a person's consciousness and phenomena. People are therefore conscious beings, whose experiences, and the meanings attached to those experiences, are individually interpreted and shaped by their social, cultural and historical backgrounds. From an existential phenomenological perspective, it is further assumed that there are essential, universal features of existence which underpin all experience, and that individual ways of being are particular expressions of these universal 'givens' (Heidegger, 1962; Spinelli, 2005).

Although this research was guided by the assumption that there are ontological features common to all experiences, it is not claimed that it is possible to uncover this structure through empirical research, or that experience reflects an underlying reality, subscribing instead to a relativist epistemological position. Considering participants' accounts of experiences in relation to these features offers one way of enhancing understanding of how individuals interpret and make sense of their lives, while avoiding reducing experience to a

predetermined ontological structure.

In addition, the notion of *multi-perspectivalism* (Kellner, 1995) was embraced, whereby multiple analytical strategies were employed to construct different, mutually-informing forms of knowledge. Kellner (1995) built upon Nietzsche's (1969) concept that knowledge is always and inescapably a perspectival knowing – because we are (necessarily) socially, culturally and historically situated – to advocate the adoption of "a wide range of perspectives to understand and interpret cultural phenomena" (p.97). A perspective is described as "an optic, a way of seeing" (p.98) and Kellner posited that different perspectives can inform and modify each other, as each highlights specific and distinct features of the phenomenon of interest. He further argued that this has the potential to produce multi-faceted, illuminating and critical readings of phenomena. In this thesis, multiple epistemological positions (which diverge on the extent to which the world can be understood through language) were adopted to produce diverse, yet complementary interpretations of the phenomenon of parenting in elite youth football, but remain commensurate by sharing the same ontological assumption. For example, in chapter four a dual analysis was performed to explore participants' phenomenological descriptions alongside the action-orientated nature of participants' talk (see p.75). This involved viewing the same data from within the same ontological standpoint, but adjusting my interpretative lens to bring into view particular aspects of the phenomenon, a process termed "shifting focus" by Simons, Lathlean and Squire (2008 p.129). In this manner I attempted to maintain Walsh and Koelsch's (2012 p.386) notion of "structural integrity" in pluralistic qualitative research; coherence between the epistemological, methodological and procedural components which hold the study together.

**Methods**

This section presents an overview of the research context and methods used in this thesis. A variety of data collection and analytic methods were incorporated in this research, depending on the specific research question that was being addressed, and therefore the details of how data collection techniques were applied and the specific methods of analysis used are provided in each corresponding chapter (see p.52, p.74, p.106 and p.140).

**Research context.** In England, the Premier League's youth football performance pathway is delivered by professional football clubs through their academy programmes. Academies provide programmes of coaching, games, sports science support and education for players across the performance pathway, to "create a fully integrated environment servicing all aspects of the players' development" (EPPP, 2011 p.18). The pathway comprises three

distinct phases; the foundation phase (under-5 to under-11 age group players), the youth development phase (under-12 to under-16 age group players) and the professional development phase (under-17 to under-21 age group players; EPPP, 2011). These can be mapped onto Côté's (1999) sampling, specialising and investment stages of sport development. In youth football, the sampling stage, characterised by experiencing fun and enjoyment through sport, occurs in the foundation phase, from ages 4 to 7 years. The latter part of the foundation phase and the youth development phase in football (ages 8 to 15 years) represent the specialising stage, in which young players begin to focus on one or two sports. Finally the investment stage of football, where players are committed to achieving an elite level of performance in a single sport, occurs in the professional development phase between 16 to 21 years of age.

Foundation phase football players are provided with between 5 and 8 hours of evening coaching and weekend competitive matches per week, increasing to between 12 and 16 hours in the youth development phase. In addition, in 2011 a hybrid training model was introduced to the academy programme, where young players take time off school to attend daytime training. Players can stay within the academy system for a number of years requiring a significant commitment from players and parents alike. As academy players in the foundation phase can live up to a maximum of one hour travel time from the training ground (increasing to 90 minutes in the youth development phase), parents have a significant role to play in transporting their children to training and home matches. Aspiring footballers who successfully progress through the youth development phase will be offered a scholarship to train full-time at the academy for a further two years. At the end of this apprenticeship, a small number of players may be offered a professional playing contract at the club. The remaining players will be released (see chapter one p.5).

**Participants.** Through colleagues at the Football Association and Loughborough University, potential contacts from English professional football club academies were identified to invite clubs to participate in the research. Firstly, details of the research project were sent to the contacts by email, outlining the purpose and intended outcomes. In football academies, any research activity must be approved by the academy director, as the gatekeeper to the research setting. When the project information was received positively by the initial contact, I was invited to attend a meeting with the academy director. At these meetings, our respective expectations of the research were discussed and the terms of access to participants agreed upon.

Three English professional football clubs participated in the research. Pseudonyms

have been assigned to each academy to provide confidentiality. “Newtown” and “Southfield” each played in the second-tier of the English professional football league. Both clubs had a history of playing at the top-flight of the sport previously and had aspirations to be promoted again. “Westville” played in the first-tier of the English professional football league and also in a European league. The number of academy staff was higher and training facilities superior to those of Newtown or Southfield. All three clubs were geographically close to rival academies, which meant competition for the best young local players was fierce.

Parents of boys registered to a football academy, players aged between 8 and 17 years and academy coaches were recruited to take part in this research, from across the three professional clubs. Details of how participants were sampled for each study are provided in the corresponding chapter (see p.51, p.74, p.105 and p.140). Chapters three and four present the experiences of parents and players in the initial phase of the specialising stage of youth football; defined as players aged 8 to 11 years (Harwood et al., 2010). Chapter five then explores parent and player experiences of the later phase of the specialising stage – players aged 12 to 17 – who were at different points within the transition into the investment stage of youth football development. Finally, chapter six presents an analysis of coaches’ accounts of the parent-coach relationship.

**Data collection.** Five distinct phases of data collection were completed. The first comprised of participant observation and is detailed below. The following phases each related to addressing one of the four research questions and involved interviews with: parents of players in the initial phase of the specialising stage (see chapter three p.52); players in the initial phase of the specialising stage (see chapter four p.74); parent-player dyads in the later phase of the specialising stage (see chapter five p.106); and youth academy coaches (see chapter six p.140).

***Phenomenological interviewing.*** In accordance with the phenomenological methodology, first-person accounts of lived-experiences were identified as the most appropriate form of data to analyse to address the research questions. As van Manen (1990 p.62) describes, phenomenological researchers seek:

> to “borrow” other people’s experiences and their reflections on their experiences in order to better be able to come to an understanding of the deeper meaning or significance of an aspect of human experience, in the context of the whole of the human experience.

Therefore, face-to-face interviewing was selected as the primary method of data

collection. The purpose of the phenomenologically-guided, semi-structured interviews was to gather "as complete a description as possible of the experience that a participant has lived through" (Giorgi, 2009). Following guidance on phenomenological interviewing (Langdridge, 2007; van Manen, 1990), questions were carefully constructed to encourage participants to present their experience as it was relevant to them. This meant that participants were able to lead and shift the conversation, and introduce topics that were meaningful to them beyond those discussed through the interview questions. Interview guides are presented in each respective chapter (see p.52, p.78, p.107 and p.141).

During the interviews I attempted as much as possible to hold the phenomenon under investigation at the forefront of my mind, in order to respond and ask further questions in a manner which was orientated toward understanding the nature of parenting in elite youth football, rather than participants' subjective perceptions and opinions. As Englander (2012 p.25) notes, phenomenological researchers aim to "encounter the phenomena via the person's description". Englander (2012) suggests that to facilitate effective interviews, researchers need to be able to shift between being present to the phenomenon of interest and to the interaction unfolding in the interview. Questions such as "what was that like?", "how did that feel?", "can you tell me what that means?", or "can you think of an example of that?" were useful in managing a balance between responding to the interaction (by recognising occasions where a follow up question could be posed) and orientating the conversation towards the research question and phenomenon. This strategy was also useful in prompting more detailed descriptions, particularly of participants' everyday taken-for-granted experiences.

Despite the prevalent use of interviews in qualitative research, this method should not be adopted uncritically in phenomenological studies, as it is important to reflect upon what data produced in interviews can, or cannot, tell us. In this thesis, interviews were not assumed to give direct access to a person's pre-reflective lived-experience. By asking participants to reflect upon their experiences of parenting in elite youth football, their descriptions were considered to represent a transformation of those experiences (van Manen, 1990). Furthermore, interviews were recognised as a form of interaction, which participants and I co-constructed. Potter and Hepburn (2005) have argued that the failure to consider interviews as interaction is a limitation of much interview-based psychological research, as the action-orientated nature of talk is overlooked. I align with Potter and Hepburn's position that people use language to accomplish action and manage interaction in interviews, however I diverge from their proposition that treating language as descriptive reproduces cognitivist assumptions. Instead, following Langdridge's (2008) approach, I assume that language is

both referential *and* functional, and that taking people's accounts of their experiences seriously can tell us something about the phenomenon of interest. From within a phenomenological perspective, this can be achieved without submitting to cognitivism, as participants' transformed descriptions are analysed in the context of the intentional relationship between a person's consciousness and the world, and not as emanating solely from the mind.

***Participant observation.*** Participant observation was used throughout this research to complement the data collected from interviews. Observations were completed in three stages. The first formed part of the exploratory stage of this research. Prior to undertaking this research, my personal experience of youth football was limited. Therefore, in order to become sensitive to the social and cultural context of academies, I arranged ten visits to Southfield Academy to observe training sessions and match days. Parents and coaches were informed that I would be undertaking research within the academy through emails sent from the academy lead coaches. During the visits, which were typically for two hours, I sat with parents in the cafeteria area, and watched players training or competing from the sideline, engaging in informal conversation with parents. Informal interviews were also held with a mother of an under-10 player and a father of an under-11 player. My role was as an *observer as participant* (Gold, 1958), where I primarily observed without being directly involved, but participated in the setting through my interaction with others.

The purpose of this participant observation was to become familiar with the day-to-day activities of an academy, the idiosyncratic language of football, and the relationships between people within the setting. I aimed to listen to the experiences, stories and opinions of parents and coaches from across the under-9 to under-16 age groups. As an outsider, identified through my gender, age and profession which positioned me as someone unlikely to have experience of youth football or of parenting, I was able to ask naïve questions about what was happening in the sessions and generally in the academy.

My observations and initial interpretations were audio recorded directly after each session to capture as much information as possible and immediate impressions. Using these recordings, notes were created the following day and entered into a research diary, allowing for later reflection and discussion with my research supervisors. This stage was crucial in informing the development of the initial research question.

Secondly, approximately a year later, parents of the under-11 age group players were observed for a period of eight weeks, specifically in relation to the research question exploring elite young footballers' experiences of interaction with their parents. The purpose

of this stage was to observe how parents were involved in their child's training and matches, and to build rapport with the families of the players I was concurrently interviewing. This was not used as a tool to triangulate the players' accounts of interaction with their parents, but to inform the focus group interview questions. Observations took place during weekend training sessions and matches, from the pitch sideline and in the cafeteria.

I also had interaction with the majority of parents of the under-9 to under-14 age group players, through my role as parent workshop facilitator at Southfield Academy. These psychology focused group workshops, held twice a season across the duration of the research period, provided the third stage of participant observation. However, it is important to note from an ethical point of view, that these sessions were part of my professional work as a psychology educator, and were not designed with methodological objectives in mind. However, my experiences of delivering these sessions both heightened my awareness of the academy culture, in particular of parents' grievances and concerns, and deeply affected my own perspective toward youth football. Therefore, observations of discussions with parents and my emotional responses to sessions were recorded, as above, and used to reflect upon any pre-conceptions that I had formed, rather than as data.

**Ethical considerations.** Ethical approval for this research was obtained from Loughborough University's ethics committee. For each recruitment phase, research invitation letters, information sheets and consent forms were produced and sent to prospective participants; examples of which can be found in Appendices B through O. These explained: the purpose of the research and why it was being conducted; details of what taking part in the research would involve; how confidentiality would be maintained; the procedures to follow if participants wished to withdraw from the research, or make a complaint; and how the findings would be used afterwards. This information enabled all participants to provide informed consent or indicate their willingness to participate. Parental consent was also sought for all participants under 18 years of age.

To ensure confidentially, culturally appropriate pseudonyms were chosen for each participant and for any person or organisation referred to by name in the interviews. Specific details discussed by participants which could lead to the identification of any person or organisation were also removed from the data. Audio recordings and transcription files were stored safely and securely in password protected computer folders. Files were identified by date and did not use participant names to maintain anonymity. Participants were informed that data would be owned by Loughborough University, only used for the purpose of this research, and held for ten years, after which it would be destroyed in accordance with the UK

Data Protection Act 1998.

As this research involved children and young people, I obtained a Criminal Records Bureau check through Loughborough University before undertaking any data collection and a detailed research proposal was submitted to the university's ethics committee. This described how the welfare, safety and confidentiality of young participants would be protected in the research process and how information pertaining to informed consent and the right to withdraw would be communicated. It is important when conducting research with children that care is taken to ensure young participants have a full and relevant understanding of the purpose of research and what taking part entails, in order to give an informed indication of whether they are willing to participate (Kirk, 2007). Before players decided whether to take part in the research, I met with them to clarify why their opinions were important, what would happen in the interviews, how their confidentiality would be maintained (reinforcing in particular that what they discussed would not be shared with parents or coaches) and how the findings would be used. Arrangements were made so that player interviews (held at either the academy training ground or the family home) could take place in a separate room to their parent if that was preferred by both the child and parent. While this provided confidentiality to players, rooms were carefully selected to be accessible to either their parent or a coach at all times. Furthermore, to ensure the welfare of participants, it was made clear to parents and players that the only exception to the confidentiality agreement was if a disclosure was made that indicated that a child may be at risk of harm or being harmed. In this instance the football academy welfare officer would be informed. No disclosures were made during this research. In addition, participants' right to withdraw was explained by reaffirming that it was up to players (and not parents) to decide whether they wanted to take part and that at any time, before, during or after the interviews, players could ask to withdraw their participation (for any reason) and that they would not be asked to explain why.

**Enhancing Research Quality**

The diversity within qualitative research has led to criticism of the notion of fixed, universal criteria for judging the quality of qualitative work (e.g. Smith & Deemer, 2000). Alternatively, a relativist approach to evaluating qualitative research recommends that criteria may need to be adapted in consideration of the research purpose and process of the particular study (Sparkes & Smith, 2009). Following this approach, frameworks of characterising traits, values, or end goals of research have been proposed, which are designed to be flexible, open-ended and context sensitive (e.g. Tracy, 2010; Yardley, 2000). Informed by Tracy's (2010) framework for excellent qualitative research and specific guidance for evaluating

phenomenological projects (Cresswell, 2007; Norlyk & Harder, 2010), I used the characteristics of sincerity, rigour, credibility and coherence to enhance the quality of the research presented in this thesis.

**Sincerity.** A reflexive, honest and transparent approach to research can help to achieve sincerity (Tracy, 2010). I aimed to achieve transparency in this research by meticulously describing the data collection and analysis procedures in each chapter so that the reader can understand how findings were constructed. Specifically, Norlyk and Harder (2010) recommend that phenomenological researchers must demonstrate how they have adopted and maintained an open phenomenological attitude throughout the research process. To remain open to the phenomenon as it appeared and not close down any new or different understandings as the research progressed, I used reflexive practice to consider how I influenced the research process. To enhance reflexivity, I participated in a bracketing interview prior to undertaking data collection, conducted by a colleague not involved in the research project itself but with experience of qualitative investigations. The purpose of the 60 minute interview was to reveal any underlying biases or opinions that could potentially influence the data collection and analysis process. Rather than aim to remove these influences from the research process, I was able to consciously check that these underlying suppositions were not directing the interviews or the analysis in a particular direction (see p.48). A research diary was also kept for the duration of the project to record my reactions to the interviews, reflections on the data analysis process and interpretative ideas and notes. Many diary entries described my gut-instincts to the data being transcribed or analysed. Reflecting back on these notes enabled me to check I had not privileged any particular interpretative direction. To assist in the bracketing process when undertaking analysis, I set aside these initial thoughts and re-read interview transcripts to see if any alternative interpretations could be formed.

**Rigour.** In order for the methodological rigour of this research to be evaluated, the procedures used to select, transform and organise data were described in detail in each chapter. Following Potter and Hepburn's (2005) proposals for improving the quality of interview-based research studies, details of: how participants were recruited; the category under which participants were recruited (i.e. "parent" or "academy player"); the information provided to participants about the interview; and the interview guides were reported so the reader can appreciate the position that participants were speaking from and how the data were produced.

Hammersley (2010) highlighted how the transcription of audio-recorded data is not a

neutral process and that researchers are required to make decisions in relation to how much to transcribe and how to represent the recorded talk. O'Connell and Kowal (1999) recommend that a transcription system should match the purpose for which it is required. Therefore, all verbal talk in interviews was transcribed to produce phenomenological texts for analysis. For the chapters where the role of language and discourse in constituting experience was explicitly explored in order to address the specific research question, transcriptions were transformed to include key features of the delivery of talk including overlap, pauses and emphasis, in order for sufficient discursive analysis to be undertaken (see chapter four p.84).

To achieve interpretative rigour, I engaged in prolonged empathetic exploration of participants' descriptions; an intense, time-consuming process where I aimed to dwell and become absorbed with the data (Finlay, 2014). This involved re-reading transcripts and re-listening to audio recordings, often multiple times over, moving between the parts and the whole of the text, to gradually sift and hone meanings to produce a fine-grained analysis (Finlay, 2014). Complemented by data from participant observation and a "head full of [phenomenological] theories" (Tracy, 2010 p.841), interpretations were tentatively developed, considered in relation to the participants' experience as it was presented, reworked and rewritten, until I had constructed an analysis which said something of significance to the nuanced and subtle way that the phenomena was experienced by participants. My interpretations are offered as one of many possible readings of the data.

**Credibility.** Credibility describes the trustworthiness, verisimilitude, and plausibility of findings (Tracy, 2010). To enhance the credibility of findings, detailed, thick phenomenological descriptions of participants' experiences, supported by data extracts and observations of the research context were presented, to "show rather than tell" (Tracy, p.843) how the interpretations were arrived at. Multiple analytical techniques were used to explore the data from different perspectives (Kellner, 1995), in order to be sensitive to the variation and complexity of participants' experiences and achieve a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of parenting in elite youth football. Data extracts, descriptions and initial interpretations were shared with research colleagues experienced in qualitative research and knowledgeable of social psychological theories to facilitate further reflection upon analysis. Colleagues offered additional and sometimes alternative meanings to the descriptions of participants' experiences, which enhanced the analysis process. For example, the data presented in chapter four (extract 2.1 p.90 and extract 3.1 p.95) which described players' experiences of interaction with their parents after matches, were interpreted by different colleagues as an example of: performance-contingent feedback and support; parental

controlling behaviours; the spatial significance of the car journey home; football as a site for the performance of masculine identity; and players' acceptance of an arbitrary culture. Informed by these various interpretations, I aimed to produce an analysis which was the most illuminating in relation to the research question and commensurate with the methodology. This further emphasises how my interpretations remain one of many possible readings of the data. In addition, colleagues with experience of working in football academy settings were able to provide reflection upon the practical significance and potential usefulness of findings.

**Coherence.** Following guidance for evaluating phenomenological projects (Cresswell, 2007; Norlyk & Harder, 2010), I attempted to articulate an understanding of the theoretical tenets of phenomenological psychology and how they were implemented. The key methodological terms were defined and philosophical assumptions clarified. Through doing so, it is hoped the reader can assess whether this study achieves coherence; a meaningful fit between the research question, methodology, analysis and interpretation of findings (Tracy, 2010).

**Researcher Position and Reflexivity**

Reflexivity involves a process of "continually reflecting upon interpretations of both our own experience and the phenomena being studied" (Finlay, 2014 p.130) and was integral to this research, as I sought to maintain an open phenomenological attitude throughout (see p.31). This section is provided to acknowledge and reflect upon how my personal background and experiences influenced the co-construction of interviews and the data analysis process.

Recognising the role I played in jointly constructing participants' experiences in interviews (Emerson & Frosh, 2004), my identity as a female, non-parent, non-footballer, researcher both opened up and closed down possibilities for dialogue within the interviews. Being a non-parent helped me to "see afresh" (Finlay, 2014) parents' everyday experiences as it was not an experience I shared, or was familiar with. Although this enabled me to ask naïve questions, it may have inhibited my interaction on occasions, as I could not relate directly to participants' lived-experiences. For example, some parents asked me if I had children. If my answer had been yes, perhaps parents would have framed their interview responses differently. Or, this may also have encouraged parents to reflect more upon the taken-for-granted nature of their experiences. For example, when one father of an under-12 player was describing how the way coaches communicated with his son was important to him, he explained:

> I think it's very important here, because there are a few

> relationships that are as sacrosanct as parents and kids as I said to you, you know when you have a child, and immediately I think as a woman once you have that baby and it's yours, your life is never, ever the same again.

My status as an outsider to elite youth football also shaped my interaction with participants in interviews. As a female researcher with no access to experiential knowledge of playing men's football I could legitimately ask participants to explain their everyday experiences and idiosyncratic language of youth football, without undermining my credibility. However, my lack of a footballing identity and connection to an educational establishment meant I was alternatively positioned by participants as an interested empathiser, or as a route to being heard by football policy makers. For example, a discussion of how my status as a football outsider positioned me in more of a teacher role and how this contributed to the production of players' interview responses is provided in chapter four (p.79).

Through my professional background in youth sport development, I had managed the development of policies and programmes designed to increase sport participation for all young people and was firmly committed to the power of sport to promote positive youth development (e.g. Holt, 2008) and enhance children's lives. I was, as Giulianotti (2004 p.356) terms, a "sport evangelist". This meant that at times I was personally uncomfortable with the performance-orientated, competitive and elitist aspects of the football academy culture. In particular, the implicit and explicit commodification of young players and what appeared to be little regard for the players who did not 'make it' troubled me greatly. Therefore, when interpreting data, I aimed to set aside the values that I attached to inclusive sport participation and temporarily accept the values of a performance based culture. In addition, rather than overtly criticising or praising certain academy practices, I endeavoured to *show* how the culture was experienced and allow the reader to bring their own moral judgements to the findings.

In my professional role as a parent workshop facilitator at Southfield Academy, I was responsible for delivering psychology-focused group workshops for parents of players in the under-9 to under-14 age groups. Over the course of this research, I facilitated 21 workshops; one induction for parents new to the academy and two themed sessions per season, covering topics including match day parent behaviours, developing players' emotional control and preparing players for release. The purpose of the workshops was to: inform parents about the psychological framework adopted by the academy and the skills that coaches aimed to

develop with the players; explore with parents how they could support the development of psychological skills with their son; and provide parents with an opportunity to ask any questions or discuss any concerns related to the academy.

These sessions provided an additional opportunity to interact with parents and coaches within the 'natural setting' of the football academy, which heightened my awareness of the academy culture. My position as an academy outsider, combined with an interactive approach to delivering sessions, meant I was able to create an inclusive environment where parents appeared comfortable to share their concerns with academy processes. Through listening to parents' balanced feedback about academy practices, and discussions oriented towards wanting the best for their son, I shifted from a position where I judged parents' contributions based on my knowledge of 'good' parenting as constructed within sport psychology literature, to empathising with the challenges of parenting in this setting. Similarly, my interaction with coaches before and after sessions meant that I developed an understanding of the coaches' perspectives on the rationales for particular practices and an appreciation of the difficult nature of interacting with large numbers of parents in this setting. However, on occasions I experienced first-hand the tension between parents and coaches that has been identified as a feature of the football academy culture (e.g. Harwood et al., 2010); as this extract from my research diary illustrates, which describes an experience of delivering a parent workshop in December 2011:

> Full house tonight! Check age group (mostly under-13s). Launch into session. Intro flows fairly well. The group easily recall what we covered previously. Parents seem to follow the first section about motivation and are happy to discuss the question "what do you think motivates your son to play football?" in small groups. I keep a low profile in the first group discussion so people can talk freely – perhaps I should have listened in more. I pull the group together, "so what did you talk about?" A short pause… "Support from the coaches" one father offers. A snigger goes round the room. There's a joke I'm not in on. I press further. "What type of support from the coaches?" He replies "just positive encouragement really, it would be nice if the boys got to hear from their coach that they had done well". Another interjects "and there's no sense of team, the boys don't feel part of a team!" This is counteracted by another father who explains that the academy focus on individual development is because they are here to find players, but recognises that the

> pressure on the boys has increased. Another adds that it has completely changed from last year. They are under so much more pressure. The boys are getting bollocked after a game and being told they've picked the wrong squad. I listen intently and feel my adrenaline building. The emotion in the air is palpable. This is a problem, but one I am unable to fix. I explain that I understand there is an issue and commit to find a way to follow it up.
>
> The rest of the session feels superficial. A mother who had not spoken during the session approaches me afterwards "I'm sorry about that, we've had no-one else to talk to so I think you got the brunt of it. It's so different from last year. It's keeping me awake at night I'm so worried about him." I feel uncomfortable when the lead coach comes back in the room – I know he wants to hear what has been said... As diplomatically as possible, I explain how parents were concerned that the players in this age group were feeling under pressure to perform. The feedback is instantly dismissed "there are no players in that team and they know it". The tears well up as I leave, I feel upset, angry, helpless. I have a responsibility to act upon this information, but feel powerless to change things. I hate academies!

Recording my experiences of delivering sessions such as this enabled me to confront, reflect upon and challenge my own attitudes towards youth football. Crucially, this awareness allowed me to critically check that my opinions were not directing my interpretations and ensure that participants' voices of support and criticism of academy culture were both included in findings.

The reflective process adopted in this research heightened my awareness of how my personal views and experiences may have shaped the research process. However, reflexivity is limited in that we cannot reflect upon that which is obscured from ourselves, and therefore I acknowledge that the interpretations and findings presented in this research are a product of my unique experience of undertaking this research. As such, the findings remain one of many possible interpretations of participants' lived-experiences of parenting in elite youth football.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has detailed the methodological and theoretical positioning of this thesis, in order to explain how decisions were made during the research process and how knowledge

was constructed. The participant recruitment, data collection techniques and ethical procedures were outlined, which are further complemented by a description of how these techniques were applied in the corresponding chapter (see p.52, p.74, p.106 and p.140). Details of the various analytic methods that were employed in this research are also provided in each specific chapter (see p.52, p.80, p.108 and p.141). Following a relativist approach to evaluating qualitative research (Sparkes & Smith, 2009); the characteristics of sincerity, rigour, credibility and coherence (Tracy, 2010) were described, which may offer a suitable framework for judging the quality of the research presented in this thesis. Finally, some personal reflections on the research approach were provided in order to acknowledge my active role in constructing the findings within this thesis.

The next four chapters present the empirical research findings that aim to address the research questions identified in this thesis. Firstly, chapter three explores the experience of being a parent of an elite youth footballer. Chapter four examines elite youth footballers' experience of interaction with their parents. Chapter five describes parents' and players' experience of their relationship in the context of elite youth football. Finally, chapter six presents an analysis of coaches' accounts of the parent-coach relationship.

# CHAPTER THREE

## Parenting Experiences in Elite Youth Football

The sport parenting literature has historically been dominated by research that has sought to identify the optimal behaviours for parents that, if adopted, will result in positive child outcomes such as higher enjoyment, reduced anxiety and successful progression in sport (e.g. Babkes & Weiss, 1999; Bois et al., 2009; Wuerth et al., 2004). A focus on parenting behaviours has made an important contribution to understanding the role of parents in youth sport, but has often overlooked the influence of social interaction and the cultural norms and values of the sport context in which these behaviours occur (see chapter one p.4). This has meant there is a paucity of research which explores how parenting within youth sport is experienced as a personal, social-cultural phenomenon. A focus on parents' experiences can illuminate what being a 'sport parent' is like and what it means to people, and can enhance understanding of how parenting shapes, and is shaped by, the specific youth sport context (see chapter one p.18).

The influence of social and contextual factors on parents' experiences in sport has previously been highlighted. Exploring how parents were socialised through their child's involvement in youth sport, Dorsch et al. (2009) illustrated that parents' behaviour, cognition and affect changed in response to their child's sport participation, through an interactive process involving the agency of the parent, the reciprocal influence of the child and the social context. The authors proposed that further research into how these features interact, and specifically parents' responsiveness to their child and the sport setting, is required to enhance theoretical understanding of parents' socialisation experiences in sport.

Research has identified that parents' experiences can be shaped through interaction with their child, coaches and parent peers (Dorsch et al., 2009; Knight & Holt, 2013a; Wiersma & Fifer, 2008). For example, Knight and Holt (2013a) described how children's performances, on-court behaviours and emotional reactions to matches affected parents' experiences of watching junior tennis tournaments. Interaction with coaches and parent peers has also been shown to contribute to parents' experiences of satisfaction and stress (Harwood et al., 2010; Harwood & Knight, 2009a; 2009b; Wiersma & Fifer, 2008; see chapter one p.19). These exploratory studies point toward the significance of parents' interactions with significant others in youth sport settings, but did not explicitly examine parents' experiences of interaction within the scope of their research.

Research has begun to explicate the influence of the youth sport environment on parents' experiences (see chapter one p.20). For example, Holt et al. (2008) observed that

parents' emotions at youth football matches were intensified by contextual factors including crowd segregation, sideline disputes and the game situation, which in turn influenced the nature of their sideline comments. Sport organisational stressors such as selection policies, competition formats and heavy time and financial demands have also been reported by parents (Harwood et al., 2010; Harwood & Knight, 2009a; 2009b). These findings demonstrate the need to understand parental experiences within specific domains, given each sport's unique competition structure, coaching system and youth development policies, for example. However, a broader investigation of the influence of the sport setting on parental experiences presents a gap in the literature.

In order to address the limitations of the current research, and enhance understanding of the influence of the social and subcultural context on parenting in youth sport, the purpose of the present study was to explore the experiences of parents in elite youth football. Specifically, this research focuses on the initial phase of the specialising stage of youth football. Harwood et al. (2010) identified a range of stressors that initial phase specialising stage parents in football described experiencing, arising from academy expectations, practices and communication (see chapter one p.19 and p.28). Given the significance of the transition to academy football for parents and players, and the potential for parents to experience stress, the present study explored the experiences of mothers and fathers of (initial phase) specialising stage footballers.

A descriptive phenomenological research design was followed in this study, which aimed to identify the essential, invariant qualities of experience – or essences of the phenomenon – and produce a general structure of the essences (Giorgi, 2009; see chapter two p.32). Its focus on examining first-person accounts to describe (rather than explain) phenomena meant that this approach was a suitable starting point for studying the experience of being a parent of an elite youth footballer.

## Methods

### Participants

Parents of boys registered to an elite football academy aged between 8 and 11 were recruited from three English professional football clubs. Five mothers and five fathers aged between 38 and 56 participated in the research ($M$ = 43.8). Three of the mothers were single-parents; all other participants were in two-parent families. Parents described their ethnicity as White British ($n$ = 8), Black British ($n$ = 1) and Spanish Bengali ($n$ = 1). Parents had between two and four years experience of their son playing at a professional football club academy. Further demographic details can be found in Appendix P.

Following initial information meetings held at the three academies, parents interested in being involved were asked to contact the researcher. Selection was then guided by maximum variation sampling (Patton, 2002). Variation between participants is beneficial in descriptive phenomenological work, as aspects of an experience that are common to a group of people and those which are unique to individuals can be highlighted (Langdridge, 2007). Accordingly, mothers and fathers, one and two-parent families and parents from the three different academies were sampled, enabling a range of parental experiences to be captured.

**Data Collection**

Semi-structured phenomenological interviews were held with individual parents over a three-month period (see chapter two p.38). In designing the interview guide (Table 1), care was taken to ensure the questions were open rather than directive, so to encourage the participants to present their experience as it was relevant to them. Parents were interviewed once for between 68 and 106 minutes (*M* = 85) at academy training grounds, parents' houses or Loughborough University. Interviews were audio-recorded and all verbal talk was transcribed verbatim into a play-script format.

**Table 1: Academy Parent Interview Guide**

| | Descriptive Questions | Further Questions |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | What is it like to be a parent of a young footballer? | |
| 2 | Can you describe a typical week for you and your son in football? | What is your role as a parent on match days? |
| 3 | What do you enjoy about being the parent of a young footballer? | What do you find difficult? |
| 4 | How do you help your son with football? | |
| 5 | What does being a parent of a young footballer mean to you? | |
| 6 | What has your experience of the academy been like? | What advice would you give to a parent new to the academy? |

**Data Analysis**

The analysis followed the steps outlined in Giorgi's (2009) descriptive phenomenological approach. Interview transcripts were read and re-read to get a sense of the overall meaning of participants' descriptions, from within a phenomenological attitude (see chapter two p.31). The data were then attended to with a broad psychological lens and "sensitivity to the implications of the data for the phenomenon being researched" (Giorgi,

2009 p.128). Next, meaning units were established, by analysing data on a line-by-line basis and marking the transcript each time the researcher interpreted that a change in psychological meaning occurred, to help make the lengthy descriptions more manageable. No data were omitted from this process in order to avoid privileging some data over others. An analysis matrix was completed for each participant to make sense of the data (an example of which is provided in Appendix Q and an extract shown in Table 2). Each meaning unit was described in more neutral language so that by lifting the data from the situation-specific details, the psychological significance could be clarified. Units were then transformed into language representing the psychological meaning of the data in order to "render the implicit explicit" (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2008b p.45). No explanations for meanings were offered at this stage in order to remain close to the experience as the participants described it.

**Table 2: Extract of Descriptive Phenomenological Analysis**

| Data Extract | Meaning unit description | Transformation | Essence notes |
|---|---|---|---|
| P3: If I can, if I see him veering off fundamentally on the wrong path then I, I will step in because I do know the journey he's going on so if he's going somewhere and straying off, I'll put him back on it. That's my, my role.<br><br>Nicky: How do you mean veering off the path, for example? | P3 sees it as his role to keep his son on the path towards becoming a footballer, as he has knowledge of football development. | P3's own experience and knowledge of football means he feels a responsibility to facilitate and guide his son's development. | Parent responsibility *(facilitating development, providing informational support)* |
| P3: Umm if I watch, he was playing a game and in his position at the moment he's playing centre-forward. There are certain things that a centre-forward must do. Or he can't be a centre-forward. If he can do other things he can be a good centre-forward, if he can do other things he can be a great one. But to be one of them he has to do these things and if he stops doing them things, I'd better put him back on, and make him understand that you can't be anything else unless you do these things. Each position has fundamentals that are, you must do. Now, if the coaches don't reinforce that, I can see why because they've got 11 other people, but me I can see him as an individual. To be a centre-forward you must do this. So keep doing that. So that's how I pull him back up. | P3 will reinforce the key technical skills if he feels his son has stopped performing them. | P3 will provide informational feedback if he perceives his son is not meeting the performance standards he judges to be essential. | Parent knowledge *(of football development pathways, performance standards required)* |
| | P3 feels that the coaches don't reinforce these basic skills, because they do not see his son as an individual. | P3 perceives that coaches are unable to provide individualised feedback to his son, and sees this instead as his role. | Relationship with coaches *(unable to provide individualised technical feedback)* |

Each participant's fully transformed description of experience was analysed and interpreted individually, before comparing to others to identify the essences of the phenomenon, which "make a phenomenon what it is and without which the phenomenon could not be what it is" (van Manen, 1990 p.107). Interview transcripts were explored further using the phenomenological technique of *imaginative variation* (Giorgi, 2009; Moustakas, 1994). This involved actively considering the data from different angles to identify essences which continued to have the same psychological meaning, even when the context of the data was imagined to be different. For example if the gender of a parent was imagined to be the opposite, did the meaning of the experience change? Individual structure statements were composed describing the meanings of participants' experiences (see below) which assisted in the final step; presenting the overall general structure and essences of the experience of being a parent of an elite specialising stage footballer.

**Example phenomenological structure statement.** The following provides an example of an individual structure statement constructed to describe James' (P3) experience of being a parent of an elite youth footballer. P3 is a father of an under-9 player who is in his second season of playing at an academy. P3 played football to a semi-professional level himself and has experience of coaching youth football.

P3 sees his role as a parent to facilitate the development of his son's talent in football. When his son was younger P3 decided to teach him the basic skills of football, as he attributes top players' success to being able to perform these skills consistently under pressure. Once P3 felt his son had learnt the basics, he reduced the amount of time he spent coaching him and attended less training sessions. He now adopts more of a supportive role rather than a teaching role. Although P3 played football to a professional level himself, football has a different meaning for his son than it did for him. Football offered a lifeline out a deprived area for P3. His son isn't disadvantaged in the same way and so P3 is confident that his son can pursue any career that he wants to, not just football. P3 feels that academy football offers his son opportunities for new and different experiences. He doesn't view the academy as part of the route to becoming a professional player. He recognises that his son is talented, but aims to keep football in perspective and ensure his son is focused on enjoying playing and growing up. P3 believes it is vital for parents to be realistic with their sons and emphasise that being in an academy does not mean players are any closer to becoming a professional. He disassociates himself from other parents who he sees as uninformed and unrealistic about their son's future in football. In contrast, from his experience of playing professionally P3 is confident that he understands the pathways in football and the demands

of the sport. This means P3 feels he gives his son an advantage because he can support him effectively and protect him from potentially negative experiences, such as poor coaching or being released. P3 feels that other parents help to create a supportive environment at the academy but that parents are judged depending on the performance of their son.

The philosophy of the academy contradicts P3's own values and beliefs. He thinks that academy training starts at too young an age, children are commodities to clubs and coaches give false hope to players and parents alike. He doesn't believe that academies will affect his son's progress in football; his son's talent will determine whether or not he is successful. As a consequence, P3 doesn't enjoy his involvement with the academy, doesn't feel a connection to the club or hold a positive view of the coaches. He feels he is faced with a difficult choice. If he takes his son out of the academy system he won't improve as quickly because of the perceived lower standard of local football, but by staying in the squad his son is exposed to additional pressure to keep his place and the subjective judgement of the coaches. P3 feels his son is too young to be evaluated and potentially told he is not good enough so he will remove him from the academy before he is released. This helps to give P3 a sense of control over the academy.

## Findings and Discussion

From the interpretations, it is suggested that the experience of being a parent of an elite youth footballer was constituted by three essential features; parent socialisation into the football academy culture, enhanced parental identity and increased parental responsibility. Though the essences (and the subthemes which support them) characterise the phenomena, there were individual variations in the psychological meanings that parents attached to their experiences. These are also outlined in order to give as full a description possible. In this sense, however, it is perhaps more appropriate to view the findings as expressions of the nature of existence rather than essential structures of being.

### Parent Socialisation into the Football Academy Culture

The parents in this study described a process of adjusting to the social norms and behavioural expectations associated with the specific academy football culture, which differed from those they had experienced at grassroots level football. Socialisation can be described as an active process through which people learn about their social world and their participation in it (Coakley, 2004). In elite youth football, academies were experienced as a space for socialisation, where parents acquired knowledge and understanding of how to act in accordance with academy guidelines, through their interaction with coaches and parent peers.

The demands on players to attend a higher amount of training meant that parents'

overall commitment to football increased. They were required to invest significant time and money, and organise working hours, childcare and transport to enable their sons to play at an academy level and access professional coaching (see chapter two p.36). As a result, parents described their decision to support their son's football as "a life choice for me" or "it's like my hobby now". However, their involvement in coaching and matches decreased, as the professional status of the coaches in an academy emphasised that parents should "let the coaches coach". This meant parents were expected to encourage but not instruct players, remain quiet during matches and refrain from questioning coaching decisions. Observing other parents reinforced that giving instructions from the sideline was not an acceptable way of behaving and that parents would "look silly if you did". These norms for sideline behaviours restricted parents from performing parenting in the way they had previously at grassroots level. By conforming to new rules, parents' movement was limited to certain spectator areas and their capacity to comment or gesture minimised. Before, football had been a setting where parents could enact involved parenting, as one mother reflected:

> Jane, under-10 parent[2]: You go to those [grassroots] matches and, if the boys want to come over and have their shoe laces tied up they could run over and do that, and if you had the drink they could come over to you. Here it's, no. Your job is to stand on that sideline and not talk to the boys or interfere with the boys. Which is absolutely right (.) but it is still a loss of control so (.) a bit difficult.

Limiting parenting to certain spaces meant parents experienced a diminished sense of agency and, at times, frustration from not being able to give their son the technical advice they believed would help him be successful. This academy practice functioned to reinforce parents' minimal role in the coaching process (and is analysed further in chapter six p.149). However, parents began to accept these norms as they became socialised into the academy culture, as Jane's description of not "interfering" being "absolutely right" illustrates.

Dorsch et al. (2009) previously identified the sport context as a potential moderator of parent socialisation into sport. Extending this finding, the parents' experiences in this study suggest that it is interaction with others within the sporting environment that can socialise parents into following particular behaviours. This essence reflects a central concept of phenomenology, that all experience is relational (e.g. Husserl, 1999; Merleau-Ponty, 1962). In academies, parents learnt about what constituted appropriate behaviours in this setting

[2] Transcription notation: (.) indicates a pause; - indicates cut off speech or self-interruption

through their interaction with coaches and other parents. Although, how parents interpreted and responded to these expectations varied, and is described below.

**Negotiating power and responsibility with coaches.** Coaches reinforced that player development was their sole responsibility by limiting communication to parents once players were signed to a club and through offering less feedback on children's performances. As one coach commented during an observational visit "can you get the parents to shut up and leave me alone?" (Field notes, November 2010). Consequently, approaching coaches to ask questions outside of formal appraisal meetings, which usually took place three times a year, was construed as "interfering" by parents. Parents had to adjust to coaches having responsibility for their son's football development, but varied in the degree that they welcomed or resisted this transference of power. This power relation is discussed from the coaches' perspective in chapter six (p.144).

Some parents were happy to relinquish this responsibility as they saw coaches as 'experts', trusted them and felt they were good role models for their son.

> Tom, under-12 parent: If I could sign a form to say you know, you have, for the hour and a half he's here, three times a week, you have complete control over whatever you do with that lad in terms of his coaching, discipline, everything else. I'd sign it and, you know, I just don't think that parents should interfere. I think they should just leave it.

Parents began to experience pressure to comply with coach requests such as attending extra training sessions during school holidays. Although these were optional, they felt that non-attendance would be negatively perceived by coaches. At times, parents acquiesced to the demands placed on players to gain approval from coaches and avoid jeopardising their son's place in the squad. However, other parents found letting go of their previous involvement more difficult.

> Andy, under-11 parent: I think that is one of the hardest things you have to come to terms with when you bring them here is that, all the things you believed in, and I'm saying this from someone who knows about football is that, you've done your bit. And it's now for somebody else to do it and, they've got to polish a rough diamond. And you probably won't take any- you won't get any of the credit for quite a bit of the formative stuff. You know, because although he's here on his own ability, if I'd have let him play the PlayStation and done nothing with him then he

> wouldn’t be here.

And some even challenged the coaches’ role in player development. For example one father rejected the authority of the academy staff, asserting his control of the situation by maintaining that he – not the coaches – would decide when his son would leave the academy.

> James, under-9 parent: I just think people once they sign a contract think they’re obliged. You know they have to- No you don’t! You have a choice you can always walk out.
> Nicky: You do have a choice yeah.
> James: Now one parent this year who walked out, they want compensation for him. So they try and make it difficult for you. But, if I’m going, we can go at any time we want, Southfield can’t stand in my way. Because the power is with us. They make you believe they’ve got the power. They don’t! We can just say we stop, we don’t want to do it no more.

Parents who felt uneasy about the transference of responsibility to coaches described how they were in the process of learning to trust the coaches’ methods of developing players. Often, it was fathers who had previous experience of coaching youth football who described struggling to accept the coach’s role the most and were more likely to question decisions. Over time parents became more accepting of coaching practices, however some felt the reduction in information once players were signed prolonged this adjustment.

> Jane, under-10 parent: It was very much you suddenly felt you weren’t getting any communication. You didn’t know what was going on, the time that you probably needed the most communication you were getting very little through.

Although parents were aware of policy changes designed to increase the frequency of communication between coaches and parents in academies, they remained sceptical about its impact: “I thought we were supposed to be in the era of more communication, but if anything we get less information” (under-10 parent, Field notes, February 2011).

This finding is supported by Kerr and Stirling (2012) who found that relinquishing control and being asked to trust coaches formed an early phase in parents’ socialisation into elite youth sport culture. In youth football, this process was facilitated through a reduction in information from coaches and a perceived pressure to comply with coach requests. However, parents accepted or contested the transference of responsibility to coaches differently, determined in part through their previous coaching experience and the extent to which

parents experienced a need for approval from coaches.

**Parent peer relationships.** Parents regularly interacted with other mothers and fathers of youth footballers and these relationships performed several important functions. Parents new to the academy setting were able to seek advice from peers whose sons had been at the academy longer, as more experienced parents could explain, for example, what could be expected in their first season, help interpret unfamiliar coaching practices and offer feedback on their son's performances – information which socialised parents into acting in accordance with the unwritten rules of academies not to approach or challenge coaches (see also chapter six p.154). Parents drew support from the friendships they made at academies as other parents offered help with transport duties and an empathetic understanding of the stress they experienced that friends outside of football could not provide. Yet the temporal nature of these friendships was recognised, as parents anticipated that relationships would not continue if their son no longer played at an academy.

> Peter, under-10 parent: I think that's one of the things that the parents probably fear a little bit, because it is a nice atmosphere here and because you all get on, you knowing that actually it's like a group of friends you're gonna lose.

Parent peers also provided a target for social comparison. Parents were judged positively by other parents when they were realistic about their son's chances of becoming a professional and seen not to push their sons, knowledgeable about football development and followed academy expectations for sideline behaviour – characteristics which reflected coaches' ideas for 'good' parenting in this setting (Holt and Dunn, 2004; Mills et al., 2012; see chapter one p.27). In contrast, parents were compared less favourably when they expressed ambitions for their sons to 'make it', were seen to pressure their child to play, or were viewed as parents of less talented players. Comparing themselves and their sons to others in an academy helped to affirm parents' own identity as a parent who knew how best to support their son's development.

> Phil, under-10 parent: I think as parents you learn, erm, certainly you have to learn by your mistakes along the way about maybe how you behave at the side of a pitch, how you behave in the car. And I watch other parents and quite often I'll look at 'em and think crikey, I can't believe that used to be me.

> James, under-9 parent: You sort of get rated as a parent as well.

> If your kid's up there, you're one of the good parents you know and one of the parents- honestly! Your, your kids down here, you know you see the parents' body language, slinks a bit and you know (.) god streuth yeah, it's pretty sad.

Relationships with parent peers have been identified as a common feature of youth sport parental experiences and previous research has highlighted that parents valued the support and social networking offered by peers, but could experience feelings of exclusion when cliques formed (Dorsch et al., 2009; Knight & Holt, 2013a). The findings of the present study extend existing knowledge by describing how these relationships not only functioned as supportive, but helped to socialise parents into the sport culture by providing advice in the absence of information from the academy. In addition, peers were used by parents to evaluate their own parenting effectiveness. Trussell and Shaw (2012) described how parents judged each other based on their perceptions of "good parenting" in organised youth sport, and criticised those who were deemed to not provide appropriate support for their child. This judgement was also prevalent among youth football parents, suggesting that parenting effectiveness was assessed through a lens of cultural expectations for parenting in this setting and established through comparisons to other parents and other children. Good parenting was constructed in relation to academy norms for behaviour (not approaching coaches and following rules for sideline behaviour) and perceived player's football ability. This may in part explain Knight and Holt's (2013a p.8) finding that cliques could develop in youth tennis between "parents of the better players".

**Enhanced Parental Identity**

Parents felt that their child's identification as a talented footballer reflected positively on their own identity as a parent. Many recounted how they were the first to recognise that their son had potential in sport; a view that was reinforced when parents started to be approached by professional club scouts and coaches. Players often received multiple offers to join academies before committing to one club, and their football ability was praised highly in the process. Having a child that was good at football meant that parents felt they had been successful in parenting.

> Sarah, under-12 parent: I'm just really proud because I think umm (.) I've done it all myself and that's because when I (.) I've been a single parent for a long time and it was me, I feel like it was me that got Tyler involved in all of his football. Even though I'm not a football person, I arranged the meeting, I got

> in touch with somebody and I was taking him- his dad only takes him to his matches, he doesn't get involved with any of the training. So I've sort of nurtured him and encouraged him and I feel as though I've done a good job and it makes me proud. I'm proud of him and I'm proud of myself because I've done it myself.

The more intensive schedule and greater emphasis on football in their lives enhanced parents' relationships with their sons. The experience of being part of a professional club, sharing a passion for football and travelling to and from training and matches together, increased the sense of closeness in the relationship.

> Tom, under-12 parent: It is very interesting how the club in some ways intensifies the relationship with your child. I suppose we're together so much, we travel so much, we talk so much, we, and when we're not here, we're watching the first team. We even go to away games. We're very tight.

> Peter, under-10 parent: He does really appreciate me taking him here and he can't thank me enough, you know, all the time. So he does, so me and Joe really are close because of it.

Experiencing closeness with their son through football meant that parents shared in his successes and failures. For example, parents experienced apprehension before coach assessments and reflected glory from their child's achievements, often referring to "when we got signed" or "when we played United".

> Tom, under-12 parent: In the beginning (.) when we first signed, it was- I used to dread assessments or be a lot more edgy than I am now. I'm much more relaxed now because I was so anxious that he should do well.

Coakley (2006) has suggested that the public, measurable nature of youth sport means that the moral worth of parents can be symbolised through their child's sporting success (see chapter one p.3). Certainly, the parents in this study experienced enhanced status from their child's selection to an academy. Consequently, it is postulated that the identification and labelling of young children as talented in sport may amplify the extent to which parents' identity and personal worth are reflected in their children's achievements. However, in academies, parents had to adjust to understanding that success was now measured not by matches won and trophies awarded, but by individual effort and improvement.

> Nicky: Can you tell me more about how it's changed then from what you were like before?
> Andy, under-11 parent: I'm far more laid back about it now, whereas before if he'd played badly it might have spoiled my weekend. Whereas now if he plays badly (.) you know, I just- doesn't bother me, doesn't bother me at all. Well it does bother me a bit but it would bother me more if he didn't try.

Often their child who was the superstar in their local team, stood out far less in an academy. Eager to see him succeed in a more challenging environment, their son's performance in football became increasingly more important.

> Phil, under-10 parent: Because it's football it seems to be life or death, whereas everything else, you know if I had a bad review here for football I'd probably be gutted. But if he had a bad parents evening I'd probably just let it go over me head. And that's completely wrong you know. But it's taken me time to learn that and understand that.
>
> Andy, under-11 parent: It's not the be all and end all . . . it just feels like that sometimes.

This connection to their son's sporting identity led some parents to anticipate experiencing identity disruption if their child was deselected and no longer played at an academy.

> Helen, under-10 parent: There is immense pride that my children play for Newtown and Academy X[3]. But with that there comes a fear that if they didn't play at Newtown would you feel that they had failed all of a sudden if they didn't get taken on, or they couldn't play at Newtown and you had to say they played at their local club. And I think, if I'm entirely honest, that might be an issue for me.

Research has highlighted that transition out of elite sport that is sudden or involuntary can be an emotionally turbulent and disruptive experience for athletes (Blinde & Stratta, 1992; Wippert & Wippert, 2010). The essence of enhanced parental identity suggests that parents may also experience identity loss following a child's unexpected exit from sport, and highlights an area worthy of further investigation.

[3] Academy X was not included in this research.

**Increased Parental Responsibility**

In addition to an enhanced identity, parents experienced an increased sense of responsibility toward their son and drew on societal expectations for parenting (e.g. Dermott, 2003; Hays, 1996; Henwood & Procter, 2003) to make sense of this responsibility, adjusting their behaviours accordingly (in various ways, described below). This was not, however, a straightforward adjustment, as although parents wanted to help their sons succeed in football, they were also acutely aware of the potential for negative consequences of playing in an elite academy environment. This inherent tension between supporting and protecting their child meant that parents experienced uncertainty and at times, interpreted the meaning of academy football differently.

**Duty to facilitate development.** Being the parent of a child recognised as talented in sport meant that parents experienced a heightened sense of responsibility to facilitate their son's development in football and help him realise his potential.

> Hannah, under-10 parent: I've stressed to Lucas (.) I, I do this for you, this is an investment, and I don't mind doing this because if you have a talent it's my duty to kind of let you see if you can do something with that talent. . . . I will do for him exactly what I'll do for my daughter as well. If they have a talent, I will do everything I can for them to succeed at what they enjoy in life or what they're good at in life.

Yet parents had to manage this additional responsibility in line with the expectation to be a realistic football parent, which they learnt about through comparisons to their peers. This meant negotiating a balance between supporting, but not pushing, their child to succeed.

In fulfilling this responsibility, parents often adjusted their own behaviours in response to their child, such as waiting until their son was ready to discuss matches afterwards and recognising that certain technical feedback was better received by players if it came from coaches. All parents regularly attended matches. Some thought their presence was important so that their son felt supported, whereas others watched games in order to be able to provide instructional feedback on where to improve afterwards. Parents were keen to follow dietary guidance for players provided by sports nutritionists and closely monitored their child's mood to respond to his needs. This commitment to following academy guidance is further discussed in chapters four (p.86) and five (p.123). Mothers in particular, described placing their child's needs above their own; sacrificing their free time and personal relationships in order to support their son's football commitments, reflecting an adherence to

the child-centred expectations of intensive mothering (Hays, 1996). This aligns with Wolfenden and Holt's (2005) finding that mothers were happy to give up their social lives and support their child's increasing tennis commitments, in order to ensure their child had access to the best opportunities. However, when mothers lacked experience of football, they experienced uncertainty over the degree to which they should be encouraging their son to practice and focus more on the sport.

> Helen, under-10 parent: I think because I'm a Mum, I have a, I think I have a slightly different attitude. If he was a girl playing netball, I think I would be a lot more pushy, umm because that was my sport, and I think I'd know a lot more.

Conversely, fathers who had experience of playing or coaching football, explained that they understood the standards required from players at different stages, would recognise whether their son was achieving them and if not, provide instructions on how to improve.

> Peter, under-10 parent: If I think there's an area he needs to improve then I- I think it's probably my job to make sure I'm supporting him towards that.

> James, under-9 parent: About five or six parents are ex-footballers here. It gives them- it gives the kid a massive advantage in terms of support. Because they know the journey. What it takes. And they know the final destination, how much you've got to put in to get there.

Holt et al. (2008) previously demonstrated that knowledge and prior experience of sport affected parents' verbal reactions to their child's performance. In youth football, fathers saw their knowledge as enabling them to fulfil their parental responsibility – to help their child achieve his potential.

These findings lend support to the emerging literature that has demonstrated the reciprocal nature of the parent-child relationship, and that parents adjust their behaviours in response to their child's temperament, performance and behaviour (e.g. Dorsch et al., 2009; Holt et al., 2008; Knight & Holt, 2013a). Developing this further, when parents in academies found it difficult to read and understand their child's feelings, the intensity of the football experience highlighted this shortcoming, as one father described upon learning that his son was not enjoying football.

> Phil, under-10 parent: I felt it upset me more than it probably

> upset him in that somebody else has had to tell me that your son's not enjoying it. And that was his granddad. My dad pulled me to one side and said "do you know how unhappy your lad is?" and I've just been on the crest of a wave thinking oh he's enjoying it and he's going to Southfield and Academy X[4], and I'm thinking he's loving it. But then when he's going to his grandparents in the week he's saying "I don't like this and I don't like that". When I found out about it I think you feel a bit (.) a bit of a failure to be honest as a dad that you've not recognised it before. And upset that he's not been able to come to me.

This quote highlights how parents can feel they have failed in parenting when they do not meet societal ideas of what constitutes 'good' parenting – in this case, the expectation for fathers to develop open and close relationships with their children (Dermott, 2003; Henwood & Procter, 2003). The social construction of parenting and the influence this has on parent-child relationships has received limited attention in sport psychology, despite authors such as Coakley (2006) and Kay (2009) describing how societal expectations for parents can be lived out in a sport context, and offers a potential direction for future research.

**Fulfilling responsibility but protecting child.** All parents wished to ensure that they were giving their son the best chance of succeeding, as they perceived academies offered the best opportunity for players to improve and were part of the journey to becoming a professional adult footballer. This perception compelled parents to continue to support their son in football, to help him reach his full potential. However, if parents reflected that it was unlikely that he would ever be offered a professional contract, their instinct to protect their son meant they questioned whether the commitment required at such a young age to play at an academy was worth it, given the potential for negative experiences. For example, players had less time to socialise with friends outside of football and were often tired from late nights travelling home after training.

> Phil, under-10 parent: We leave home at 4.00pm to beat the traffic and we usually get down here for about 5:15pm, and it's dark when we leave, it's dark when we get home. He's asleep for most of the journey home. We get in at 8:45pm. There's times when I've carried him from the car straight to bed and I'm thinking 'what am I doing putting him through this?' It's madness.

[4] Academy X was not included in this research.

Players were also exposed to the potential disappointment of deselection from academy squads (see chapter one p.5). Being released was seen as a constant threat to player's well-being and future in football, as all parents had heard stories of other players and parents who had not coped well with release, or had not expected it. Parents talked about academies as being cut-throat, competitive and ruthless, where only the good enough survive, but accepted this as part of the elite youth football culture. In chapters five (p.122) and six (p.154), parents' acceptance of academy practices is discussed in more detail.

> Peter, under-10 parent: I think it's a little bit ruthless anyway, academy clubs. If you're- if you're good enough, then I think you suit and you're ok. If you're not I think it's- it's not very nice to be honest. But that's football.

> Helen, under-10 parent: They do have these assessments and they will have elements of criticism and umm, things that they need to improve upon and stuff like that and it's competitive and, you know, that's life.

> Louise, under-11 parent: I think it's so cut throat, it's so cut throat. And you have to have other provisions in place which, you know, we're trying to put. Umm and you don't know when- when it will finish really.

Parents' perceptions of the probability of their son being released mirrored the decreasing number of academy players who were re-signed to football clubs each season. For example, at Southfield Academy, from the 90% of players the club aimed to retain from the under-9 age group squad, the club aimed to re-sign 40% of those players to the under-16 age group and 20% of those players to the under-21 squad (Field notes, February 2012). Consequently, parents were torn between the concern that the professional club environment was inappropriate for young children and the perception that academies were the best place to develop players.

> James, under-9 parent: I'm really mixed and ambivalent on academies. You know, because I- I just think it's too early. Telling a kid you're not good enough at nine or ten is unnecessary. They don't need to face the sharp end of the world at that age, you know. It doesn't need to be that at nine or ten. There's no place in the world for that. But if I took Harry out

> and put him back in the youth team, he really won't have anyone to play with, because the talent's diluted. If I leave him in here he's got to deal with the pressures that come with this. So they've put you in this either or position, which is poor.

> Louise, under-11 parent: There's times when I say "I've had enough, I can't do this you know he's never gonna be a footballer anyway so why-" you know, all of this comes out and my husband's the one going "no, no, no, come on, he's enjoying it, let's just keep it going".

By focusing instead on the meaning of academy football as an opportunity for their son to play in fantastic facilities and learn skills such as discipline, respect and teamwork, parents resolved to carry on taking their son to the academy as long as he was enjoying playing and improving in football. In addition, to try and ensure their son remained realistic and kept football in perspective, parents emphasised the importance of education and encouraged their sons to take part in a variety of sports, recognising that the numbers of players who would ever become professionals were small. Parents regulated the temptation to look ahead to their son's potential future in football by trying to focus on being in the present and enjoying the experience for as long as it lasted, downplaying the meaning of academy football as a potential route into the professional game.

> Peter, under-10 parent: If he can stay here until he's at least 14 and learn about life, being a footballer then I'll be very happy. If he's beyond that then I'll be, I'll be ecstatic and that's how I look at it because you can't (.) I don't think you can get too hung up about saying well you gotta get to you're 16 because then you've got this and then you can have that. I think you're setting yourself up for a big fall if you do that if I'm honest because there's only a very small percentage that actually make it . . . I think, keep your feet on the ground and just enjoy the experience while it's happening.

Uncertainty about a child's future in sport has been cited as a common stressor among sport parents (Harwood et al., 2010; Harwood & Knight, 2009a). By reorienting towards the present and their son's short-term enjoyment from football, parents suppressed their concerns and resolved to help their son as long as he was progressing. This finding demonstrates how parents coped with uncertainty and reflects the temporal dimension of being a parent of an

elite youth footballer, often lost in retrospective accounts.

## Conclusion

### Phenomenological Interpretations

Using a phenomenological approach as the theoretical lens for this research – which differs from a traditional cognitive or behavioural view of psychology (Langdridge, 2007) – provided a new way of understanding the psychological phenomena of parenting in elite youth football. The essences which together constituted parents' experiences: socialisation into the football academy culture; enhanced parental identity; and increased parental responsibility, can be described in phenomenological terms as reflecting fundamental aspects of lived-experience (Ashworth, 2003a; 2003b; Merleau-Ponty, 1962). In particular: relationality (the experience of social relations as lived); selfhood (what the phenomenon means for identity and agency); embodiment (the role of the body in experiencing a phenomenon including emotions); and temporality (the lived-sense of past, present and future).

The significance of relations with coaches and peers to parents' experiences in this study illustrates the social nature of parenting. Yet current theorisations of parental influence in sport do not account for social interaction in their explanations. Fredricks and Eccles' (2004) model, used extensively to underpin sport parenting research (e.g. Bhalla & Weiss, 2010; Bois et al., 2009; Gould et al., 2008), identifies a number of social and cultural demographics that affect parental influence, but does not recognise the influence of relationships or the sport environment. By theoretically conceptualising parenting as a social process and considering issues of relationality alongside individual characteristics, a more complex understanding of parental influence may be produced. In particular, the relationship and interaction between parents and children, coaches and parent peers should be considered in theories which seek to account for parenting behaviours in sport.

Parents' relationship with their child was an essential feature of their experience, and being part of the elite youth football culture shaped this relationship. Through their son's selection to an academy, parents' identity was enhanced and became closely linked to his football participation. Rather than seeing the self as residing within the individual, phenomenology constructs identity as something which is developed through social interaction. As Merleau-Ponty (1962 p.122) explains; "we are literally what others think of us and what our world is". For the participants in this study, their identity as a parent was formed through their relationship and interaction with their child in the football setting. This is examined further in chapter five (p.119).

The embodied aspect of parenting has not previously been explored in sport contexts. The findings of this study highlighted how parents felt restricted when they were unable to perform parenting in the same way they had at grassroots level, as the responsibility for player development shifted to coaches. The tension between the embodied instinct to protect their son from negative experiences, and the desire to ensure their child had access to the best opportunities to develop and improve, meant parents experienced uncertainty. Following Merleau-Ponty's perspective that "we perceive the world with our body" (1962 p.239) and that "it is precisely my body which perceives the body of another" (1962 p.412), we can view embodied parent-child relationships as a key feature of what it means to be a parent. Exploring the implications of club policies which may restrict parents from parenting is an important area for future research.

Finally, the temporal dimension of being a parent of an elite youth footballer was reflected in how parents recognised the transient nature of their friendships with peers, and how they coped with uncertainty about their child's future in football. By focusing on being in the present and their son's short-term enjoyment from football, despite the temptation to project to a possible future in which their son becomes a professional player, parents suppressed their concerns. These findings provide insight into parents' experiences in the present, often overlooked in retrospective studies.

**Parent Transitions in Sport**

Together, the findings of this study suggest that parents experienced a transition as their son progressed into the specialisation stage of football. Much has been written concerning young athlete's career transitions in sport and the changing roles and involvement of parents across an athlete's sport career (e.g. Alfermann & Stambulova, 2007; Côté, 1999; Lauer et al., 2010b), and yet parents' own adaptation to these transitions remains relatively unexplored. In football, parents' transition into the specialisation stage was associated with a change in identity and an increased sense of responsibility to facilitate their son's development. It is postulated that formal recognition of a child as talented contributed to these changes, and that knowledge and previous experience of sport, together with perception of the parent-child relationship shaped how parents adapted. Further studies are required to understand how transitions in sport are experienced by parents and what constrains or enables parents to adapt successfully. For example, understanding how parental identity changes following a child's exit from sport may be of interest, given the potential for identity disruption.

This study also emphasises the need to provide support and communication when

parents transition into elite youth sport environments. In the absence of clear guidance and faced with an increased sense of responsibility for their son's development, the parents in elite youth football relied upon societal constructions of parenting and subjective comparisons to peers to make decisions and judge whether they were parenting effectively. Informing parents about player development pathways (including exit routes) and expected performance and practice levels across different stages is essential. In sports where performance criteria are not clearly defined, explaining how young athletes will be judged may help to reduce uncertainty around children's future in sport. It is advisable, however, that in elite settings parents are encouraged to measure their child's success in terms wider than just whether their child keeps a place on a particular squad or team. The coach's role in this communication to parents is imperative, although the findings question the extent to which coaches are aware of their role in shaping the experiences of parents. Coaches' management of feedback to parents regarding players' performances is discussed in more detail in chapter six (p.152).

The differences between the experiences of mothers and fathers in this sample (explored further in chapter five p.130) suggest that parents may benefit from more individualised advice and guidance. Fathers experiencing difficulty adjusting to a reduction in responsibility for their child's football development, or mothers with a lack of access to experiential knowledge of playing men's football may require different forms of support. Other parents who can empathise with the emotional experience of parenting in youth sport may be best placed to explain to newer parents how they adapted to the different cultural norms and practices.

**Limitations**

The unique context of English elite youth football, where a professional contract is highly coveted and academy squads are assessed regularly by coaches by performance standards that are not clearly articulated to parents, means that caution should be taken when considering these findings in relation to other sports. Perhaps coach evaluations of children's performances would be less important to parents in a sport where young athletes' progress can be tangibly measured through grades or ranking points, although this system comes with its own challenges, such as increasing the emphasis on winning (Knight & Holt, 2013a). This study may also be limited in that despite seeking variation in the sample, the participants all volunteered to take part in interviews and may share common characteristics different to those parents who declined or did not respond to research invitations. More research in different populations of parents of elite youth footballers may help to further delineate the

essences of experience.

In conclusion, phenomenological research in other contexts may further contribute to understanding the complex nature of parenting in youth sport and encourage this vital area of research to move beyond defining parents by a checklist of positive and negative behaviours, and instead highlight how practitioners can understand parents and help them to adjust to the demands of being a sport parent.

# CHAPTER FOUR

## Elite Youth Footballers' Experiences of Interaction with their Parents

Parents have a crucial role to play in shaping children's experiences, development and achievement in sport (e.g. Côté, 1999; Fredricks & Eccles, 2004; Wolfenden & Holt, 2005). Understanding how children interpret and respond to parenting behaviours is essential for developing a complex understanding of parenting in youth sport, and importantly, considers children's agency in the parenting process, but to date has been a neglected area of research (Faircloth et al., 2013). Parenting research underpinned by the assumptions of developmental psychology has been criticised for positioning children as passive recipients of adult's socialisation efforts, and for its focus on parenting behaviours that lead to positive or negative child outcomes (Burman, 1994). Alternatively, researchers have called for a view of children as competent social actors, who interpret, negotiate, and manage their interaction with parents (Brannen & O'Brien, 1996; Mayall, 2002). This perspective emphasises the value of understanding how children make sense of their worlds, and seeking their views on their role within families and issues that affect them (Jeanes, 2009; Mayall, 2002; Piggott, 2010). Including children in research is essential to ensure young athletes are not reduced to being "seen but not heard" in sport (Pitchford et al., 2004 p.43). Yet first-person accounts of children's experiences of interactions with parents in sport environments are limited.

Previous research that has examined the relationship between young athletes' psychological outcomes and perceptions of parenting through cross-sectional correlational study designs (e.g. Babkes & Weiss, 1999; Bois, Lalanne & Delforge, 2009; LaVoi & Babkes-Stellino, 2008), has increased understanding of the effects of parenting behaviours, but methodologically has limited children's experiences to certain psychological constructs (e.g. anxiety, motivation, enjoyment) and restricted responses to predetermined questionnaire items. This approach has failed to account for the role children play in actively attaching meaning to their interaction with parents, by assuming a unidirectional relationship between parenting behaviours and child outcomes.

Alternatively, studies using qualitative methods have explored how children interpret their interaction with parents in sport contexts (e.g. Fraser-Thomas & Côté, 2009; Fraser-Thomas, Côté & Deakin, 2008a; 2008b; Knight et al., 2010; 2011; Omli & Wiese-Bjornstal, 2011; see chapter one p.17 and p.23). Together, this research has begun to illuminate children's subjective experiences of interaction with their parents, but remains limited by a narrow focus on perceptions of parent behaviours at sport competitions, with North American adolescent athlete populations in individual sport settings. In addition, the influence of

institutional norms and practices of the sport setting on parent-child interaction has not been examined. This is necessary to develop a fuller understanding of parenting in youth sport as a dynamic process, constituted through social interaction and the specific cultural context.

Recognising that the voices of children have been marginalised in English youth football (following interviews with 70 children from professional, amateur and school-based football clubs), Pitchford et al. (2004) called for a new child-focused research agenda, arguing that children in football were not simply engaged in preparation for the adult game, and that they actively construct identities and attach meanings to their interactions with adults in this context. The authors proposed that future research should include the experiences of children currently engaged in football and how they perceive, and negotiate with, the individuals and institutions that bestow authority in the game.

Therefore, the purpose of the present study was to explore children's subjective experiences of parenting and the meaning they attach to interactions with their parents, in the context of elite youth football. English elite youth football provides a research setting where parent-child interactions occur frequently, as parents are highly involved through the weekly training and competition commitment that academies demand, and are often responsible for transporting their child to and from the football club. By exploring player's experiences of interaction with their parents in football academies, this study offers a perspective on the parenting process in an elite, team sport setting, within a culture where football is a high profile and mass participation sport. This addresses the limitation of the existing children in youth sport parenting research, which has predominantly been undertaken with North American adolescent populations and in individual sport settings (see chapter one p.24).

An existential phenomenological approach was adopted for this research, guided by Ashworth's lifeworld version of phenomenology (Ashworth, 2003a; 2003b; see chapter two p.34), to provide an in-depth account of the experiences of elite youth footballers' interaction with their parents. The phenomenological focus on how an individual consciously attends to their world allows for children's agency and voice to be represented in research. A lifeworld approach is suitable for exploring children's experiences of parenting as it explicitly attends to the lived-experience of relations with others, and enables interaction with parents to be located within children's overall experience, in this case, of playing football at an academy. In addition, the use of existential phenomenological methods has been advocated for research with children, on account of its open methodological techniques and unique focus on experience as lived (Ryba, 2008). In contrast to structured, theoretically-driven interviews, phenomenological interviewing encourages participants to express their experiences in their

own words, therefore positioning children as experts on their lived-experience (Ryba, 2008).

## Methods

### Participants

Five children registered to an English professional football club elite academy participated in this research. Participants were male, aged 11 years (*M* = 11.2) and were of Black British African (*n* = 1), White British (*n* = 3) and White British/Black Caribbean (*n* = 1) ethnicity. The group played together in an under-11 age group academy squad and knew each other prior to taking part in the study. Participants had between six months and four years of experience of playing academy level football (*M* = 2.1).

With the permission of the Southfield Academy director, all parents of players in the under-11 age group squad were contacted to ask if their son would like to be involved in the research. Parents who expressed an interest on behalf of their child then attended a meeting where the purpose of the research, the format of the interviews, and issues of confidentiality and withdrawal were explained. After an opportunity to ask questions and agree the interview dates, information sheets and consent forms were provided for both parents and players. Therefore initially, parents explained the details of the research project to players.

Players were then invited to a meeting to clarify why players' opinions were important, what would happen in the interviews, how confidentiality would be achieved and how findings would be used. It was emphasised that there were no right or wrong answers to questions and that participants were the experts on the research topic. Participants' right to withdraw was explained by reaffirming that it was up to players (and not parents) to decide whether they came to the first interview and that they could choose not to attend further sessions at any time during the process. Finally, players were free to ask any questions they had. Players who decided that they wanted to be involved then brought their signed willingness to participate and parental consent forms to the first interview.

### Data Collection

**Focus group interviewing.** When working with young children in the age range of the participants in this study, researchers must be aware of, and attempt to address the power relations that affect the interview setting. A focus group interviewing technique can help to reduce disparity in power and status by increasing the ratio of participants to the researcher and encouraging children to discuss topics using their own shared language (Eder & Fingerson, 2002). Focus groups may be preferred by children who value the sharing and support available from participating alongside their peers, and are appropriate for working with members of a pre-established group (Hill, 2006; Mercer, 2012; Palmer, Larkin, de

Visser & Fadden, 2010). Therefore, a focus group method was selected for the present study. This also enabled the interaction between participants, such as how accounts are corroborated, challenged, emphasised or downplayed to be examined (Wilkinson, 2006; 1998), to understand how children co-construct meanings and make sense of their experience of playing academy football together.

***Focus groups and phenomenology.*** The use of focus group interviewing within phenomenological research should not be adopted uncritically (Bradbury-Jones, Sambrook & Irvine, 2009; Mercer, 2012). Authors have recognised the potential of using group interviews to gather rich descriptions of experiences but have advised reflection upon the status of personal accounts obtained through group interaction (Langdridge, 2007; Smith, 2004). The main criticism of using focus group interviews is that the presence of others, the dynamics between participants and the potential for dominance of certain accounts within discussion may inhibit the production of individual phenomenological descriptions.

However, it has been counter-argued that individual perspectives can be preserved, when careful sampling ensures that the group share similar experiences and when all participants have an opportunity for their voice to be heard in interviews, highlighting the crucial role of the focus group facilitator (Bradbury-Jones et al., 2009; Mercer, 2012). In fact, talking with others can have the potential to enhance the production of personal accounts, as participants can listen to multiple perspectives on a phenomenon stimulating reflection, and can share and elaborate on views in response to questions, agreement or disagreement from others (Tomkins & Eatough, 2010; Wilkinson, 1998). The focus of phenomenology is not on the individual per se, which would preclude group interviews, but on the nature of phenomenon as a human experience (Finlay, 2014). Interaction among participants can therefore be viewed as offering an additional way of understanding phenomena, as participants are provided with space to reflect and elaborate on their experiences together.

The question then becomes one of how data produced from phenomenological group interviews can be analysed and presented. Mercer (2012) and Smith (2004) recommend that further stages of analysis (beyond a typical interpretative phenomenological analysis) may be required to adequately account for the group context in which descriptions were obtained. Likewise, Tomkins and Eatough (2010) outlined the risk of privileging either the group or the individual in analysis and acknowledged the need to find ways to “move dynamically with and between” (p.249) personal and shared accounts.

Therefore, in the present study, two levels of analysis were performed to examine both the individual phenomenological descriptions produced in interviews and the action-

orientated nature of participants' talk. The application of conversation analysis (Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson, 1974) to undertake an in-depth examination of the function of participants' talk, complemented the exploration of the lifeworld which itself includes a focus on discourse and how language available to participants shapes experience (Ashworth, 2003a; see chapter two p.34). As opposed to researchers simply listening to and re-presenting children's views of their world, conversation analysis can be used to show, rather than tell how social phenomena are enacted and negotiated by children (James, 2007).

***Philosophical assumptions.*** In adopting a dual analysis, it was acknowledged that people use language to do things, but that there is being which precedes language and that taking people's accounts of their experiences seriously can tell us something about the phenomenon of interest (Langdridge, 2008). It is important to note here that some may view these two approaches as incommensurate, and therefore inappropriate to combine due to their different philosophical assumptions (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011). However, this research does not align fully to the position of discursive psychology, which sets aside ontological concerns and assumes that the world can only be understood through language (Edwards, 2006; Potter, 2010). Instead, informed by multi-perspectivalism (Kellner, 1995; see chapter two p.36), a technique used by discourse analysts was employed to explore the interaction within interviews with the aim of producing a richer, more complex understanding of how individuals interpret and make sense of their lives than a phenomenological analysis could offer alone. The ontological underpinnings of this study are fully described in chapter two (p.35).

***Focus group interview format.*** Players participated in five 31 to 47 minute semi-structured, phenomenologically-guided focus group interviews (*M* = 38 minutes), held weekly following a Saturday morning academy training session. It has been recommended that for young children (aged 6 to 11 years), four to six participants are optimal for focus group research and that in sessions that exceed 45 minutes children's responses may decline (Gibson, 2007; Morgan, Gibbs, Maxwell & Britten, 2002). Four sessions were initially planned as it was agreed by the researcher and academy staff that this was not too onerous a commitment for participants and their families, yet was sufficient time for the facilitator to develop rapport with the group and for players to describe their experiences in detail. After the third interview, permission was sought and gained from players, parents and coaches to hold an additional fifth session to allow extra time to complete planned activities and discussion (see Table 3). Parents were contacted weekly by text and email to confirm that the session would take place and were asked to reply if their son would not be attending. Except

for one session missed by two players due to poor weather conditions, all participants attended all interviews.

Interviews were held in a staff room at the academy ground, which had comfortable chairs that could be arranged in a circle to encourage sharing and interaction. The room was accessible to coaches but conversations could not be overheard. Holding interviews at the academy ground meant that players were in a familiar setting and in a space that they had more ownership over than the researcher, helping to reduce the power imbalance within the interviews (Ryba, 2008). The interview facilitator was experienced in working with young people in both professional and volunteer roles which required respecting, communicating with, listening to and understanding young people; skills that have been identified as useful for encouraging open and interactive dialogue with children (Gibson, 2007).

***Focus group interview content.*** To create an inclusive atmosphere, a number of ground rules were agreed upon at the start of the first interview. Listening to each other when someone is speaking, remembering that there are no right or wrong answers and that it is okay for people to have different opinions, and not being afraid to ask questions were proposed as guidelines by the facilitator. Players had the opportunity to add their own ideas but did not make any further suggestions. Ice breaker questions (‘what was your favourite part of the London Olympics?’; ‘who is your favourite football player and why?’) were asked firstly to give participants the opportunity to practice speaking and listening in the group. The facilitator also contributed answers to these questions to build rapport.

During interviews a combination of open questions and a variety of interactive activities were used to prompt discussion (see Table 3 for detailed interview content). A balance was struck between individual and group tasks to explore both personal experiences and co-constructed meanings. Activities were designed to provide players with choice in how they participated in the research. Players could select to write or draw to communicate their experiences, and use stickers to express their individual view in collaborative activities.

Having choice has been highlighted as important to young people who take part in research as they themselves recognise that different methods suit different people and that offering a range of activities may allow more children’s views to be expressed equally (Hill, 2006). Choice was also provided in order to maintain informality. Players chose where they wanted to sit and were able to move around during the sessions, sometimes selecting to work at a table, other times on the floor. There was also sufficient space for children to act out some of their experiences, which should be anticipated in interviews which seek to explore embodied experiences of sport (Ryba, 2008).

**Table 3: Academy Player Focus Group Interview Schedule**

| Session | Focus | Activity |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Ground rules and ice breakers. | Questions. |
| | What do you enjoy about being an academy player? | Free drawing/writing on individual whiteboards (pen and paper exercise; Morgan et al., 2002).* |
| 2 | What do you sometimes not like about being an academy player? | Free drawing/writing on individual whiteboards.* |
| | What is a typical week like for you? How does it feel when you play in games? What has been your best memory of being at the academy so far? | Questions. |
| 3 | Exploring motivation for playing football. | As a group rank a list of reasons for playing football e.g. to play a sport I enjoy, to become a professional footballer, from the most to least important (diamond ranking exercise; O'Kane, 2000).* |
| | Exploring meanings attached to football. | Word association to images of professional football clubs and players (label generation; Colucci, 2007).* |
| | How do your parents help you at home, in training, and before, during and after matches? | Free drawing/writing to complete individual grids on A4 card.* |
| 4 | How do your parents help you at home, in training, and before, during and after matches? | Continued discussion from previous week. |
| | What do parents and coaches do? | As a group sort a selection of behaviours into things parents do or things coaches do e.g. tells me what to do on the pitch, encourages me, helps me to improve (pile sorting; Colucci, 2007). Using stickers individually indicate which three are the most important behaviours for a parent and a coach.* |
| 5 | Explore meanings attached to interaction with parents. | Individually complete sentence cards e.g. 'my parent is pleased when…', 'the most annoying thing my parent does is…', 'I wish my parent would… more' (sentence completion, Colucci, 2007).* |
| | What does football mean to you? | Free drawing/writing together on flip chart paper.* |

* These activities were not included in the data analysis, but used to prompt discussion.

The role of the facilitator was to ask questions to prompt further description (such as what players thought or how they felt), to check meaning or to encourage others to share their experiences. To maximise contributions from all participants, players were asked sometimes to share their ideas in turn (with the option to pass), or quieter participants were asked questions directly. A feature of phenomenological interviewing is that participants are encouraged to describe their experiences in terms relevant to them (Langdridge, 2007; Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009), and therefore players were able to lead and shift the topic of discussion. However, it remained the facilitator's responsibility to decide when to move on to the next question or activity.

**Reflections on the Role of Researcher**

As a female researcher with no claim to knowledge of what playing at a male professional club academy was like, I was able to legitimately ask participants to explain their taken-for-granted experiences and common language, which I felt enabled players to gain confidence in their role as experts and in giving explanations. My choice of wearing casual clothes rather than a sports tracksuit further distinguished me from the setting. However my lack of a footballing identity positioned me instead in more of a teacher relationship with the participants, evidenced by the players raising their hands to speak in the initial interviews and an occasion where a player accidentally referred to me as 'Miss'. This faux pas was met with laughter from the group, which acknowledged that they had understood it was not an appropriate form of address in this context. In ways I conformed to this position, by praising contributions, giving instructions for activities and chaperoning players at the end of a session until their parents arrived to collect them (to uphold my responsibility to their welfare), even though players usually would have been able to move around the academy freely. At other times I resisted the teacher role, by being amiable to off-task conversations, joking behaviours and snacks being consumed during interviews. Nevertheless my relationship with the group was one through which players were learning how to participate in interviews and therefore it was important to examine my responses to players' talk in the interviews, to identify how I co-constructed 'good' contributions and interaction in interviews.

For example, players recognised how I responded to their contributions, at times mirroring my language, or aligning with my assessments. Extract 1.0 provides an example of this alignment, where Alex praised Seb following my positive assessment.

Extract 1.0

```
1 Seb:      Well I feel I feel <really really> (0.8) thinking like
2           they're the best mum and dad in the ↑wor:ld and I
3           think they'll never ever give up on me (0.4) so when
4           I'm older and they're older:: (0.2) I'll never give up
5           on them
6           (1.2)
7 Nicky:    That's very nic:e.
8 Alex:     Well done ↑Seb
```

In this interaction Alex and I co-construct players' personal accounts of relationships with parents as good interview contributions, demonstrating how the research agenda and question were imbued in my responses during the interviews.

**Data Analysis**

All interviews were audio recorded. Recordings were transcribed following each session, so that the facilitator could reflect on the interview and identify any discussion points that may have warranted further exploration in the subsequent session. All verbal talk was transcribed at this stage and interpretative notes recorded in a research diary (see chapter two p.43). Once all five interviews were complete, transcriptions were transformed to include key features of the delivery of conversation including overlap, pauses and emphasis, in order for a sufficient interactional analysis to be undertaken. Transcription conventions (Jefferson, 2004; Sidnell, 2010) can be found in Table 6. Recordings were listened to several times during the process of transforming transcriptions, which facilitated the "intimate familiarity with their material that qualitative researchers need" (Howitt & Cramer, 2011 p.317).

Interview transcripts were analysed using phenomenological lifeworld analysis and conversation analysis (Ashworth, 2003a; 2003b; Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson, 1974). These will be briefly described before outlining the process of applying two analytical techniques to the same data. Analysis was further supplemented by the participant observation detailed in chapter two (see p.40). Lifeworld research involves exploring participants' phenomenological descriptions in relation to essential, universal features of existence which are assumed to underpin all lived-experience (Spinelli, 2005). In this analysis, Ashworth's (2003a; 2003b) seven 'fragments' of the lifeworld (described in chapter two p.35) were used to explore and interpret participants' lived-experience. Conversation analysis examines the organisation of talk-in-interaction. Analysts seek to notice patterns in interaction and action-orientated features, and then show how conversational devices are used by people to manage their interactional business (Antaki, Billig, Edwards & Potter, 2003). Following Ten Have's

(2007) recommendation, analysis in this study began by attending to data with "an open-minded approach, using just a few basic concepts from the conversation analysis tradition to structure one 'looking'" (p.121). These concepts were:

- turn-taking organisation (how speaker change is managed, involving the analysis of *turn construction units*; parts of talk which could constitute a complete turn after which another speaker might take over);
- sequence organisation (the progression and order of turn construction units, often based on *adjacency pairs*; two-part utterances in which the first part makes relevant the second e.g. question/answer);
- repair (the use of practices designed to resolve problems of speaking, hearing or understanding); and
- turn-design (how turn construction units perform action).

Although it has been suggested that dual analysis of this kind should be performed sequentially (Palmer et al., 2010; Smith, 2004), in reality it proved difficult to fully set aside one analytical lens and so in practice, analyses were undertaken concurrently. For each page of transcript on a line-by-line basis, phenomenological descriptions were highlighted and descriptive codes added to the margin. This included any stories, comments or discussion that referred to participants' experience of 'something'. Then for the same page, the interactional features were examined, labelling the conversational device or sequence and noting initial thoughts on the function of those features. Different coloured pens were used on transcripts to differentiate between the two analyses.

Next, codes and labels were copied into an analysis table for each interview. The tables functioned to establish meaning units in the data, by recording the line number at which a shift in topic or meaning occurred in the transcript. Each meaning unit was described in phenomenological language to "render the implicit explicit" (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2008b p.45) and help to clarify the psychological significance. Examples of interactional features were also collated by noting the line numbers at which devices were used. No data were omitted from this process in order to avoid privileging some over others. See Table 5 for an example dual analysis table.

Phenomenological meaning units were interpreted in relation to the seven lifeworld fractions, paying attention to links between them (see chapter two p.35). Meaning units interpreted as relevant to the same lifeworld feature were then grouped into lower-order themes. Theme descriptions were adjusted and new themes added on completion of each

interview transcript. Table 4 shows an extract of phenomenological analysis and Appendix R provides an example of how phenomenological themes were constructed from the data. The functions of particular conversational devices or sequences were interpreted by comparing their use across transcripts and considering the specific instance at which they occurred. To challenge and enhance the interpretation of the interactional data in this study, extracts were also presented to a research group within Loughborough University to gather additional and alternative interpretations.

**Table 4: Extract of Phenomenological Lifeworld Analysis**

| Data Extract | Phenomenological Description | Phenomenological Interpretation |
|---|---|---|
| Alex: Well (0.3) there's two different times like (0.4) I like to know how I've done after a match (0.5) nn I like my dad to watch me but (0.2) somet:imes the pressure's off ya (0.5) and ya free like, >coz if I do well< me dad does tell me if I do bad (0.2) my dad does tell me [w- off]<br><br>Nicky: [Hehehe] | Likes Dad to watch him because he likes feedback on how he has played. If he plays good Dad praises him a little bit, but when he plays bad Dad tells him off. Feels under pressure. | Performing while being watched by parent – feedback, pressure |
| Alex: And if I do good h-he praises me a little bit (0.5) and then (0.5) but when he's not watching ya like we when when we went to a futsal tournament (0.4) I just (0.4) I did some things that I wouldn't normally be able to do (0.5) >when I'm with me dad< coz me dad likes to be really strong ↓ and (0.5) but I tried a couple a tricks and stuff and I played really well and (0.4) just the pressure's off ya when your parents aren't watching sometimes: | Dad likes him to be really strong. | Parent expectation for way of playing – to look strong on the pitch |
| | Felt free to try tricks and played well in a tournament when his Dad wasn't watching. | Performing while being watched by parent<br><br>Freedom to perform different skills when parent was absent |

This analysis process produced in-depth descriptions and multiple interpretations of participants' experiences and the group's interaction for each interview transcript. The research question was then used to focus in analysis and construct findings. Themes related to the phenomenological lifeworld and patterns in interaction were considered in relation to how children experienced and made sense of parenting in elite youth football. Participants all shared experiences of interacting with parents at training, at matches and at home and therefore these occasions were used to frame the findings and discussion. Interview extracts were selected which illustrated personal accounts, group interaction, or both where appropriate.

**Table 5: Example Dual Analysis Table**

| Line Numbers | Phenomenological Description | Interactional Feature | Interpretation |
|---|---|---|---|
| 208-220 | In academies you learn from losing and learn nothing from winning in Sunday league | **Reported talk / Idiom** (win some you lose some) | **Embodiment –** losing makes you strong and learn not to cry if you lose<br>**Project** – learning from losing<br>**Identity –** difference in levels; learn less in Sunday league |
| 229 | Academy means; being an elite player, home, family, good team | | **Identity** – recognise label of being elite<br>**Space/Identity/Sociality –** home/family |
| 274-285 | Important for players to be good at school | **Alignment**<br>**Rules and account** (for being good at school) | **Identity** – construction of good academy player; being good at school<br>**Project –** need to be good at school to have other jobs to fall back on |
| 292-296 | Players have got to step up in years; need to develop | **Language** (step up) | **Temporal** – continual progression required to become a professional |
| 302-312 | Have to achieve tasks set by academy coaches – if you can't do things you're not the highest academy player | **Rules and account** (meet tasks) | **Temporal** – progression is measured in a time-framed manner; consequences for not achieving tasks |
| 308, 313, 316, 349, 518, 520 | Players need to get better and better | **Rules** (need to, have to) | **Temporal/Project** – continual expectation to improve |
| 316 | Players need to work as hard as possible and put effort in | **Rules** (work hard)<br>**Extremes/three part list** (110% effort) | **Discourse/Embodiment –** Winning – want to win and do well (motivation)<br>**Project –** give effort |
| 326, 372 | Being responsible means looking after younger players, role modelling – guide them into future | | **Identity/Project –** role modelling, orientation to future as professionals<br>**Knowledge** – increases with age, possess more than age group below |
| 332 | Being responsible for kit – something you need to do as you get older | **Language** (Parents – *let* mum and dad prepare kit) | **Sociality** – Parents – preparing kit<br>**Identity/Temporal –** responsibility changes with age |

**Table 6: Transcription Conventions**

| Symbol | Conversation Feature Represented |
|---|---|
| [ | Onset of overlapping talk. |
| ] | End of overlapping talk. |
| = | No break or gap. One at the end of a line and another at the start of the next indicate; a continuous utterance with no pause by the same speaker (where lines are broken up to accommodate overlap); or latching, where there is no gap between utterances of different speakers. |
| (0.5) | Numbers in parentheses indicate length of silence, represented by tenths of seconds. |
| (.) | A micropause, audible but not usually measurable, ordinarily less than 0.2 seconds. |
| . | Falling, or final intonation, not necessarily the end of a sentence. |
| , | Continuing intonation, like when reading a list. |
| ? | Rising intonation, not necessarily a question. |
| :: | Prolongation of the preceding sound. Multiple colons denote a longer stretched sound. |
| word | Stress or emphasis via increased loudness or higher pitch. The more underlining, the greater the emphasis. |
| WOrd | Especially loud talk. The more upper case letters, the louder the sound. |
| ° | Onset of quieter or softer talk. Talk between two degree signs denotes a quieter sound relative to surrounding talk. |
| - | A cut-off or self-interruption. |
| word: | Combinations of underlining and colons indicate intonation contours. An underlined colon and preceding letter(s) indicates rising pitch. If the colon is not underlined this indicates falling pitch. |
| ↑ | Sharp rise in pitch. |
| ↓ | Sharp fall in pitch. |
| < > | Slowed or drawn out talk. |
| > < | Compressed or rushed talk. |
| w(h)ord | Parenthesised h's indicates aspiration as in breathing, laughing or crying. |

## Findings and Discussion

The following presents an interpretation of the elite youth footballers' experiences of parenting. Specifically the lifeworld fractions (Ashworth, 2003a; 2003b) of sociality (experience in relation to others), project (the experience of pursuing life activities) and embodiment (the role of the body in experience) are used to offer richer understandings of

three features of players' experiences: the parent role in relation to becoming successful academy footballers; performing while being watched by parents; and conflict. Interactional features of interest are also described in order to highlight how participants co-constructed meaning during group interviews.

**Setting the Scene**

Firstly, to provide context to the interpretations, an account of parents' involvement at training and matches is outlined, based on participant observation, followed by a description of the individual participants' family networks and football experiences.

**Parents' presence at training and matches.** Over the eight-week period of observing the players' training sessions and matches, there was a noticeable pattern to parents' involvement. At a typical training session, parents would arrive and congregate in the cafeteria for a chat and a cup of tea with their peer group; which mirrored the players' squad affiliations and friendship groups. With little else to occupy their time, parents would then move outside to watch the second half of the training session, which featured the nine-a-side practice game which culminated each session. Applause would be given for a shot on target, a successful tackle or a goal scored. Some parents would offer a running commentary on the game, audible for the other parents but not the players to hear. In particular, comments were made if their son made a mistake, for example making a pass that was easily intercepted or being tackled and losing possession. These errors were commonly followed by a rhetorical "why didn't you pass it?" or "what were you thinking?!"

Most parents attended matches, and were markedly more vocal on the sideline; providing verbal encouragement or short instructions such as "give it" or "get forward". As set out in the academy parent code of conduct, parents were expected not to coach from the sidelines and so comments were never delivered too frequently or outlandishly to attract attention, and were directed at individuals rather than the team.

> Watching the under-11s friendly match after the interview. Stood next to one of the Dads for the first quarter, whose eyes track his son's movement across the pitch like a hawk. "Do this, don't do that, put your head up, fall back, move! shoot!" Even when he is not speaking, I palpably sense that he wants to. Watching alongside him, I feel like I'm back on the terraces at Yeovil Town. (Field notes, September 2012)

Players seemed aware of their parents' presence as they looked over to the sideline when close enough, especially if they had scored or made a mistake. As outlined in chapter

three of this thesis (see p.63), parents explained that they regularly attended training and matches because they felt it was important for their son to be supported, or to be able to provide instructional feedback on where to improve afterwards. Therefore, how players experienced and made sense of their parents' presence at trainings and matches was of interest.

**Player family and football contexts.** The five participants who took part in the focus group interviews played together in the under-11 age group squad at Southfield Academy. Having played at the club for four years, James had the most experience of academy football in the group. At home, he lived with his mother and older sister. His mother regularly supported him at matches, often enthusiastically, which he sometimes found embarrassing. His father came to watch him play occasionally. Alex had played at the academy for three years and travelled for an hour to attend academy training and matches. He was an ardent supporter of his local club, not Southfield's first team. Alex lived with his father, mother, older sister and younger brother. He described his mother as not being very involved in his football, taking him to training infrequently to give his father a break from travelling, whereas his father had never missed a game he had played in. After three trials with other local football clubs, Seb joined Southfield Academy and had played there for two years. Living 45 minutes from the club, his mother and father shared the responsibility to bring him to training and both attended matches. Seb's younger brother had also been scouted by another academy. Tim had played for Southfield Academy for one year. It was his local club and he enjoyed supporting the first team, often attending matches with his family after training on a Saturday. Tim's mother, father or uncle took turns to bring him to training and matches. Finally, Noah was the player newest to the academy, having joined the squad six months earlier. At home, he lived with his mother and father. His described his mother as disinterested in sport generally, and therefore football was an activity he shared primarily with his father.

**Becoming Successful Academy Footballers**

Players' relationships with their parents were shaped by their academy football identity and project (Ashworth, 2003; 2003b); in that becoming a successful academy player was not possible without the support of parents. Players co-constructed that it was their individual responsibility to improve, and listed the extensive self-regulation and rule following required of a model academy footballer.

Extract 1.1

```
1 Seb:      You have to be committed to be actually a footballer
2           and you wan- (0.2) and like and like don't be like any
3           others just playing on your Xbox or PS3 or anything
4           [like] that.
5 James:    [Yeah]
6 Seb:      Get up ear:ly, be committed, get ready [for ya  ] for=
7 Noah:                                            [Practice]
8 Seb:      =a for a hard (.) day's training, practice like Noah
9           says and=
10 James:   =Get back [↑then you can rest: (0.3) for like a day
```

Here, Seb constructs the work ethic needed to be a footballer, his reference to "a hard day's training" mirroring that of full-time professional players. This extract also provides an example of the many collaborative sequences (Lerner, 2004) that were a feature of the interviews. Noah and James completed Seb's turns on lines 7 and 10 extract 1.1, which Seb subsequently accepts and builds upon in line 8. This form of collaborative alignment (Sidnell, 2010 p.170) suggests that Seb's understanding of the commitment required was shared and endorsed by the group.

Through the repetition of phrases such as 'you have to' and 'you need to', players demonstrated what Maybin (2006 p.153) described from her analysis of schoolchildren's talk as a "commitment to institutional authority". In the academy context, players understood that to become a good footballer meant conforming to norms that might usually be associated with adult professional players.

```
Extract 1.2
1 James:    OH: and and you're uh ye- you don't (0.3) you need to
2           keep yourself f:it
3           (0.6)
4 Seb:      Yeah [don't               don't]
5 James:         [>if you know what I mean<] coz you [can put on=
6 Noah:                                              [don't eat=
7 James:    =lots-]
8 Noah:     =loads] of junk food you can [eat (0.4) vegetables]=
9 Alex:                                  [we're we've got like]
10 Noah:    [=and fruit]
11 Seb:     [vegetables] fruit [pasta,]
12 Alex:                       [In the] un- [in the under eights]=
13 Seb:                                     [<car:bohy:dra::tes>]
```

```
14 Alex:    =I were given] a: a nutrition sheet
15 James:   Yeah
16 Alex:    Still got it up on my (0.2) board now
```

Keeping fit and regulating food intake was constructed as expected behaviour for an academy player. Alex provided evidence for Noah's claim on lines 6 to 8 extract 1.2 that they should not eat junk food, by referring to a nutrition sheet supplied by the academy. This access to 'official' knowledge (which others who joined the academy later did not receive), both validated the academy's stance on nutrition and demonstrated his personal commitment to following dietary guidance through describing its prominence in his personal space at home.

This demonstration of commitment to the behaviours required of a model academy footballer suggests that players were becoming socialised into the academy subculture. Cushion and Jones (2006; 2014) described how full-time academy players (aged 16 to 19 years) were socialised into embodying the values and expectations of the club through the repetition of daily activities and routines, and "constant messages, from how and where to dress, eat, train, play and behave" (2012 p.11). The authors highlighted how frequent reminders by coaches that players should prepare for matches through correct diet and rest, for example, emphasised the coaches' position of control and reinforced conformity among players. The present study supports these findings, and suggests that socialisation through legitimised, disciplinary practices in football occurs at a much younger age, and before players attend an academy on a full-time basis; as further illustrated through this example of an off-season objective for an under-9 player at Southfield Academy.

> Try to do as much physical activity as possible, as often as possible, and return in pre-season in the best physical condition that you can. Please note that this will be monitored by the coaching and sports science staff. (Field notes, May 2013)

Whereas peer pressure among older academy players meant individuals could be marginalised by peers if they were seen to be too eager or keen in training sessions (Cushion & Jones, 2006), there appeared to be an unchallenged acceptance of institutional norms displayed within the talk of the younger players in the present study. Cushion and Jones (2006; 2014) suggested that players' minimal resistance to the coaching process was due to their personal commitment to becoming a professional footballer and their belief that coaches were integral to achieving their goal. Similarly, the younger players expressed their aspiration to become a professional adult footballer during the interviews, and interpreted that adopting

the behaviours of a model academy player would help them to achieve their goal.

Ultimately, however, it was parents who enabled or restricted players' ability to follow academy rules and guidance. Players were not solely responsible for their diet, or their punctuality and attendance at training as they relied upon parents for transport. Consequently, players praised their parents when they enabled them to comply with academy guidance and criticised them when parents inhibited their ability to follow guidance, such as if parents gave them unhealthy foods or prepared their kit for them; a role which coaches expected players to undertake. Alex, for example, described his frustration when his father cleaned his football boots for him:

```
Extract 1.3
1 Alex:     He cleans em and uhh that's:: really annoying because
2           they tell ya (0.2) not to do it not- let you:: do at
3           Southfield,
4 Seb:      My Dad [helps °me]
5 Alex:            [>But every] time I get home from school
6           they're clean<, bang in front of me. [  They]'re=
7 Nicky:                                         [Hehehe]
8 Alex:     =shi:ning I'm like DAD let me ↑DO I::T
```

In this extract, Alex criticised his father for not allowing him to take responsibility for preparing his kit. By emphasising in line 8 how he protests against his parent's intervention, Alex displayed his eagerness to comply with the academy's expectation for players to demonstrate independence. Formulating his father's behaviour as scripted (Edwards, 1994) and routine ("every time"), and upgrading the action (from "clean" to "shining") provided Alex with an account for why he does not enact the ideal behaviour – he was restricted by his parent.

This implies that to the same extent that parents described supporting a child in elite football as a shared, relational experience (see chapter three p.61 and chapter five p.118), players also cannot follow their personal projects without the support of their parents. Players constructed their relationships with parents by interpreting interactions in relation to their institutional commitment and goal of becoming a successful academy footballer. This finding illustrates how children experience agency in the parenting process, by attributing meaning to parent behaviours in accordance with their own personal agendas, which are shaped by the sport culture. This interpretation may be useful for understanding why children express preferences toward certain parent behaviours (Knight et al., 2010; 2011; Omli & Wiese-

Bjornstal, 2011).

Furthermore, players described that they felt able to make their parents feel proud of them through football, when they played well, or if they scored a goal; increasing the importance of success in football to their relationship with their parents. Although this encouraged players "to try more and more to be a better player" (Seb), this understanding of parents' pride also reinforced players' construction of their identities as footballers with the potential to be successful. Using Merleau-Ponty's (1962) conception that the self is constructed through relations with others, this suggests that players' footballing identities were formed in part through their interactions with their parents. Exploring how children's athletic identity (the degree to which an individual identifies with the role of being an athlete; Brewer, Van Raalte & Linder, 1993) is shaped through social interaction therefore provides a useful potential direction for future research.

**Performing Bodies**

**Players' experiences of being watched.** Players agreed that parents should try and attend training and matches. They described playing to try and impress parents when they were watching, which as a result meant they put extra effort into performances. To substantiate this further, examples were provided of teammates who did not try hard, because their parents were absent and unable to monitor these players' performances or tell them to "shape up a bit" (Seb). However, not all players preferred their parents to be present, owing to their different experiences of being watched, and of interaction with parents following sessions.

```
Extract 2.1
1 Nicky:   Umm so you said like uhh in that match that your dad
2          was watching: do you like it ↑when your parents come
3          to watch you?
4 Alex:    [Uhh]
5 Seb:     [Yes]
6 Alex:    Well (0.3) there's two different times like (0.4) I
7          like to know how I've done after a match (0.5) nn I
8          like my dad to watch me but (0.2) somet:imes the
9          pressure's off ya (0.5) and ya free like, >coz if I do
10         well< me dad does tell me if I do bad (0.2) my dad
11         does tell me [w- off]
12 Nicky:               [Hehehe]
13 Alex:   And if I do good h-he praises me a little bit (0.5)
```

```
14          and then (0.5) but when he's not watching ya like we
15          when when we went to a futsal tournament (0.4) I just
16          (0.4) I did some things that I wouldn't normally be
17          able to do (0.5) >when I'm with me dad< coz me dad
18          likes to be really strong ↓and (0.5) but I tried a
19          couple a tricks and stuff and I played really well and
20          (0.4) just the pressure's off ya when your parents
21          aren't watching sometimes:
22 Nicky:   Mkay
23 Seb:     Yeah I like my dad to be there coz (0.8) he gives you
24          like the coaches they only say well done coz they
25          don't wanna put other kids down. But then when you get
26          when you get in the car with ya dad he's like (.) well
27          done fantastic you played well but then (0.4)
28          sometimes if you're in the car they say that err you
29          didn't do as well as you'd normal what was wrong with
30          you and stuff like that. But nothing uh bad with me.
31 Nicky:   Hmm. How about you Tim? (0.5) Do you like your parents
32          watching you?
33 Tim:     Yeah (1.0) mmm (0.4) sometimes.
34          (0.5)
35 Tim:     Coz when you've played- when you know you've played
36          good they will- when you're on your way back home,
37          they will >say in the car< but sometimes when you know
38          you haven't played as well and they've been watching
39          you, they will- (1.2) they sometimes don't even >say
40          anything in the car like they'll normally do when you<
41          [(0.5)] have pla[yed well]
42 Nicky:   [ Mmm ]
43 Seb:                     [played we]ll
```

Players liked parents to watch them play because they wanted to receive feedback on their performances, and interpreted parents' feedback as information that would help them to improve in football. This information was valued by players because, as Seb described in lines 23 to 27 extract 2.1, parents could provide more specific and enhanced feedback in comparison to the generalised, positive comments of coaches. Holt and Dunn (2004) previously highlighted that fathers with previous playing experience commonly provided informational support to professional youth footballers (aged 16 to 18 years). In academies,

younger players valued this feedback (a finding supported in chapter five of this thesis; see p.124), which contradicts findings from North American research that young athletes participating in individual sports did not wish to receive technical or tactical advice from parents, or considered parental advice to be "sometimes acceptable but rarely needed" (Hassell et al., 2010; Knight et al., 2010; Omli & Wiese-Bjornstal, 2011 p.707).

To understand why the information parents could provide was meaningful to players, it is relevant to reflect on how improvement and progress were judged in the academy. Players were set individualised targets which they understood had to be met within a certain timeframe, or else their academy status was at risk.

```
Extract 2.2
1 Noah:     We have these tasks at Southfield and you have to try
2           and reach em in a certain amount of time: or umm or
3           then you- if- if you can't do it >in an amount of
4           time< then they (0.2) might release you
```

In addition to providing written reports on progress against six-weekly targets, coaches set individual and team goals for each game. However players' understanding of how they could work towards targets was not always clear.

```
Extract 2.3
1 Alex:     If it's there: (0.4) in black and white, from the
2           coaches (0.6) then you know you've full well got to
3           work on it.
4 James:    Yeah
5 Alex:     But one of ↑my thing, one of my- both my things (.)
6           are not somethin' that you can work on in the garden
7           like
8 James:    Yeah
9           (0.5)
10 Nicky:   Give [me an ex]ample
11 Seb:          [Ye::::ah]
12 Alex:    ↑Like I've got to be (1.6) go- (0.4) try to be more
13          physical (0.4) and stronger (0.4) in me tackle, I mean
14          I can't work on that.
```

Parents therefore provided a source of instant information about how players had performed and how they were progressing against targets, in the absence of individualised feedback from coaches after matches. Players recognised that parents "watched every move

you make" (James), and shared their personal goals; "they just want to make you a better player" (Seb), which meant that their feedback was interpreted as credible. For this age group player appraisal meetings were held twice a year between parents and coaches, further endorsing parents' role in delivering feedback to players. Given the potential negative consequences for not achieving academy targets, players were keen to receive information they believed would help them improve, although the way this feedback was delivered by parents was important to how players responded. For example, players described the ineffectiveness of parents' instructions when given in an unsupportive way, citing how they did not, or could not listen to parents when they were being shouted at. Yet the desire to "take on board" (Alex, Noah) feedback from parents to try and improve endured.

This may suggest that players did not feel empowered to reflect on their own performances and that their embodied knowledge was not valued. However on line 35 extract 2.1, Tim self-repairs his turn (Schegloff, Jefferson & Sacks, 1977) from "when you've played-" to "when you <u>know</u> you've played good", in doing so demonstrating that he possessed knowledge of his performance, with the added emphasis suggesting he was certain in that knowledge. This indicates that players can contribute to evaluating their own performances at this age, and reinforces the importance of viewing children as competent social actors in their own right (Brannen & O'Brien, 1996). Merleau-Ponty (1962) discussed the significance of bodily knowledge in the acquisition of habit; "it is the body which 'understands' [ ] the experience between the intention and the performance", describing this understanding as "forthcoming only when bodily effort is made, and cannot be formulated in detachment from that effort" (p.166-7). Diminishing the value of players' embodied knowledge, together with limiting information on how to achieve prescribed objectives, is in opposition to the 'player-centred' approach to learning often espoused but not enacted by academies (Cushion & Jones, 2014). Nor does this reflect the self-awareness and reflection strategies identified by academy coaches as important to developing independent and responsible young players (Cook, Crust, Littlewood, Nesti & Allen-Collinson, 2014).

**Embodied experience of performing.** The consequences of parents being able to provide information were that players experienced feeling microscopically observed whenever they were on the pitch, and had to negotiate performing in a manner that met parents' fixed views for their behaviour on the pitch to avoid reprimand. Alex described how he was expected to look "strong" (line 18 extract 2.1), evidenced by rolling up the sleeves of his playing shirt to show he was "up for it" and avoiding trying any 'flashy' or 'showy' skills which might result in losing possession of the ball. Adding that he felt free and played well

when his father was absent, he illustrated how he contested his father's ideas about the way to play football, by taking the opportunity to try different skills when he could.

This embodied experience of performing under the gaze of parents (and quite possibly coaches although the data does not reference this explicitly) meant players experienced their bodies both as subjectively 'lived' and as objectively viewed. Merleau-Ponty (1962) drew this distinction between the body as subject, and the body as object when observed by another. In the academy, when players were on the pitch their bodies became an object to be scrutinised, measured and assessed. In learning how to become academy footballers, players' bodies were conditioned and movements restricted. For example, when players anticipated that parents would be critical of mistakes or under-par performances, they experienced pressure when playing, meaning they felt inhibited to try new skills or more prone to making mistakes as Noah explained:

```
Extract 2.4
1 Noah:     It ↑makes you think li:ke oh if I mess up, if I make a
2           mistake then he's gonna say something
3 Nicky:    Mmm
4 Noah:     So it makes ya put your head down, (0.6) it makes ya
5           make more mistakes
```

Applying a critical lens to this finding, players' embodied experiences of performing in football were in part constituted by the relations of power between players, parents and the academy. Langdridge (2008) argued that phenomenological research can attend to power and politics by examining how these are experienced as lived. Foucault's (1978) concept of bio-power suggests that in a capitalistic society, a healthy, skilled, yet docile population is required to make a productive contribution to the economy, and that this can be accomplished through the social control of bodies. In elite youth football, parents' desire to see their son succeed and ultimately become a professional footballer, was congruent with the application of surveillance and discipline techniques to produce physically educated, disciplined bodies which could be productive in the football workplace (see also chapter five p.122), reflecting the mode of governance operated by academies to reproduce conformity to institutional norms and develop competent workers (Cushion & Jones, 2014; Manley, Palmer & Roderick, 2012). Players' experience of this social control was, as we see above, one of feeling pressure and expectation to conform to parents' ideas of 'being' a footballer, but also that of contesting power, by not listening when being shouted at after matches, or by trying new skills and moves when they were not being observed.

**Conflict**

The car journey home after training or matches was at times a site of judgement and conflict between players and their parents. In the extract below Noah described how his father would shout at him and deconstruct the details of the game if he had not performed well.

```
Extract 3.1
1 Noah:     Nn ↑Nicky als- um my Dad >always< (0.2) [if I have]=
2 Nicky:                                            [oh  sorry]
3 Noah:     =like a (.) bad (0.2) training session, he when we're
4           in the car he'll ss- he'll say a (0.4) oh what what
5           why an't ya done this and that o:h just I (.) probably
6           had an off day, and then eh eh and then he's just
7           shoutin at me and >then I'm al-< (0.2) and >then I'm
8           like< what why you shoutin at me for >and he said<
9           (0.3) ↓o:h umm oh well I I'm drivin you here so (0.4)
10          yo:u so you listen to me
11 James:   Hehheh haha[ha]
12 Nicky:              [huh]huhhmm
13          (0.5)
14 Nicky:   And how's that feel.
15 Noah:    It don't feel good
16 Nicky:   Ye(hh)ah
17 James:   It's horr↑i[ble]
18 Noah:               [Mm ] yeah
19          (1.0)
20 Seb:     [I've had it once or ] twice but not many ti:mes:
21 Noah:    [Coz I       coz I   ]                          >oh<
22          coz I don't like him saying comments and then (.) then
23          he says (0.2) umm like real ba- real bad comments why
24          didn't you do this why didn't you do that (0.4) nnd
25          >when I say I don't- can you< stop doing tha:t: he he
26          says >oh well I'm< drive- I'm driving you here so
27          (0.3) you'd better listen to me=
28 James:   =And umm (0.5) they're ↑only like doing that so::
29          because they [want you to like achie::ve the] being a=
30 Seb:                  [oo::::h  they want you t- °e e]
31 James:   =professional footballer
32 Seb:     They want you to [do well they want you t- they ↑want]
```

```
33 James:                    [so they'd-   they'd-  they're doing]
34          it for your own good.
35 Seb:     Yeah they're doing it for your own good but even if
36          they are shouting at ye you do get a bit annoyed but
37          (.) I've hardly had that I've only had it >once or
38          twice< hh but you just take it in- on board and then
39          carry on and carry on doing well and then they won't
40          shout at you (0.5) as much.
```

The story told by Noah, in which he repeated the upshot (Drew, 1984) of his father asserting that he is obligated to listen to his opinion (lines 10 and 27 extract 3.1), emphasised that his father held a position of power that Noah was unable to counteract because he was reliant on him for transport. By describing how his request for his father to stop was ignored, and reporting his father's dismissive "oh well" response, he constructed this behaviour as unreasonable. James on line 17 extract 3.1 aligned with Noah's assessment of the car journey conflict as "horrible", but offered an alternative explanation for the behaviour. He suggests that parents say comments because "they want you to achieve being a professional footballer", which is quickly endorsed by Seb, as illustrated through the overlapped and collaborative turns on lines 30 to 35 extract 3.1, even though he admits to rarely experiencing this with his own parents. By interpreting parent's behaviours as "for your own good", the players oriented to parents' authority and the expectation for children to be obedient (Mayall, 2002). While the alternative account of the conflict may have been designed to offer a more supportive version to Noah, it nonetheless reaffirmed the power relationship that influences this type of interaction.

And yet players also recognised that they were able to influence parents' future behaviours. Seb described how conflict could be reduced if players continued to do well in football; his repetition and emphasis on line 39 extract 3.1 implying that this effort must be sustained to affect a change in parent's behaviour. This further suggests that players perceived that the interaction with parents on the car journey home was conditional on their performance and behaviours on the pitch. Alex corroborated this understanding when asked what it felt like to receive criticism:

```
Extract 3.2
1 Nicky:    What do yo::u try and think to yourself (0.2) if
2           that's happening
3 Alex:     I try and think just take that on board: next time and
4           (0.4) try not- try and make it less times that he
```

```
5           shouts at ya
```

Alternatively, players could challenge parents' behaviours, but not without consequence.

```
Extract 3.3
1 Alex:     I daren't tell >me dad<
2 Noah:     I do↑ (0.2) he gets well annoyed with me↑
```

Here Noah's emphasis on the pronoun and description of the negative upshot which Alex alluded to, positioned his objection to his father's behaviour as an act of defiance requiring an element of courage, reinforcing that the normative behaviour is to conform.

These extracts highlight that rather than passive recipients of criticism, players attached meaning to, and actively managed their experiences of conflict with parents. Conflict was experienced as a relational process in which players felt unable to challenge their parent's behaviours without fear of consequence, but could influence them in future by adapting their own behaviours. Criticism was recognised as being dependent on their performance in football, but was rationalised as acceptable because parents wanted players to succeed in football.

Players' phenomenological experience of conflict can therefore be interpreted as constituted through their relations with parents, their embodied football performance, and the spatial and temporal significance of the car journey home. The car was a site that players experienced as being controlled by parents, as the restricted space and fixed journey time home (immediately following a training session or a match) meant that players could not avoid interacting with their parents.

These findings also illustrate how players' perceptions of parent's performance contingent feedback – which, for example, can shape young footballers' goal orientation (Gershgoren, Tenenbaum, Gershgoren & Eklund, 2011) – are situated within relations of power. Foucault (1982 p.221) defines power as "a mode of action upon the actions of others", where a person acts to guide another's conduct, or structure their "possible field of action". Using this conceptualisation, a more complex understanding of parental influence can be developed. For Foucault (1982), there is no power without freedom, meaning there is always the possibility for resistance against actions designed to influence the present or future conduct of others. By theorising parent-player interactions as existing within a power relation, although parents may typically act to influence their child's actions, players have freedom to determine how to respond. The players in this study demonstrated how they negotiated this power relation through challenging or seeking to influence parents' behaviour

(thereby resisting the expectation for children to be obedient), and accepting performance contingent feedback when players perceived that parents shared their personal goals. This concept is further discussed in chapter five of this thesis (p.121). Understanding children's agency in the parenting process in this way, positions children as active subjects who mutually constitute their relationship with parents, and recognises the reciprocal nature of parent-child interactions. This offers an alternative conceptual view of parental influence in sport to that adopted by conventional developmental behavioural studies.

## Conclusion

By adopting a phenomenological methodology, this study has provided a detailed account of elite young footballers' experiences of interaction with their parents; an area that has not previously been explored in sport parenting research. This research contributes to enhancing the understanding of parenting in elite youth football as a dynamic, social process, in which players actively interpret, negotiate and manage their interaction with parents.

Three key features of players' experiences were described. Players ascribed meaning to their interaction with parents in relation to their personal project of becoming a successful academy footballer. Parents enabled or restricted players' ability to enact being a model player, through their provision of informational feedback and transport, and the extent to which academy guidance was followed at home. This finding indicates how the sport context can shape parent-child relationships.

Players also described their embodied experience of performing under the gaze of parents, and the inherent contradiction between agreeing that parents should attend training and matches (to be able to monitor players' performances and provide feedback on how to improve), and feeling under pressure to perform (if players anticipated receiving criticism from parents). The experience of their body being observed as an object (Merleau-Ponty, 1963), to be scrutinised and assessed, led some players to feel inhibited to try new skills or more prone to making mistakes on the pitch, indicating a potential consequence of parents' presence at academy sessions.

When conflict with parents occurred in relation to players' football performance, it was experienced from within a power relation (Foucault, 1982). Rather than passive recipients of criticism, players actively managed their experience of this conflict, resisting or accepting parents' performance contingent feedback to different extents.

Together, these findings emphasised the relational, embodied and contextual experience of players' interaction with parents at academy training, at matches and at home. Understanding children as active subjects who mutually constitute their relationship with

parents presents a more complex conceptual view of parental influence in sport, and may offer an alternative theoretical basis for future research. This is explored in more detail in chapter five (see p.135).

Using a dual analytic approach in this study allowed different aspects of children's interactions with their parents in football to be considered. Alongside the phenomenological interpretation, conversation analysis examined the interaction between participants in the interviews, to understand how children co-constructed meanings and made sense of playing academy football together. In particular, this highlighted how players' performed their identity as footballers. Players demonstrated their commitment to the academy's institutional authority through their talk; the collaborative turns illustrating how the understanding of expectations for their behaviour was shared by the group. The unchallenged acceptance of academy norms meant that players provided an account to justify behaviours which did not follow academy rules, for example if coaches set targets which they could not work towards outside of training sessions, or if parents inhibited their ability to follow academy guidance at home. However, as the participants were recruited to the research as academy players, and the interviews took place within the academy setting, this may have reinforced the institutional talk as the dominant narrative. Players' talk was also guided by their interaction with the interviewer. Good interview contributions were co-constructed between participants and the interviewer, but in accordance with the research agenda and question. This indicates that in addition to exploring the action-orientated nature of participants' talk, conversation analysis can be used to provide a more critical view of data produced in interview settings (Potter & Hepburn, 2005). In conclusion, a pluralistic approach to qualitative analysis, which explores data from different epistemological perspectives, has the potential to avoid reductionism and provide richer, nuanced understandings of psychological phenomena.

This study has addressed the marginalisation of children's voices in youth football (Pitchford et al., 2004) by presenting an account of how players negotiated their parents' authority in an academy setting. For elite youth football academies, these findings point towards the futility of codes of conduct designed to restrict parents from providing coaching advice and feedback, and highlight the importance of empowering players to contribute to evaluating their own performances. In addition, this research questions the degree to which the players in this study were able to resist the cultural expectations for self-regulated behaviour in academies, given the unchallenged acceptance of norms and rules demonstrated in the interviews. The enactment of being a model academy footballer extended to players' home environment and shaped their relationships with parents, contributing to the

construction of particular athletic identities. Following Markula and Pringle's (2006) pedagogical strategy, which discusses how the Foucauldian concept of knowledge and power can be used to transform practice in a critical yet ethical manner; youth football socialisation should not be conceptualised as inherently problematic, or oppositely, morally worthy, but there appears to be a need for alternative knowledge which allows players, parents *and* coaches to critically reflect upon and challenge academy practices.

# CHAPTER FIVE

## An Exploration of the Parent-Child Relationship in Elite Youth Football

The dominant media representation of parents in football reproduces the stereotype of the "problem parent": enter "parents and youth football" into an internet search engine and an array of recent negative headlines appears.

> Kids' football: when dads go bad. (Anthony, 2014. *The Guardian,* 12 April)
>
> The kids are all right but ban the parents from youth football. (Broadbent, 2014. *The Times,* 24 March)
>
> FA gives lessons in good behaviour for parents who scream abuse from touchline during children's football matches. (Ellery, 2014. *Daily Mail*, 22 February)

While there are certainly incidents of violent parental behaviour that pervade the youth game, which attract media attention and are rightly challenged, the rhetoric used in articles such as these typically positions *all* football parents as problematic and draws attention to the threats to children emanating from parents' deficiencies. This reflects a wider cultural phenomenon that Furedi (2002 p.45) has termed *parental determinism*; "the notion that parental intervention determines the future fate of a youngster", meaning that the everyday activities of parents are held directly accountable in society for children's future well-being, development and achievement. The rise of parental determinism in the 21st century has shifted attention away from understanding adult-child interactions within the family and wider social context, to an explicit focus on parents and their behaviours (Lee, Bristow, Faircloth & Macvarish, 2014).

The New Statesman article presented at the beginning of this thesis (see chapter one p.1) serves as an example of this. Within this extract, parents are referred to in generalised terms as "they" or "most mums and dads" and constructed as pushy, maniacal, clueless and abusive. Children in comparison are described as sensitive, afraid and damaged, with their enjoyment thwarted and development derailed by parents' sideline behaviour. This account positions children as vulnerable and at risk, which fails to acknowledge children's capacity for resilience and resistance (Furedi, 2002). Parents are problematised and criticised because of their lack of awareness, which emphasises the determining impact of parent behaviours, and omits an understanding of parent-child relationships and the everyday, lived-experiences

of parents (Lee, Macvarish & Bristow, 2010).

Parental determinism is an assumption which also underpins theory and research in developmental psychology (Burman, 1994; Faircloth, 2014). “The child” has become the central focus within this perspective, which has contributed significantly to the dominant understanding of children, parents and families. The emphasis on children’s needs and developmental outcomes has produced corresponding implications for parents, whereby “appropriate parenting” is necessary for children to fulfil their developmental potential (e.g. Furedi, 2002; Hays, 1996). Critics of this approach argue that it transforms parenting from a relationship into a set of tasks and contends that parents must learn and acquire skills to enable them to parent effectively (Faircloth et al., 2013; Lee, 2014; Ribbens McCarthy & Edwards, 2011). Claims that parents therefore require advice and support from parenting professionals or experts can undermine parents’ confidence, by diminishing the importance of parental intuition and learning through interaction with their child, as a basis for the development of parent-child relationships (Furedi, 2002; Lee, 2014). Furthermore, the child-centred focus of developmental psychology distances children from their social, cultural and historical milieu, constructing them instead as “fixed, unilinear and timeless” (Burman, 1994 p.59). This assumes that all children will respond to parent behaviours in a similar manner, obscures differences arising from gender or social class, and fails to acknowledge children’s subjective experiences and their agency in the parenting process (Burman, 1994; Faircloth et al., 2013).

The understanding of parental determinism and view of parent-child relationships as potentially problematic or deficient is reproduced in sport parenting literature, which often draws implicitly on the assumptions of developmental psychology (e.g. Bowker et al., 2009; Gould et al., 2008; Omli & Wiese-Bjornstal, 2011; Sapieja et al., 2011). The predominant focus of sport parenting research to date has been on identifying what parents can do to facilitate positive outcomes for their child, which in sport are defined in terms of both talent development; achievement and successful progression in sport, and positive youth development; acquisition of psychological competencies and life skills (Harwood & Knight, in press; Holt, 2008). Studies have examined child outcomes associated with parenting styles, parenting practices and the perceptions of coaches and athletes on preferred parental behaviours. Research has also begun to explore the experiences of parents themselves to highlight the demands of being a sport parent (see chapter one p.10 to p.22).

These studies have made an important contribution to understanding the role of parents in youth sport and have described the complexity and challenges of parenting in this

setting (Holt & Knight, 2014). However, terms such as “optimal”, “healthy” and “positive” or oppositely “negative” and “inappropriate” are used frequently and uncritically in these studies, indicating the presence of unacknowledged assumptions reflecting the parental determinism that underpins developmental psychology. This is further demonstrated in the conclusions often drawn by authors – that there is a need to educate parents to enhance their awareness of their behaviours and the impact of these on their child (e.g. Gould et al., 2008; Knight et al., 2011; Wiersma & Fifer, 2008). This lends support to a “one-size-fits-all” solution to parent education, which fails to consider the dynamic and varied nature of family relationships (Holt & Knight, 2014 p.114).

The claim that parents require education supports the perspective of sport parenting as a set of skills which can be learnt and justifies the need for evidence-based, expert knowledge of parenting. This draws upon the parenting discourse prevalent in contemporary society; that following advice from professional parenting experts is the best route to enhancing child outcomes (Lee, 2014). Arguably, there is value to providing parents with certain information, given the challenges that families may face as a child progresses in sport (e.g. Harwood et al., 2010; Harwood & Knight, 2009a), and in view of findings that parents themselves have expressed a desire for more guidance (Knight & Holt, 2013a; 2013b). However, there is a need for a more critical discussion concerning the circumstances in which expert knowledge is needed and legitimate, or alternatively, when parents can be encouraged to trust their own instinct and judgement about what is in their child’s best interests (Furedi, 2002; Lee, 2014).

Building on this corpus of research, Harwood and Knight (in press) presented a useful and timely critical review of the literature, from which they developed a preliminary position on the concept of “expertise” in sport parenting. Expertise was defined in this context as “parental involvement that increases the chances for children to achieve their sporting potential, have a positive psychosocial experience, and develop a range of positive developmental outcomes” (p.2). The authors proposed that parents with greater expertise will consistently demonstrate “an extensive amount of knowledge and a range of intrapersonal, interpersonal, and organizational skills” (p.9). This research extends the concept of sport parenting beyond that of identifying “good and “bad” parental behaviours and recognises the demands placed on parents when supporting a child’s sport participation, the emotional experience of being a sport parent and the salience of relationships that parents form with others in the youth sport environment. However, by defining expertise in terms of achieving optimal child outcomes – as opposed to enhancing relationships between parents and children – and outlining a set of knowledge and skills that parents are required to learn to become

expert, this article also reflects underlying assumptions of parental determinism. Within the article sport parenting is constructed as an incredibly complex endeavour demanding a significant amount of self-awareness and self-development on the part of parents, which can be enhanced by expert practitioners in the field (Harwood & Knight, in press). The implication that parents are unaware emphasises their need for support and may serve to undermine parents' confidence and reliance upon their intuition (Furedi, 2002).

Moreover, the focus on describing expert or optimal parental involvement (as was the aim of Knight & Holt, 2014) shifts attention away from understanding parent-child relationships and the everyday, lived-experiences of parents and children. Although some useful observations have been made regarding the importance of effective communication between parents and children (e.g. Harwood & Knight, in press; Knight & Holt, 2014), the assumption that features of expert or optimal parenting are broadly applicable across families overlooks the social and cultural context in which interactions occur and fails to account for children's agency in the parenting process. Rather than active subjects who mutually constitute their relationship with parents, children are framed as passive, asocial and vulnerable to parental actions which inhibit their development or experiences in sport (Caputo, 2007; Mayall, 2002).

The interest in delineating parental involvement which promotes positive child development in sport means that a focus on understanding parent-child interaction and relationships in this domain has been neglected. Research has begun to describe aspects of this relationship, highlighting that relationship quality, the sport context in which interactions occur, and both parents' and players' experiences of interaction should be considered in future research (Dorsch et al., 2009: Kay, 2009; Lauer et al., 2010a; see chapter one p.25). In addition, Dorsch et al.'s (2009 p.458) finding that parents were learning "how to be youth sport parents" through communicating with their child and adjusting their subsequent behaviour, indicated that parents were acquiring informal, tacit knowledge through interaction with their child, which challenges the claim that parents need advice and support from experts (Harwood & Knight, in press).

In summary, the implicit assumptions of the existing sport parenting research has led to a disproportionate focus in the literature on examining parental involvement and resulting child outcomes, rather than an understanding of parent-child relationships from a dyadic perspective. Studies which have begun to describe aspects of this relationship in sport have drawn attention to the dynamic and complex nature of parent-child interactions, but remain limited (Dorsch et al., 2009; Kay, 2009; Lauer et al., 2010a). Therefore, there is a need firstly

to describe the parent-child relationship in detail and to understand how interaction is experienced by both parents and children. A phenomenological approach, which is concerned with describing subjective experience and understanding how this is shaped by social interaction and the specific cultural context, offers great potential for exploring this area (Langdridge, 2008). Therefore, the purpose of this research was to explore the experience of parenting and the meaning that children and parents attach to their interaction and relationships, in the context of elite youth football. Informed by the findings presented in chapter three of this thesis (p.68), parenting is conceptualised theoretically as a social process, influenced by the cultural context in which interactions between parents and children take place. Specifically, this research focuses on the later phase of the specialising stage of youth football development.

An existential phenomenological approach was selected for this study, guided by Ashworth's lifeworld analysis (2003a; 2003b see chapter two p.34). A focus on the phenomenological lifeworld anchors research in understanding everyday lived-experience and explicitly attends to peoples' experiences of relations with others. In addition, this research was informed by van Manen's (1990) hermeneutic (interpretative) phenomenological approach, to develop a richer understanding of the parent-player relationship. Drawing on Gadamer's (1975) position that "[t]hat which can be understood is language" (p.491), which proposes that being *pre-exists* language, but is *expressed through* language, van Manen's phenomenological project emphasises the role of language in constituting experience. As Langdridge (2007) summarises, "we always speak from somewhere, from a position dependent on our history and culture" (p.42); therefore a focus on language recognises that in dyadic research interviews participants reflect upon their relations with others, and that this interpretative process is influenced by individuals' social, cultural and historical backgrounds.

## Methods

### Participants

Parents of children registered to an elite football academy were recruited from three English professional football clubs. With the permission of the academy directors, parents of players aged 12 to 17 years were contacted to invite them and their son to participate in the research. Parents who expressed interest were sent information sheets and consent forms for parents and players explaining; the purpose of the research; the format of the interviews; issues pertaining to confidentiality and withdrawal; and how research findings would be used. Interview dates were confirmed with participants who provided informed consent. To ensure

players were able to give an informed indication of their willingness to participate, each interview was preceded by a discussion with the researcher to allow participants the opportunity to ask any questions they had. It was emphasised that there was no expectation for them to participate, that consent could be withdrawn at any time, and that participants should consider themselves the experts on the research topic.

Eight parent-player dyads participated in this study; four mothers and four fathers aged between 40 and 49 years (*M* = 44.75), of players aged between 12 and 17 years (*M* = 14). Participants described their ethnicity as White British (*n* = 8), Black African (*n* = 2), African British (*n* = 1), African Caribbean & Bengali Spanish (*n* = 1), Spanish Bengali (*n* = 1), White Asian (*n* = 1), White & Black African (*n* = 1) and White & Black Caribbean (*n* = 1). Parents self-identified as the person most involved in their son's football participation. Mothers, fathers and players from three different academies were purposively sampled, guided by maximum variation sampling (Patton, 2002), to enable a range of parent and player experiences to be examined.

**Data Collection**

Dyadic research offers a powerful method for understanding interaction and relationships and has been used extensively within family research (Morgan, Ataie, Carder & Hoffman, 2013; Wittenborn, Dolbin-MacNab & Keiley, 2013). Dyadic interviewing, where two people who share a relationship are interviewed separately, allows each person to discuss an experience from their own perspective and also reflect upon their relationship. Interview data can then be explored from an individual and a dyadic perspective, examining overlaps and contrasts between accounts (Eisikovits & Koren, 2010). Separate dyadic interviews were selected for this research, as this approach enabled both parent and player experiences of academy football and interaction with the other to be collected.

Participants took part in a phenomenological semi-structured interview, held at parents' homes or at academy training grounds. Four parents also participated in a follow up interview, at the request of the researcher, to discuss certain aspects of their experience more fully. Total interview time was between 33 and 182 minutes (*M* = 62) for players and 40 and 237 minutes (*M* = 97) for parents. On occasions, more informal conversation took place between parent, player and researcher, which were also recorded, with the consent of participants. The first stage of the player interviews was guided by questions which focused on participants' subjective experiences of playing academy football. The opening question; "tell me about your experience of playing football from when you first began to the present day", was designed to encourage players to reflect upon and share their experiences in their

own words. Subsequent questions explored their present, everyday experiences of playing football. The second stage of the player interviews concentrated on players' experience of interaction with their parents. The purpose of these questions was to prompt players to reflect upon their relationship with their parent, in the context of football. Follow up questions were used to ask players to elaborate and provide more detailed descriptions. Parent interviews followed a similar format, but rather focused firstly, on their experiences of being a parent of an elite youth footballer and secondly, on their experience of interaction with their son in relation to football. Both interview guides are shown in Table 7.

**Table 7: Academy Player and Parent Interview Guide**

| | **Player Interview Questions** | |
|---|---|---|
| | **Descriptive Questions** | **Further Questions** |
| 1 | Tell me about your experience of playing football from when you first began to the present day. | What have been your high points and low points?<br>What has changed since you first started at the academy? |
| 2 | Can you describe a typical week for you? | |
| 3 | What do you enjoy? | How do you feel when you play? |
| 4 | What do you sometimes find difficult? | |
| 5 | How have your parents been involved with your football? | How are your parents involved now?<br><br>What kind of things do you talk about? |
| 6 | What do your parents think about your football? | |
| 7 | What is your relationship with your parents like? | Has football influenced your relationship with your parents? |
| 8 | What does football mean to you? | |
| | **Parent Interview Questions** | |
| 1 | What has your experience been like supporting your son with his football? | What have been your high points and low points? |
| 2 | Can you describe a typical week for you and your son? | How are you involved in a typical week? |
| 3 | What do you enjoy? | |
| 4 | What do you sometimes find difficult? | |
| 5 | How do you help your son with his football? | Has your involvement changed compared to when your son was younger? |
| 6 | What is your relationship like with your son? | Has football influenced your relationship with your son? |
| 7 | What does football mean to you? | |

Interviews were audio recorded and all verbal talk transcribed. The data extracts presented in this chapter were transformed to include key features of the delivery of talk including overlap, pauses and emphasis (see chapter two p.44). Transcription conventions followed those applied in chapter four[5] (see Table 6 p.84).

**Data Analysis**

Analysis began by reflecting upon each interview directly after it had concluded and audio recording initial impressions and interpretations, which were later used as prompts to write research diary notes. These notes assisted in enhancing reflexivity throughout the analysis process, by checking that initial, instinctive interpretations were not obscuring alternative understandings. Analysis was further supplemented by the participant observation described in chapter two (p.40).

Interview transcripts were explored using the "selective" and "wholistic" reading approaches described by van Manen (1990 p.93). Firstly, transcripts were read several times while listening to the respective audio recording, and sections of the text which seemed particularly essential to the participants' individual experience were highlighted, creating meaning units in the data. Descriptive codes and interpretative notes for each meaning unit were entered into an analysis table, which differentiated between descriptions related to participants' phenomenological lifeworld and to the parent-child relationship. An analysis extract is shown in Table 8 and an example analysis table can be found in Appendix S. Next, a wholistic reading of each transcript was used to understand the overall meaning of participants' descriptions and ensure that idiosyncratic interpretations did not move beyond the data.

A two-stage analysis process was performed to examine how the individual parent and player accounts related dyadically. In the first stage, meaning units identified in each interview were interpreted in relation to the seven universal features or 'fractions' of the phenomenological lifeworld as described by Ashworth (2003a; 2003b; see chapter two p.35), paying attention to links between them. This produced a set of thematic interpretations for each individual participant. Secondly, parent and player themes were analysed together by undertaking a wholistic reading of both transcripts and searching for patterns in the data from a dyadic perspective. Informed by Eisikovits and Koren's (2010) guidance for dyadic interview analysis, particular attention was paid to overlaps and contrasts in participants' accounts. For example, were experiences described similarly but interpreted differently, or

[5] The lengths of pauses were not recorded and are instead represented as (.).

vice versa? In addition, how language was used to construct participants' descriptions was examined closely (in recognition of the constitutive role of language) to avoid uncritically combining individual data and making conclusions about the parent-player relationship. Moving between the dyadic and individual analyses allowed for different interpretations of individual themes and unique relational themes to be constructed.

**Table 8: Extract of Phenomenological Dyadic Analysis**

| Data Extract | Parent-child Relationship | Experience | Interpretation |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Nicky**: Who comes to watch you?<br>**Harry**: My dad, my mum has started coming, my granddad and grandma always go as well because they always take me training, so they always come to watch me, so that is good support yes.<br>**Nicky**: Is it nice having people there to watch you?<br>**Harry**: Sometimes, but the more people there the more pressure I feel. But like say it is an away game and no one comes, I don't feel that I need to work hard kind of thing, but with people there you want to look good in front of people, so it makes me play better.<br>**Nicky**: But sometimes you feel a bit of a pressure to (.) I don't know<br>**Harry**: Yeah to play better really when your parents are there because then they'll say something if you make a mistake, they pick up on it, but if they are not watching and then you make a mistake it doesn't, they don't really see it and you don't feel under pressure as much. | More people watching the more pressure he feels because parents will pick up on mistakes, but it makes him work harder | Dad and grandparents always watch, mum started coming too – good support<br><br>Playing while being watched by parents | Embodied experience of playing while watched by parents |

Drawing upon Gadamer's (1975) concept that understanding is developed through conversation in which we seek a *fusion of horizons* towards agreement, van Manen (1990) describes his phenomenological approach as a "conversational relation that the researcher develops with the notion he or she wishes to explore and understand" (p.97-98), and emphasises how transforming thematic statements into phenomenologically sensitive writing is a creative, hermeneutic process. Therefore, writing was embraced as an additional method of analysis, in which detailed descriptions of each parent-player relationship were produced from individual and dyadic themes. Extracts of this writing were shared with research peers experienced in qualitative research and knowledgeable of social psychological theories to

facilitate further conversation and reflection upon analysis. Collaborators offered additional interpretative lenses which could be used to enhance understanding of participants' experiences. Finally, the writing and rewriting process (van Manen, 1990) assisted in the production of dyadic case studies which present phenomenological accounts of the parent-player relationship and interprets how this shapes the parenting process.

## Findings and Discussion

Three idiographic, phenomenological case studies are presented, detailing the experiences of parent-player interaction and relationships in the context of football. The case studies were selected from the eight dyads as examples of players who are at different points within the transition from the specialising stage into the investment stage of youth football development (see chapter two p.37) and are presented in chronological order. The analyses of all eight parent-player dyads are then drawn upon to present a phenomenological interpretation of the findings.

### Case Study 1: "Teenage Kicks"

**Family and football context.** Ali is playing in his third season at the academy of a second-tier English professional football league club, after being scouted from a local league team when he was 11 years old. As part of the under-14 squad, he is competing for a two year contract at the end of the season. Earlier this year, several of the players in his squad were released, while others were guaranteed their place, leaving Ali part of a small group who were yet to learn their fate. As a result of the smaller squad size, Ali has trained alongside the older academy players, which he has found physically demanding. At home, Ali lives with his mother and older sister. His parents separated when he was very young and he describes himself as not close to his father.

Carla, Ali's mother, first took her son to football practice so he could learn teamwork and social skills and have a focus. Football was an activity where he could be around male role models, which as a single parent was important to her. Carla aspires that her children will be able to do a job that they enjoy and not work to pay the bills like she has done, and sees the academy as an opportunity for her son to be successful in life at something he loves. She is fully committed to supporting her son to realise his talent and potential. However, she is acutely aware that players can be released at any time, so also emphasises the importance of her son's education.

**Parent-player relationship.** Compared to their earlier experiences of academy football, both parent and player described how football had become more serious and a greater focus in their lives. Ali had begun to attend additional optional training sessions to try

and improve his technical skills and described his typical week as “tiring”. His mother was aware that he only had one evening a week to see his friends and was concerned that he was not “as free as he could be” to enjoy his childhood. She admitted feeling unsure about how to find a balance once in the academy system, describing how players had “almost entered the workforce at 12, 13 (.) they’re not getting paid for it, but with the amount of hours they’re putting in that’s classed as a part-time job.” Ali similarly described the significance of football in his life:

```
Extract 1.1
1 Ali:      It’s like everything (.) revolves around the football
2           like, everything is affected by football. nn (.) it’s
3           ↑like something I ha:ve to do I can’t- if I didn’t do
4           football I dunno what I’d do, (.) just be lost a bit
```

The weekly training commitment made it difficult for Ali to find time to invest in other activities and other identities outside of football and school, meaning his capacity to maintain a balanced lifestyle was limited. Previous research has suggested that a strong athletic identity; the degree to which an individual identifies with the role of being an athlete (Brewer et al., 1993), is associated with higher commitment and achievement in sport, but can also be problematic when coping with an injury or managing the transition out of sport. For example, Brown and Potrac (2009) highlighted how academy players (aged 16 to 19) who had prioritised and invested heavily in their football identity from a young age, experienced feelings of loss, uncertainty and failure when deselected from professional football. Jones, Glintmeyer and McKenzie (2005) have also recommended that coaches should help to develop athletes with multiple identities but, in academies, coaches emphasised that it was parents who should be responsible for ensuring players took part in non-football activities, as illustrated by the following quote, taken from observational field notes.

> Coach: We’ve always said to the parents, we’ve constantly reinforced they can’t just do football. It won’t give them all the physical skills they need. They need to do badminton, tennis, stop/start sports like squash. If they have the night off because they’re playing rugby it doesn’t bother me at all, in fact I’ll encourage it, because it can’t just be this all the time. (Field notes, September 2012)

For Carla, although she strived to fulfil this responsibility, the perceived pressure for

Ali to not “lag behind” in his technical development, together with the knowledge that a two-year contract could be awarded at the end of the season, meant she felt it was necessary to take her son to the extra training. These sessions were described by the academy as optional, but Carla interpreted that the coaches “don’t really mean optional”. This increased pressure to perform on the pitch was also experienced by Ali:

```
Extract 1.2
1 Nicky:   Umm and is there anything that you find difficult
2          about playing at an ↑academy?
3 Ali:     Umm (.) I ↑think being consistent (.) like ma- from
4          match to match and training sessions (.) just (.)
5          >trying to be consistent and keep giving your best
6          and< (.) even if you’re not doing very well, (.) you
7          have to keep ↓try:ing but (.) it’s hard to keep trying
8          when you’re doing (.) bad
```

```
Extract 1.3
1 Ali:     It’s a lot more intense >and like< har:der, umm we’ve
2          ↑just had like a new academy manager been put in, (.)
3          uh so it’s more pressure >to try and impress him as<
4          well, and try and make him: (.) li:ke you
```

Understanding that her son was under increasing pressure to perform well consistently, Carla experienced a strong sense of responsibility to support her son and be “everything, the parent, the motivator, the coach”, which she acknowledged came with increased uncertainty about whether she was parenting effectively.

```
Extract 1.4
1 Carla:   There is a lot of pressure, ↑I feel a lot of pressure
2          sometimes to be <everything>. umm and- and I don’t
3          know whether I- huhu I succeed or not. umm (.) but
4          ↑yeah I think (.) as a parent you always wonder am I
5          getting it right or not a:nyway, without ev- without
6          this side of things, (.) umm coming in to the picture
```

She described motivating Ali to “get the best out of him” in football and in school. To support his education, she placed equal value on school and football achievements, scheduled time for homework, and emphasised the importance of working hard at school to have a “plan b” in case he was not successful in football. Recognising that as players were becoming

young men they were being coached differently and were expected to take on more responsibility for their football, she encouraged Ali to be independent at home, yet found that she was “constantly on his case”, because of his tendency to be lazy which she attributed to being a teenager. This meant she questioned whether the degree to which she pushed her son was appropriate and whether the advice she gave as a mother was effective:

```
Extract 1.5
1 Carla:    I- I ↑do push him, (.) I do push him and I do try to
2           keep him motivated and, (.) ↑sometimes I- I- I: do
3           wonder >you know am I just a< nag (.) does he just
4           think I’m a nag uhh huhu

Extract 1.6
1 Carla:    I think at some point with men in general, (.) I think
2           when we open our mo:uths as ↑women, it just comes out
3           as nag nag nag or they just (.) genetically they just
4           come to an [a:ge and] they just start tuning us out=
5 Nicky:               [ha ha ha]
6 Carla     =tuning us ↑out? hehehahaha I dnt- >I don’t know if<
7           ↓he’s at tha(h)t sta(h)ge ri(h)ght now hehehaha

Extract 1.7
1 Carla:    A boy lea:rns certain things from his father. (.) And
2           if he’s not there, and there isn’t another man in the
3           house, where does that ↑come from. (.) Umm I mean I’ve
4           been taking Ali to football since he was five years
5           old it’s al:ways been me. And I’ve always been the one
6           giving him the ad↑vice and everything, and I love
7           football. (.) I’ve been watching it- I watched it with
8           older brother since I was a- a young girl: (.) so I
9           KI::nd of know what I’m talk(h)ing ab(h)ou(h)t
10 Nicky    Hehehuh
11 Carla:   But ↑obviously you have [the co]aches teaching them
12 Nicky:                           [ye::ah]
13 Carla:   whatever they teach them, (.) and I have said to Woody
14          and Wrighty in- in the meeting I- sometimes I don’t
15          know whether (.) what I say to him is a help or a
16          hindrance.
```

Despite this uncertainty, Ali praised his mother's parenting approach and described feeling closer to his mother than his father, because of the time they had spent together through football.

```
Extract 1.8
1 Ali:      Umm (.) my mum↑ is very like- she's always like
2           encouraging me and trying to make me be my best and,
3           got something for me to fall back on, and keeps
4           telling me do well in education and everything, (.)
5           she's right- she's quite strict as well which is quite
6           good >but not like< over:ly strict like you can't do
7           anything, but she's quite strict sometimes but (.) I
8           think being strict's better most of the time, coz then
9           she know- like I know what to do and everything (.)
10          and it feels like (.) like say I don't feel spoilt if
11          you know what I mean (.) she (.) tries to get like the
12          right blend between the both or somethin like that.
```

In this extract Ali describes how he negotiates his mother's authority. He constructs his mother's encouragement as recurring ("always"), then lists the ways that she gives advice (lines 2 to 4), which emphasises the predictable pattern of her behaviour (Edwards, 1994). By using the modifiers "quite" and "overly" he downplays his formulation of her approach as strict and evaluates it as the "right blend". Strictness is typically associated with parental discipline and control (Skinner et al., 2009) but Ali accepts her advice because he interprets that it has a positive impact on him (lines 9 to 11) and later in the interview, admitted to being lazy. This is in contrast to Carla's anxiety that her guidance was construed as "nagging" by her son and represents a divergence in their individual accounts.

The perception that her feedback *as a mother* was not effective illustrates the gendered nature of parenting experiences. Professional football clubs are controlled and organised by men and permeated by dominant masculine norms and values (Roderick, 2006). Youth sport can provide a setting where fathers feel comfortable and competent to perform parenting, as men's knowledge and experience of sport are considered authoritative (Coakley, 2006; Willms, 2009). How mothers experience this subordination is unclear, yet mothers must also negotiate contemporary cultural expectations of intensive mothering (child-centred, expert-guided, emotionally absorbing and time and labour intensive) when supporting their son's sport participation (Hays, 1996; Trussell & Shaw, 2012). By positioning herself within this gender order – the pattern of power relations between men and women (Connell, 1987) –

Carla experienced greater uncertainty and questioned the value of her advice to her son in this setting, even though at other points in the interview she described her detailed knowledge of and love for football. However, Carla also valued football as an environment that allowed her son to interact with male role models and develop her son's masculine identity in a way she felt unable to as a single mother.

This finding illuminates the power of gender relations to both enable and restrict parenting experiences. Carla reproduces the gender order of academies when she constructs herself as a nagging mother and idealises the version of masculinity enacted in football. In doing so, her embodied sense of her interaction with her son – that her feedback is ineffective – illustrates how gender shapes parents' embodied experience and relationship with their child. Furthermore, her uncertainty and doubt was experienced in relation to her son, illustrating how emotions can be conceptualised as embodied experiences, constituted in relations between people and shaped by the power relations within specific cultures (Burkitt, 1999). This presents a more complex understanding of the embodied experiences of parenting.

The experience of feeling under pressure to "get it right" (extract 1.4, line 5) and concerned that her son lacked confidence on the pitch, Carla sought advice from the academy coaches. In agreement that "part of his development was being delayed", together, they facilitated a meeting with the club sport psychologist for Ali. Although Carla perceived that this had helped her son to handle mistakes on the pitch better, Ali's account of this intervention was of being misrecognised by others:

```
Extract 1.9
1 Ali:      I had to go to some other psychologist guy, I think
2           his name was Sam or something, (.) umm because I'm not
3           a very confident person (.) and I'm very
4           ↑pess:imis:tic [apparently]
5 Nicky:                   [Hehehehehe] hh right I see (.) and has
6           that helped talking to somebody about those things do
7           you think?
8 Ali:      Quite a bit yeah
9           (.)
10 Nicky:   Are you starting to feel more (.) opti↑mistic now do
11          you think? hehe
12 Ali:     I- I was never really pessimistic it's just everyone
13          thinks I'm- (.) th- they just think I'm mar::dy all
```

```
14          the time >because I don't-< I don't smi::le a lot.
15          [(.) but I] don't see the need to smile all the [time]
16 Nicky:   [Hehuhuhuh]                                     [Hehe]
17          hehe (.) so do you ↑feel mardy
18          Ali: No I ↑always feel nor:mal
```

In this extract Ali demonstrates his resistance to his identity being determined by others. Although he described not having a choice about talking to the psychologist ("I had to go") and downplaying the significance of their interaction ("some other guy"), he reflected that he found it helpful, but not for reasons intended by his mother and his coaches. Instead, he rejects their description of him as pessimistic, illustrated by his change in intonation and elongated syllables when he reproduces the voice of the psychologist on line 9. As Maybin (2006) notes, all reported voice is evaluative, and in this example his mocking tone is immediately recognised and responded to with laughter which continues throughout the interaction. In criticising their assessment, Ali resists the attempts by others to 'finalise' his identity (Bakhtin, 1984). This provides an example of how players can negotiate the institutional authority of the academy and of parents, by participating in academy practices but constructing alternative meanings. Researchers have recommended that effective communication between parents and coaches can enhance children's experiences (Blom, Visek & Harris, 2013; Smoll, Cumming & Smith, 2011). However, even when coaches and parents agree and work together, actions which undermine players' lived-experiences can still be resisted by children.

In summary, the interaction between parent and player in this case study was shaped by the expectations of the academy for players to continuously develop and perform consistently, and the gendered relationship between a single mother and her teenage son. The societal expectations for intensive parenting (Hays, 2006) were reflected in Carla's commitment to support her son's football development and her sense of pressure to fulfil this responsibility. However, her anxiety that her feedback was ineffective was not reflected in her son's account, and when she sought advice from coaches about her son's development, the intervention was resisted by her son. This highlights the need for a critical discussion regarding the circumstances in which advice from experts or parental intuition is most appropriate for guiding interaction between parents and children.

**Case Study 2: "An Uncertain Future"**

**Family and football context.** Harry has played for his home town professional football academy since he was six years old. After training with three different academies he

chose to sign a contract with his local club and has now played at the academy for eight consecutive seasons. At 15 years old, and playing in the under-16 squad, he will learn within the next month whether the club will offer him a scholarship to play full-time academy football. At home, Harry lives with his father, mother and older sister. His grandparents also live nearby and are responsible for taking him to training. His father and grandparents regularly watch him play in matches and recently his mother has started attending games more often too. All the family support their local club who play in the second-tier of the English professional football league.

Steve is Harry's father and has been involved in football throughout his life as a player and as a youth coach. At 15 years of age he was offered a youth contract by the same club that his son now plays at, but was not allowed to sign it because his own father said "it was too one-sided". He regrets that he was denied the chance of playing higher level football and wonders what he could have achieved as a player if he had signed to the club. When his son started playing football he discussed with his father that if Harry was offered a similar opportunity he would let him sign a contract. He updated his coaching qualification so that he could "pass on the correct information" to his son, and now coaches youth players part-time. Football is significant in both his personal and his family life:

```
Extract 2.1
1 Steve:   Football's just a li:fe for ↓us it's a lifestyle. (.)
2          it really is (.) umm (.) it is most of my ↑li(h)fe you
3          know I- I go to wo:rk and I earn money, [(.) ] but I=
4 Nicky:                                           [hehe]
5 Steve:   =come home and I live ↑football you know it- it's
6          gre::at (.) do everything ↑football.
```

```
Extract 2.2
1 Steve:   We::'re quite a footballing family really, umm which's
2          been great I just love it, and anything to do with
3          football, (.) >I do it you know I'd do any-< I'd love
4          to wo:rk in football. that would be my err (.) my
5          dream job (.) but uh- ↑>yeah I do a bit of coaching,
6          I'm mean that's the< nea:rest you get to it now (.)
7          nearest you get to playing I think (.) being on the
8          pitch
```

**Parent-player relationship.** The imminent scholarship decision created a shared experience of uncertainty for father and son. Harry described feeling nervous about the impending decision but also a sense of assurance that he would be able to play at another club in a lower tier of English football if he was not offered a scholarship at his current academy. He described being unconcerned about looking for another club, as his aim was simply to play football. This was in contrast to his father who experienced increased anxiety about his son's future at the club and a desire for a resolution.

```
Extract 2.3
1 Steve:   But yeah at the minute everybody's edgy, everybody's
2          worr:ied, this and that you know why is he playing
3          half a game, who's this that's come in on tri:al, blah
4          blah blah so, (.) n ↑I've- to be- to be hon- I've been
5          quite laid back about the whole thing real:ly
6 Nicky:   Mmm
7 Steve:   You know over the years, now even I'm starting to feel
8          it a little bit (.) umm (.) you know I'm I'm getting
9          worried f'him if he has a bad ga:me it's like ↓ohh you
10         know hope they're not gonna (.) drop him, and you know
11         things like that (.) you do start getting like that. I
12         just- I just want it to be ↑o:ver really I just want
13         it- to get him sorted
```

Both parent and player interpreted how the other was experiencing this period of uncertainty. Steve perceived that he was feeling more nervous than his son and that Harry's enthusiasm for attending training and extra fitness suggested that he was playing without pressure. He described maintaining open communication with his son, where match performances could be discussed without being criticised. At the same time, he monitored how his son had performed at training by speaking regularly to Harry's granddad, who he perceived as also feeling anxious about the potential consequences for Harry if he played poorly. By reassuring his son about his football ability and reminding him that other opportunities to play football elsewhere were available, Steve felt he was able to reduce the pressure on his son that he experienced so intensely himself.

```
Extract 2.4
1 Steve:   We're pretty straight with each other. you know it's
2          not uhh (.) I'd never put him under a lot- you know
3          pressure or anything like that- I have ↑always said to
```

```
4          him though, look I- >you know< I think you're a good
5          player, umm and I think if you do- you don't make it
6          at Newtown, there's 91 other clubs. So don't- you know
7          don't worry too mu- and he- >and he said< ↑no I
8          wo:n't. So he's jus- he's just playing (.) ↑without
9          pressure really, I think it's °maybe just me that's
10         being a little bit-°
```

The value Steve placed on football as a career and the significance of football in his family's life (extract 2.1, line 1; extract 2.2, lines 3 to 5), suggest that his experience of pressure was constituted through his connection to his son's football participation. For Steve, success was judged by whether or not Harry was offered a professional contract. His concern that the club might "drop" his son (extract 2.3, line 10) and his desire to "get him sorted" (extract 2.3 line 13) further implied that his own identity was in part constructed through his son's achievements in football. Furedi (2002 p.107) suggested that "adults do not simply live their lives through their children, but in part, develop their identity through them". In the sport domain, Smoll et al. (2011 p.16) termed this experience "reversed-dependency", where parents define their own self-worth in terms of their child's sporting successes or failures. Steve's shared football identity with his son meant that he was committed to supporting his son's pursuit of a professional football playing career. Smoll et al. (2011) assumed that reverse-dependency was accompanied with excessive parental pressure. However, this was not apparent in Harry's interpretation of his interaction with his father.

Harry recognised his father's determination "to get him being a footballer", but rather than this expectation increasing the sense of pressure to succeed, he interpreted his parent's behaviours in relation to achieving his personal goal of playing professional football. In order to increase his chances of being offered a scholarship, Harry described how he completed additional training and fitness to improve because "if the coaches know that you are doing extra work they will like you a lot more because you are determined to get better". In particular he spoke of needing to "bulk up" and how his father had organised access to a personal trainer for him, and that being watched by his father and his granddad meant that he played better.

```
Extract 2.5
1 Nicky:   Is it nice having people there to (.) watch you?
2 Harry:   Some↑times, but uhh the ↑more people there the more
3          pressure I feel, but like say it's an away game and no
4          one comes, I don't feel that (.) like I need to work
```

```
5          ha:rd kind of thing. but with people there (.) you
6          wanna look good in [front of people] so it makes-=
7 Nicky:                      [Mmm  yeah  yeah]
8          =↑makes me play better so
```

Extract 2.6

```
1 Nicky:   And in what ways have they helped you
2 Harry:   Well (.) took me training that's the main part umm (.)
3          they ↑tell me what I need to improve on, like in the
4          ni:cest way (.) and then they tell me (.) like how I
5          can improve it so ↓dad got me a personal trainer, (.)
6          which helped me a lot I wouldn't have been able to get
7          myself a personal trainer,
8 Nicky:   Mm yeah
9 Harry:   so they get a lot of stuff like that
10 Nicky:  And how- how would- ↑what's the kind of- you say they
11         tell you stuff in the nicest way what does that mean
12 Harry:  Uhh ↑they like (.) they just say ↑ohh you need to work
13         on your ↑speed a little bit, I've ↓just seen like an
14         example and then they give me an example of why (.)
15         and I'm like ↑yeah I do and then (.) they give me
16         advice on how to do it, and then they (.) like my dad
17         will take me out training, speed training, so I do
18         some there (.) so they don't just tell me ↓yeah you
19         need to work on your speed or you won't get a
20         scholarship
```

The pressure of performing in front of his family formed part of Harry's experience of playing academy football, but was justified as a mechanism through which he was motivated to work harder and therefore play better, reflecting an externally regulated motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1985). He accepted feedback from his father and granddad on how to improve, explaining how it was delivered in a supportive way. By using "just" and "a little bit" to describe how advice was typically given (extract 2.6, lines 12 and 13), and contrasting the feedback he received against a threat designed to govern his behaviour (extract 2.6, lines 18 to 20), he minimised the authoritarian nature of their instruction. Instead, he constructed this feedback as an assessment, based on evidence, which he agreed with (extract 2.6, line 15). He further described how his father was then actively involved in helping him practise at home (extract 2.6, line 17).

In this description, Harry experiences his body both subjectively and as an object to be assessed by others (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). However, in contrast to the findings presented in chapter four – where players experienced pressure and felt inhibited to try new skills when performing under the gaze of parents (see p.94) – Harry described being reliant upon his family's presence at matches for motivation and accepted the evaluation of his body by others. Aware of being observed in this objective manner, he strived to avoid demonstrating low ability on the pitch, illustrating how an extrinsic motivation can be developed through the body and social relations. In addition, he acknowledged that his father has access to knowledge of his performing football body, but positioned himself as an active participant in the process of assessing his weaknesses, as opposed to a passive recipient of evaluation and corrective instruction. This shared knowledge of his body, as an object to be measured against the physical requirements of professional adult football, was uncontested as he interpreted that his father was also committed to his personal goal of becoming a professional footballer.

To understand this acceptance of shared knowledge and evaluation of his body, interactions between parent and player must be considered in the social context of the academy. Harry identified that he perceived that the academy coaches looked favourably on players who "do extra". His father similarly indicated that it was coaches who had encouraged his son to work on his speed and strength during the previous season.

```
Extract 2.7
1 Steve:   <They wanted him> to improve his speed over nought to
2          ten metres, o↑kay fair enough. so we got that
3          information, and it's like well (.) how are you gonna
4          help u:s (.) ach↑ieve that. ↑they don't- they don't
5          give a ↑toss (.) they don't ↓ca:re.
6 Nicky:   °Ye::ah°
7 Steve:   They just said that's what we need you to do, off you
8          go and ↑do it. (.) and you're telling a 14 15 year old
9          kid to bulk his bod(h)y? up (.) he's still growing
```

The perceived absence of support from the academy to achieve this objective was used to justify his decision to find a personal trainer to help his son improve his fitness. However he described the experience of his son working with a trainer in conflicting terms, both admiring the physical development of his son, but feeling uncomfortable about him starting a training regime at a young age.

Extract 2.8

```
1 Steve:   He's built his arm::s up, and every- he's really done
2          a cracking job with him. (.) but- I just did not fe:el
3          we should be °doing that at that a:ge° (.) you know
4          (.) the club- ↑I I think most clubs are the same, if
5          the- if the players aren't ready, (.) by the time
6          they're 16, they d- they don't wanna ↑know (.) they
7          don't really wanna know, they [wanna see the ↑finish]
8 Nicky:                                 [What do you mean by  ]
9          ready
10 Steve:  Well ready- I don't- physically ready. you know
11         physically built up, you know are they ready for men's
12         football
```

Although he described his reticence toward his son undertaking strength training, he nonetheless remained complicit in the objectification of his son's body. The knowledge that the academy coaches expected his son to develop physically, a view that he normalised by suggesting that "most clubs" would reject players who were not sufficiently physically developed, compelled him to participate in a disciplinary practice that he did not agree with. This suggests that parent-player interactions can be shaped by the social context and in particular the relations of power between players, parents and the academy. Foucault (1991) described how the body is "directly involved in a political field; power relations have an immediate hold upon it; "(p.25) and that disciplinary practices operate primarily on the body in order to produce docile populations which may be "subjected, used, transformed and improved" (p.136) to be economically productive. Both parent and player were compliant with the social control of players' bodies exerted by the academy. Manley et al. (2012) exemplified how youth football academies placed emphasis on the corporeality of players by measuring and analysing data from numerous fitness and physiological tests. This was a practice operating within the clubs included in this research. For example, at Southfield Academy, anthropometric 'predictive' measurements and speed, agility and endurance fitness test scores were collected three times a year, for all players aged 8 to 16 years. All competitive matches were filmed and analysed, and players wore global positioning system (GPS) equipment to track their movement on the pitch, twice a season, increasing in frequency for later phase specialising stage players.

This process of *examination* (Foucault, 1991 p.184), served as a disciplinary technique to promote self-regulatory behaviours that would improve players' productivity on

the pitch (Manley et al., 2012). Foucault (1991) also argued that for disciplinary practices to be effective there must be an associated punishment for failing to conform to normalised standards. For Steve, the ultimate punishment was for Harry to be released from the academy without a professional playing contract. This may in part explain why he acted upon the coaches' feedback despite his reticence towards his son engaging in physical conditioning. Similarly, Harry's understanding of the coaches' expectations meant that he positively valued the corrective instruction and intervention from his father.

The need to comply with coach requests mirrors the experiences of parents outlined in chapter three of this thesis (p.57). This is reflected further in Steve's description of feeling "trapped" by his son's existing contract with the football club, and unable to negotiate any terms for a scholarship.

```
Extract 2.9
1 Steve:   We've got no- we can't barter with ↑anything, we can't
2          say we wanna a four year- so they've got us. [>you ]
3 Nicky:                                                [ye:ah]
4 Steve:   know what I mean< and we we- we're trapped.
```

However, although his experience of the academy's institutional power was of feeling disempowered and compelled to comply with disciplinary practices, he also resisted the control of the academy over his son's future in football by "being proactive" and contacting other football clubs and agents surreptitiously to seek alternative opportunities for his son, should he not be offered a scholarship. While he acknowledged that this behaviour was "underhand", he justified his actions in relation to fulfilling his parental role by giving his son "every chance of success" and ensuring he was "sorted" with another club before he might be released (extract 2.3, line 13). This finding illustrates how the temporal aspect of the impending scholarship decision shaped his parenting experience; increasing both the need to comply with coach requests and, oppositely, his resistance to the academy's control.

In summary, this case study presents a description of a parent-player relationship characterised by a shared understanding of goals and joint commitment to follow academy guidance, shaped by the temporal significance of a scholarship decision. Parent and player experienced the uncertainty differently and both were aware of how the other interpreted this. Steve's commitment to his son's pursuit of a professional football playing career; demonstrated through his use of "we" throughout the interview (e.g. extract 2.7, line 2; extract 2.8, line 3; extract 2.9, line 1) and the value he placed on a career in football (extract 2.2, lines 3 to 5); was recognised and positively valued by his son. Harry described being

actively involved in evaluating his performances and accepting feedback from his father, which supports the finding in chapter four of this thesis (p.91), that players valued personalised feedback from parents. However, Harry also described being reliant on observation by his parents for performance, reflecting an externally regulated motivation, which has been associated with negative consequences (Vallerand, 2007). Finally, this case study highlights how parent-player interactions can be influenced by the power relations and disciplinary practices that function within the academy context.

**Case Study 3: "Identity Disruption"**

**Family and football context.** Luke is an academy scholar and is in his first season of playing full-time football, at a club which play in the second-tier of the English professional football league. Unlike his teammates, Luke has chosen to continue in full-time education as well to study for the qualifications that he wanted to, which were not offered by the academy education provision. As a consequence, he has to carefully schedule his diary to prioritise football training, minimise the time he misses from school and ensure he is able to keep up to date with homework and exam revision. Recently, Luke made the decision to move in with his father, as his mother has begun working away and he wanted to have a parent around who could help him with his commitments. His older brother and younger sister still live with their mother and Luke sees them all regularly.

Luke's father Mike has been involved with youth football since his two sons started to take an interest in the sport. In the absence of a local youth team for his sons to play in, he set up a coaching school to teach children football skills. Since then he has followed his sons as they progressed through youth football, supporting Luke especially. His experience as a parent of an academy player allowed him to extend his coaching and he currently offers individual advice and guidance to a number of players. Mike played youth football himself at a professional club and loves the game, but has other personal interests and aspires equally for his son to excel in education and in sport.

**Parent-player relationship.** Since Luke first started playing, football has been a shared experience which has shaped his relationship with his father. Both parent and player described feeling close to the other and that it was difficult to imagine their relationship without football. Interestingly, both compared their relationship to that of Mike's with Luke's brother and sister. Mike felt he was not able to have the same relationship with his older son as he played sport for fun, or with his daughter, because while she was also talented at sport, they argued if he tried to give her advice. He further reflected that he had spent much more time with Luke than his other children because of football, but that this was justified because

of Luke's success, which he perceived he would not have been able to achieve without his support.

```
Extract 3.1
1 Mike:     It has meant (.) that I have spent a ridi:culous
2           amount of time with him as opposed to the other two.
3           (.) umm and I probably would have spent more time with
4           the other two if I wasn't dragged away all around the
5           country with him however (.) he: would have never have
6           gotten the level of support he probably nee::ds and
7           nee:ded (.) had I have not been able to sacrifice (.)
8           the time to do that
```

Luke also described feeling closer to his father than his siblings were, because after his parents separated he continued to see him more at football. He interpreted that his father pushed him more compared to his brother because "he knows what I want and so he tries to help me (.) tries to push me more". Football was something he and his father talked about frequently and had "always worked towards", which suggested that parent and player shared a mutual understanding of Luke's goal of becoming a professional footballer. This influenced Luke's decision to move in with his father, as he found balancing his educational and football commitments challenging and wanted to have someone there to push him to "stay on top of everything" and avoid being "mediocre" at either. He reflected that he did not think he would be where he was right now if he did not live with his father, echoing Mike's perception of the influence of his parental support in extract 3.1. This illustrates how Luke's personal project (his pursuit of and commitment to life activities; Ashworth, 2003a) influenced his interaction with his father.

By pursuing personal goals in school and football equally, Luke demonstrated resistance to the dominant norm in academies that places little value on the educational component of scholarships (Brown & Potrac, 2009). Luke's full-time football and education commitments required him to work more hours than either his teammates or his school friends, and meant that his father was uniquely positioned to keep a perspective on and understand his life as a whole. Luke interpreted that his father "knows me better than anybody else", in particular with regards to football, as whereas his coaches and teammates had changed, his father had been "the only person that's been with me the whole time". This reflects how a shared understanding of his everyday subjective experience was a significant aspect of Luke's relationship with his father.

Becoming a full-time academy scholar meant for Luke that the chance of playing senior professional football was closer to him than ever before. He loved that he was able to continue to study and play football at the same time, but, at the time of the interview, had struggled to adjust to the academy environment. He was now one of the youngest in his squad and had been frustrated by a lack of game time and being substituted. He perceived that he was not one of the top players in his squad, something he had not experienced before. From previously being the captain of his team and a prolific goal scorer, he described feeling unsure about his identity as a player now.

```
Extract 3.2
1 Luke:     When I was scoring >loads of goals in like under 15s
2           or something< (.) it- or like- or like Fernando Torres
3           a few years ago, if you said to me, (.) what kind of
4           player are you? (.) I'd tell you. Or like what- what
5           would you bring to my team, I'd tell you. Obviously
6           I'd- what- what are you like I'd tell you.
7 Nicky:    Mmhmm
8 Luke:     But like if you were to say that to me (.) today I
9           would- >I don't even know do ya know what I mean like<
```

This uncertainty suggests that Luke was experiencing a disruption to his sense of self and lived body; his repetition of "I'd tell you" emphasising his previous assurance in his identity and taken-for-granted reliance on his body. His father was also aware of this change and was concerned that his son was trying to impress the coaches and lacked the confidence he perceived he needed in order to perform well. This aligns with previous findings that a decrease in playing time and an emphasis on evaluating performance through outcome goals negatively impacted on players' confidence when transitioning into elite senior ice-hockey (Bruner, Munroe-Chandler & Spink, 2008). However, for Luke his experience of 'confidence' (which from a phenomenological perspective would be conceptualised as constituted through his intentional relationship with the world) formed part of his embodied footballing identity, which furthermore was shaped through his interaction with others; notably in relation to coaches' perceptions of his ability and in comparison to teammates. Following Merleau-Ponty's (1962) notion that the embodied self is constituted through relations with others, and Gadamer's (1975) position that understanding is made possible through language, examining both parent and player's construction of this disruption can therefore contribute to understanding how identity is formed and reformed in sport.

Luke explained how he had approached the coaches to express his frustration and ask about how he could improve. He was told that he should not expect things to change now and instead, concentrate on learning and developing in his first year and not risk overtraining by undertaking additional fitness training. Mike interpreted that this meant that the coaches did not understand his son and were therefore not able to provide him with the individualised support he needed in order to feel confident and perform to the best of his ability. This account was shared by Luke who agreed that he needed to approach his football training differently. The following extracts are taken from a conversation that occurred as part of Luke's interview, where Mike joined his son and the researcher to have dinner. This additional data presents an interesting example of how parent and player co-constructed an alternative understanding of the coaches' feedback.

```
Extract 3.3
1 Luke:     I only first ↑met him in the start of July. (.) So I
2           don't think he knows me (.) well enough to know what
3           I'm li:ke kind of thing
4 Nicky:    ↑Yeah
5 Luke:     [So I] think he- the way- the information he was=
6 Mike:     [But-]
7 Luke:     =giving me is information (.) that he would give to
8           anyone, not [     not] not information that he would=
9 Mike:                 [Correct.]
10 Luke:    =give to me personally.

Extract 3.4
1 Luke:     I think that me and my dad have always (.) have always
2           like gone to the park done like extra stuff,
3 Nicky:    Yeah
4 Luke:     And umm
5           (.)
6 Mike:     And we bear the fruits. (.) We >bear the fruit you
7           know< but at times people will say (.) it's too much
8           you know he's playing on a ↑Wednesday night for
9           school, and blah blah blah and=
10 Luke:    =But that's what I've always done.

Extract 3.5
1 Luke:     He'd say that if he saw me like in the gym on the- in
```

```
2          the evening, that I don't- that I'm ov:erworking
3          myself (.) overtiring [myself] out
4 Nicky:                         [I see ](.) o↑kay
5 Luke:    When in my eyes and my dad's eyes (.) I'm making sure
6          that I can be fitter than everyone else
7 Mike:    As fit as he needs to be in order to accomplish what
8          he needs to on the pitch
9 Luke:    But in his- but in in Steve's eyes, I'm overworking
10         myself so I'd be too tired.
```

In extract 3.3, Luke evaluated his coach as not knowing him well enough to provide him with individualised feedback, which his father aligned with on line 9. This assessment constructs that knowledge of a player is required to coach effectively and that this knowledge takes time to acquire. This functioned to both undermine the coach's advice and give credibility to the knowledge of Luke as a player that father and son share. This was further reinforced when Luke reported that he and his father had "always" undertaken extra fitness training (extract 3.4, lines 1 and 10), which Mike subsequently assessed as a strategy that had been successful in the past, despite criticism from others. Collaboratively they dismissed this criticism, evidenced by the latching on lines 9-10 where Luke finished his father's turn (Lerner, 2004); further emphasising their knowledge of training methods which they perceived suited Luke.

Together these extracts illustrate how player and parent co-constructed an account for Luke's non-selection and why he should undertake additional fitness training, in contrast to the coach's advice. By supporting this counter-narrative, Mike enabled Luke to choose to resist the advice of his coaches and to undertake the extra training that together, they believed was the missing component from his football performances. For Heidegger (1962), authenticity is an essential feature of our "being in the world". Our freedom to choose and act authentically however is limited by our sociality, as often we act according to the influences of others. Through the production of an alternative account, it could be said that Luke's father enabled him to act authentically, rather than in the proscribed way of the academy, and to take responsibility for his own development. In doing so, Luke sought to reconstruct his identity and lived body as a confident and competent footballer.

From a critical perspective, however, this finding might suggest that Luke's experience of his body as one to be disciplined and honed into a competent worker through extra physical training, together with his focus on gaining an edge over others (extract 3.5, lines 5-6), is in line with capitalist ideals of individualism and competition that are

reproduced in professional football (Roderick, 2006). Similarly, Mike's emphasis on maximising Luke's individual achievement potential (extract 3.5, lines 7-8) reflects wider cultural expectations of "good" parenting. By engaging in *concerted cultivation* (sustained efforts toward developing children's talent and skills; Lareau, 2003), parents can contribute to a capitalist society by supporting children to develop skills that are valued in the workplace (Faircloth et al., 2013). This provides an example of how experiences that are lived authentically (Heidegger, 1962), can also be imbued with the politics and power of the professional sport culture.

This case study presents an example of how the experience of being involved in elite youth football can develop a sense of closeness in the parent-player relationship. The constancy of Mike's involvement (throughout Luke's football playing history, despite a parental separation) and his empathetic understanding of his son's everyday subjective experience meant his support was valued by Luke. By working together towards shared goals, and co-constructing knowledge of Luke's lived body, Mike facilitated his son to resist certain academy norms and act authentically.

**Phenomenological Interpretations**

The case studies presented provide detailed descriptions of three parent-player relationships in the context of elite youth football. The idiographic approach allowed for participants' individual and relational experiences to be explored. This section will now consider the implications that the case studies have for understanding the phenomenology of these relationships. In particular, the findings will be interpreted using the phenomenological concepts of relationality, embodiment and temporality (Ashworth, 2003a; 2003b; van Manen, 1990; see chapter two p.35), and will draw upon the analysis of all the parent-player dyads involved in the research. The family context for each individual dyad is provided at the end of this chapter (p.135).

**Embodiment: Closeness.** Across the parent-player dyads, football was a shared experience which shaped their relationships and was significant in their lives. Players described spending more time with, or feeling closer to their parent through football. This was reflected in parents' accounts, supporting previous findings that parents valued the opportunity to interact more with their child that sport provided (Dorsch et al., 2009; Wiersma & Fifer, 2008). This closeness in parent-player relationships can be described as a key feature of participants' lived-experiences, which manifested in various embodied ways. For example, parents experienced excitement from the buzz of the Sunday morning pre-match routine (parent 5), pride when players felt able to ask for feedback to be given in a

different way (parents 3 and 6) and uncertainty about the fragility of their son's academy place (parents 1, 5, 7 and 8). Players described feeling frustrated or embarrassed if they did not play well or were substituted when parents were watching (players 2 and 3), happy when parents gave them positive feedback (players 4, 6 and 8) and a sense of security from the knowledge that their parent would be there for them if they were released by the club (players 3 and 5). These emotions can be described as part of the embodied experience of closeness and - following Burkitt's (1999) interpretation of emotions – were constituted through parent-player interaction and shaped by the elite, competitive culture of football academies.

Extending this further, the experience of closeness also influenced parents' involvement with their son's football participation. In case study three, Luke's description of how his father shared an understanding of his everyday subjective experience suggests that parents are uniquely positioned to understand their child as not just a footballer, student, or friend, but as a person, and to advise and support them accordingly. Harwood and Knight (in press p.3) proposed that self-development to "learn the trade" of being a sport parent is required for parents to be able to offer appropriate types of social support. This, however, does not recognise parents' ability to empathise with their child's lived-experience – developed over time through interaction – and that this understanding may enable parents to provide social support which is valued by their child.

**Embodiment: Gender.** Case study one highlighted the gendered dimension of parent-child relationships. Despite his mother's uncertainty about the effectiveness of her feedback, Ali sought and valued her advice after football matches. This was in contrast to many of the players whose father was identified as the most involved in their football. Players often described their mother's role in limited terms because of a perceived lack of football knowledge.

> Nicky: And uhh (.) is your mum involved in football at all?
> Player 5: She's uhh supportive heh she's like (.) she don't know much about football at all (.) she just says like enjoy it and stuff (.) so she's not really like (.) she wouldn't watch football or like she wouldn't- >she don't really kno(h)w much< about football basically heh (.) so it's hard to get something from her

> Player 7: My stepdad like (.) gets more sort of involved sort of thing than my mum because he- he knows a bit more about football than her, (.) and like is more interested and stuff like that

This was also reflected in the interviews with parents. Mothers described how their understanding of football developed a sense of closeness with their son, but typically downplayed their level of knowledge.

> Parent 2: °Because obviously I'm a (.) female°, being able to enjo:y that with them has helped our relationship because he's so into it, (.) I suppose I've got enough football knowledge and li:ke of the game enough to you know to be able to (.) enjo:y you know, enjoy that ↑with him

> Parent 7: I think (.) if Jason hadn't have done the football in the way that he did I would struggle to have conversa:tions with them about ↑anything sometimes. It is a topic of conversation I can now join in, and not feel (.) I don't know anything about it. (.) I don't know as much as everybody ↑else but I- I- I feel as though I'm pa:rt of it

These findings imply that knowledge and understanding of football was assumed and accepted with fathers, but not mothers, and reflects something of the dominant masculine norms and values of professional football (Roderick, 2006). The gender order in academies was experienced corporeally by mothers and fathers differently, and constrained or enabled their interactions with their son. This supports and extends Holt et al.'s (2008) finding that perceived knowledge and experience influenced parents' involvement at youth sport competitions, by highlighting how certain knowledge is authoritative within sport cultures. Importantly, perceived knowledge also has the potential to contribute to a sense of closeness in the parent-child relationship, which may be problematic for mothers who lack or devalue their experiential knowledge of football. However, as case study one illustrates, the gendered roles of parents can be reinterpreted by players, particularly in one-parent families, emphasising the constitutive role of gender to the parent-child relationship.

**Temporality and transitions.** Interaction between parent and player was influenced by the temporal significance of the players' next transition in football. Transition points occurred towards the end of each season when a decision would be made by the club as to whether to extend players' contracts (see chapter one p.5). As illustrated in the three case studies, players experienced a pressure to develop and impress coaches within a definitive timeframe, or else their academy status would be at risk; reflecting the experiences of the initial phase specialising stage players presented in chapter four (p.92). Likewise, parents

recognised that their son's place in the academy was not secure and were aware of the restricted period of time in which their child had to meet expected performance standards. This sense of lived-time in relation to their son's future reinforced parents' commitment to facilitate their son's football development and was used to justify certain practices, for example criticising performances. Criticism was legitimised as a practice necessary for preparing their son for a future in professional football:

> Parent 6: It's good that I tell him already ↑now and then I'm harsh with him and then because he want to become professional footballer he's pre↑pared (.) to take whatever I'm going to (.) throw to him, umm because I know (.) you know after- after this (.) it's gonna be ↑tough (.) it's gonna be very bad

This reflects Jeanes and Magee's (2011) finding that parenting practices which contradict the orthodox expectations of involved fathering, such as aggressive or controlling behaviours, were rationalised by fathers of 14-year-old academy players as necessary for equipping their sons for the masculine, competitive, elite environment of professional football. Extending this finding, the influence of this masculine culture was also observed in parents of younger players, as this extract from an observational field note of an under-9 age group training session illustrates:

> During the practice game at the end of the training session, the player who was in goal took quite a close range shot to his body and stayed on the ground afterwards for a short while, to which his dad on the sideline said – not to his son but audibly to the other parents watching – "get up ya soft git". At the end of the session when his son came over, he told him "you're a goalkeeper, you've got to use every bit of your body". (Field notes, July 2012)

Although criticising performances was a strategy used by some fathers in the present study, in the face of temporal uncertainty parents also described complying with academy expectations, emphasising the importance of education and proactively making contact with other clubs to manage their son's approaching transition point.

This data has highlighted the influence of the football context and the temporal nature of progression in football on the parent-player relationship. Furthermore, this suggests that the relations of power (Foucault, 1982) between parents, players and coaches were an essential feature of participants' experiences. Importantly, the case studies demonstrated in

different ways, that players experienced agency in the parenting process and can negotiate, resist and be resilient to the authority of their parents and of the academy. In conclusion, the parent-player relationship in elite youth football can be understood as constituted through the temporal significance of players' transitions and the relations of power with the academy context.

**Relations with family.** The case studies presented in this research highlight how parent-child interaction occurs within the context of wider, more complex family relationships. A variety of individual adults may be involved in the care of children including step-parents, grandparents, older siblings and other family members (Ribbens McCarthy & Edwards, 2011). Each parent-player dyad in this study was part of a unique network of family relationships, which shaped their interaction in different ways. For example, in case study two Harry's grandfather was significantly involved in his football. He provided transport and technical advice to his grandson, and monitored his performance to pass on information to Harry's father. The regret that Harry's father experienced because his own father did not allow him to sign a contract with a professional club also influenced his decision to support Harry to play academy football; highlighting how his parenting was influenced by his personal experiences with his father.

Parent-sibling relationships were often used as a comparison to describe and interpret players' own relationship with their parent. For example, having two older brothers who had been through the academy system meant for player 6 that he anticipated how his interaction with his father was likely to change:

> Player 6: I guarantee if I (.) stay until the under 13s, he will talk a lot (.) and a lot.
> Nicky: Hehehehe
> Player 6: And then (.) he ↑talks a lot to my brother, like just gives him a conversation for like an ho:ur (.) for ↑me he speaks like 20 minutes, (.) but when I get older probably be an hour as well it's lo::ng.

Parent 6 also acknowledged that his approach was influenced by his experience of supporting his other sons' football participation. Describing professional football as "very ruthless and very cruel", he had resolved to "never be laidback again" and instead, be more involved and proactive in facilitating opportunities for his youngest son to play and progress.

This finding exemplifies how parent-child relationships both shaped, and were shaped by, relations with other family members. This has implications for future research; in

particular that examining parent-child relationships in isolation from the family milieu may limit understanding of the parenting process. A limitation of the present study, therefore, was the focus on the experiences of biological parents, which may have excluded step-parents or grandparents who were actively involved in parenting and with players' football. Previous research has indicated that siblings can positively support the development of young athletes when brothers and sisters are cooperative rather than competitive (Côté, 1999) and that parents can struggle balancing time with their other children (Harwood et al., 2010; Harwood & Knight, 2009a; 2009b). The interdependence of family relationships in sport, therefore, remains an important area of interest for future research.

Furthermore, this study lends support to a family systems approach to research and to working with families to enhance experiences in sport. Family systems theory, although typically used in family therapy, has been utilised in the sport setting and focuses on understanding individuals in the context of their relationships with family members (Hellstedt, 2005; Zito, 2010). This approach aims to develop the necessary support for families to manage change and adapt to the transitions that children may experience as they progress in sport, by identifying patterns of functional or dysfunctional interaction. This offers an alternative intervention strategy to types of parental education programmes which seek to increase parents' knowledge and awareness through a one-size-fits-all solution to optimising parental involvement in sport (Holt & Knight, 2014). However, family systems theory is limited by underlying assumptions which determine what is meant by functional interaction within a family, and a failure to account for the influence of political, social and economic power in relationships (Walters, 1990). Therefore, future research which explores parent-child relationships in the context of the family – including individuals who a child identifies as having a significant relationship with – can further enhance understanding of the complex process of parenting in sport; especially when the influence of the politics and power of the sport culture are considered.

## Conclusion

By adopting an existential phenomenological approach, this study aimed to explore the experience of parenting and the meaning that children and parents attach to their interaction and relationships, in the context of elite youth football. The findings present a detailed description and interpretation of the parent-player relationship; as one constituted by relations with other family members, an embodied sense of closeness, the temporal significance of sport transitions, and gender and power relations. It is suggested that these experiential aspects may serve as a useful heuristic guide for researchers and practitioners

working with families to encourage reflection on current understandings of parent-child relationships and interaction in this context.

By illustrating how players experienced agency in the parenting process, this research also emphasised how children mutually constitute their relationship with parents. This advocates the need for a view of parenting that accounts for how interaction is experienced by parents *and* children, rather than a sole focus on explicating optimal parental involvement, and lends support to the findings in chapter four of this thesis (p.98). Parents' lived-experience of developing and acting upon a shared understanding of their child's body, identity and project to effectively manage and negotiate transitions in sport, presents an alternative to the construction of parenting as a skill set which parents must learn to be effective. Considering the emphasis on the need for parent education in the sport psychology literature (e.g. Gould et al., 2008; Knight et al., 2011; Wiersma & Fifer, 2008), further research to establish the circumstances in which expert advice in elite youth sport is legitimate and warranted, or when active support for parental instinct and judgement can be encouraged may therefore be useful.

**Additional Information**

This section details the family context for each individual dyad included within this research.

**Parent-Player 2**. Player 2 is currently playing in the under-16 age group squad and first joined the academy when he was eight years old. He was released after one season and then resigned by the same club at age 11. Recently he learnt that he has been offered a full-time scholarship for the forthcoming season. Player 2 lives with his mother and younger brother and regularly sees his father at weekends. An ex-professional football player, his father watches matches and supports player 2's football participation. Parent 2, a single mother, has supported her local club where her son now plays since she was a child and likes that her son is involved in healthy, disciplined activity. However, her experience of the professional football environment means that she feels that there are more worthwhile careers and therefore football "is not the be all and the end all to me".

**Parent-Player 4.** Since he was six years old, player 4 has played at the development centre and then the academy of a first-tier English professional football league club. He now plays in the under-12 age group squad and from this year has had day release from school for two afternoons a week to train at the academy. At home, he lives with his mother, father, older sister and younger brother. His mother, parent 4, shares the responsibility for supporting her son's football with her husband. Education is most important to parent 4 as her son has

recently started secondary school, has settled in well and is excelling across subjects. In order to maintain her son's attainment, she negotiated with the academy that he would attend day release training only every other week.

**Parent-Player 5.** Player 5 is 14 years of age and playing in his sixth season at the academy of a first-tier English professional football league club. He lives with his mother and his older brother, as his parents are separated. He stays with his father, who has remarried, for one night a week, and at a host family's house for another night of the week, to reduce travelling as his lives over an hour from the academy. His father, parent 5, has supported his son's football participation from when he was first scouted by professional clubs and watches all his games. Football is a passion which offers escapism for parent 5, who describes that his family and football are his life. Being involved in football has enabled parent 5 to develop a close relationship with his son, which as a non-resident father is important to him.

**Parent-Player 6.** Player 6 is part of the under-12 age group squad of a first-tier English professional football league club, where he has played since he was eight years old. He is following in the path of his two older brothers who have both played at the same academy. His father, parent 6, has supported his three sons' academy football participation for ten years. At home, player 6 lives with his mother, father and one of his older brothers. Parent 6 describes that his whole family loves football and that they often practice together at home. Supporting his oldest son through the transition from the academy to a professional club means parent 6 feels able to prepare his two younger sons better.

**Parent-Player 7.** Player 7 lives with his mother, stepdad, older brother, stepbrother and stepsister. When his mother, parent 7, was a single parent she could not support player 7 to keep a regular football commitment, and every other weekend he would visit his father. When he and his mother moved in with their step-family, player 7 was able to start playing football more regularly. After playing for a local team for two years, he was scouted by an academy of a second-tier English professional football league club. He has now played at the academy for 22 months and is currently part of the under-15 age group squad. Player 7 is appreciative of the time his mother and stepdad's give up for him to play football, but understands that their support is conditional on maintaining his performance and behaviour at school.

# CHAPTER SIX

## A Discursive Approach to Understanding Parent-Coach Relationships in Elite Youth Football

In chapter three of this thesis (p.57) the influence of interaction with coaches on parents' experiences was highlighted. Notably, that once children were signed to a club as academy players, parents were expected to adjust their sideline behaviours, relinquish responsibility for their child's development in football and refrain from challenging coaching practices and decisions. From the perspective of parents, although not all accepted these changes, they nonetheless recognised the shift in power away from parents to coaches once players had signed contracts, as they experienced a reduction in communication from coaches, a pressure to conform to coach requests and an increased need for approval from coaches.

Furthermore, chapter five (p.132) discussed how relations of power between parents, players and coaches were an essential feature of participants' experiences. The institutional power exerted by the academy compelled parents to comply with disciplinary practices, or at times, to resist the academy's control and the requests of coaches. The implication that parent-coach interaction occurs within a relation of power (Foucault, 1982) invites further examination, as an analysis of power within the parent-coach relationship is missing from existing youth sport literature.

Research has predominantly problematised the parent-coach relationship, emphasising the negative aspects of parent-coach interaction and the potential consequences for player development (see chapter one p.26). Coaches play a pivotal role in the development of young players and interaction between coaches and parents forms part of the complex social-cultural context of youth football academies (e.g. Jones et al., 2002; Poczwardowski et al., 2006). Research in football academies has indicated the presence of underlying tension in the parent-coach relationship – as both rely upon each other, yet reciprocally evaluate the other according to their (sometimes conflicting) expectations for roles and behaviours; in particular in relation to player development (Harwood et al., 2010; Holt & Dunn, 2004; Mills et al., 2012). Academy practices have also been shown to contribute to tension between parents and coaches, such as player assessment and deselection processes, and the management of parents' involvement at matches (Harwood et al., 2010; Partington & Cushion, 2012); reflecting the influence of the subcultural context on parent-coach relationships.

In response to the potential for negative parent-coach interactions, researchers have proposed recommendations for developing effective relationships between parents and

coaches in youth sport settings (Smoll et al., 2011; Blom et al., 2013). Smoll et al. (2011) presented advice for coaches across youth sports to enhance their relationships with parents, for the purpose of improving the quality of athletes' sport experiences. The article begins by problematising the behaviour of parents and positioning coaches as able to educate parents to influence their behaviours. Establishing two-way communication is promoted as a strategy for developing effective relationships, however the role of coaches in improving parents' understanding of youth sport is emphasised. This assumes a particular relationship between parents and coaches, which assigns an 'expert' status to coaches and constructs parents as unaware; "parents simply do not realize the trouble they are causing" (Smoll et al., 2011 p.19). As Brustad (2011) notes, there is a tendency to attribute issues in parent-coach-player relationships to the inappropriate involvement of parents and cautions that parents must also be empowered to raise concerns they may have related to the welfare of their child. Moreover, this universal advice does not account for the influence of the specific sport environment or broader cultural context on interaction between parents and coaches (Gilbert & Hamel, 2011; Horn, 2011). For example, does this guidance hold in an elite youth sport setting? A more detailed understanding of the power dynamics which influence the parent-coach relationship, including the institution power of sporting organisations, may shed light on the efficacy of such advice.

This chapter therefore presents an analysis of power within the parent-coach relationship in the context of elite youth football. Given how interaction with coaches constrained or enabled the subjective experiences of parents in academies (see chapter three p.57), the purpose of this study was to examine the ways in which coaches describe their interaction and relationship with parents. In doing so, this study contributes to addressing the fourth research question of this thesis; how are the experiences of parents of elite youth footballers shaped by the parent-coach relationship? By investigating the ways in which coaches' talk about parents, this research aims to explore how parents are positioned and relationships with parents are constructed by coaches. Uniquely, this is the first study to adopt a discursive approach to exploring parent-coach relationships in sport.

The concept of power is not something that is directly addressed in phenomenological research, as this approach focuses on understanding the world as it is lived. However, existential phenomenologists recognise that experience is shaped by social, historical and culture influences. For example, Heidegger (1962) wrote of existence as constituted by "thrown-ness", describing how we are thrown into a pre-existing world of people, language, objects and culture, which limits our possible ways of being. A deeper understanding of the

influence of power in social relations can therefore produce a more complex and critical account of parenting experiences in elite youth football.

**Foucault and Power**

Foucault's primary interest laid in understanding how power is produced, through relations with others. He defined power as "a mode of action upon the actions of others", where a person acts to guide another's conduct, or structure their "possible field of action" (Foucault, 1982 p.221), meaning that the exertion of power does not directly determine the actions of others. This is because Foucault also theorised that "power is exercised only over free subjects, and only insofar as they are free" (p.221). Thus, although a coach may attempt to influence the behaviour of a parent, that parent retains an element of 'freedom' to choose how to respond to the guiding mode of action. From this perspective, relations of power are assumed to construct the social world and people's subjective experiences.

To understand power relations, Foucault contended that it was necessary to examine discourses, which he argued were "practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak" (2002 p.54). Discourses therefore do more than describe things, they are practices which structure and shape our social world, and "constrain what can be said, who can say it and how people may act and conceive of their own agency and subjectivity" (Parker, 1994). Discourses can reproduce power relations, through the construction of *knowledge* and *truths* which guide societal practices. For Foucault, discourse, knowledge and power were inextricably linked:

> There are manifold relations of power which permeate, characterise and constitute the social body, and these relations of power cannot themselves be established, consolidated nor implemented without the production, accumulation, circulation and functioning of a discourse. There can be no possible exercise of power without a certain economy of discourses of truth which operates through and on the basis of this association. We are subjected to the production of truth through power and we cannot exercise power except through the production of truth. (Foucault, 1980 p.93)

Therefore, within institutions such as professional football clubs, or the family, discourses form knowledge and truth which legitimate practices designed to organise, regulate and administer social life. Concomitantly, these institutional practices reproduce and support the discourses which legitimate them, through relations of power.

In this chapter a Foucauldian discourse analysis (Willig 2008) was employed to identify the discursive practices used by coaches when describing their relationships with parents in football academies. Discourse analysis "systematises different ways of talking so we can understand them better [then ] looks at the tensions within discourses and the way they reproduce and transform the world" (Parker, 1992 p.5). Unlike other discursive approaches to psychology which are concerned with the organisation and management of inter-personal communication (e.g. Potter & Wetherell, 1987), a Foucauldian discourse analysis allows for an understanding of the implications of discursive practices on selfhood and subjectivity. As Willig (2008) neatly explains; "the way in which we talk about things has implications for the ways in which we experience the world, both physically and psychologically" (p.124). From this perspective, Foucauldian discourse analysis shares a common interest with phenomenologists in the role of discourse in shaping lived-experience (see chapter two p.33). However, rather than assume that discourse precedes and wholly constitutes subjectivity, in this study, discourse and experience are assumed to be dialectical and mutually constitutive (e.g. Langdridge, 2008).

## Methods

### Participants

Football coaches with experience of coaching in elite youth academies were recruited from three English professional football clubs. Ten male coaches aged between 22 and 54 years participated in the research (*M* = 39.5). Coaches had between 3 and 30 years of experience of football coaching (*M* = 17.2) and 1 and 15 years of professional coaching experience in academies (*M* = 6.7). Further details of participants' coaching experience and demographic information are available in Appendix T.

With the permission of the academy directors, coaches were initially approached to participate in the research by a senior member of the academy staff, or recruited directly where a personal contact existed. Participants with a range of years of football coaching experience, experience of working with parents of different aged players, and both full and part-time coaches were purposively sampled; guided by maximum variation sampling (Patton, 2002) to explore a variety of coach perspectives on parent-coach relationships.

### Data Collection

Individual interviews were held with coaches, at academy training grounds, for between 30 and 94 minutes (*M* = 60). The purpose of the semi-structured interviews was to produce discursive accounts; where participants comment upon and theorise about social acts (Harré, 1997). During the interviews, coaches were encouraged to describe their experiences

of working with parents in detail. The interview questions used to guide discussion are shown in Table 9. Interviews were audio-recorded and all verbal talk transcribed verbatim into a play-script format. The data extracts presented in this chapter were transformed to include key features of the delivery of talk including overlap, pauses and emphasis (see chapter two p.44). Transcription conventions followed those used in chapter four[6] (see Table 6 p.84).

**Table 9: Academy Coach Interview Guide**

| | Descriptive Questions | Further Questions |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Can you tell me about how long you have coached and in what settings? | What is your current role at the academy? |
| 2 | What experience have you had as a coach of working with parents in academies? | Can you describe a time when you had a positive experience of working with parents?<br>Can you describe a time when you had a negative experience of working with parents? |
| 3 | What is your overall approach to working with parents? | |
| 4 | How do you think parents can help players in academies? | |
| 5 | How do you think parents can help coaches in academies? | |
| 6 | How do you think clubs can support parents in academies? | |
| 7 | How do you think clubs can support coaches to work with parents? | |
| 8 | What advice about working with parents would you give to a new coach in an academy? | |

## Data Analysis

Data analysis followed the six stages of Foucauldian discourse analysis outlined by Willig (2008), which focuses on the availability of discursive resources within a culture and its implications for those who live within it. Discourse was defined as "a system of statements which constructs an object" (Parker, 1992). Analysis was further supplemented by the interpretation of data from phenomenological interviews with parents and participant observation (see chapter two p.38).

**Stage 1: Discursive construction.** Interview transcripts were firstly read and re-read

[6] The lengths of pauses were not recorded and are instead represented as (.).

to become familiar with the data[7]. To identify the ways in which parents were discursively constructed in coaches' talk, explicit and implicit references to parents, or connotations for parents within the texts were highlighted, through a line-by-line analysis.

**Stage 2: Discourses.** For each highlighted section of text, the way in which parents were constructed was described and recorded in an analysis table (see Table 10 for an analysis extract and Appendix U for an example analysis table). To interpret the discourses and the connections between them, constructions were compared and contrasted, and considered in relation to wider cultural discourses (e.g. parenting, child development and football). As this process was completed for each interview transcript, a thematic structure of discourses and descriptive labels was developed. This was continually amended and added to during the analysis.

**Stage 3: Action orientation.** To understand why coaches may have drawn on certain discourses, the function of constructions were analysed by examining what was achieved from invoking a particular discourse at specific points in the interviews. Attending to how participants shifted between discursive constructions assisted this analysis stage.

**Stage 4: Positionings.** Next, the subject positions made available for both parents and coaches through the discursive constructions were explored. Subject positions were defined as "a location for persons within the structure of rights and duties for those who use that repertoire" (Davies & Harré, 1999 p.35). Discursive locations can limit or enable the positions from which people can speak or act. In this stage of the analysis it was therefore important to move beyond coaches' literal descriptions of what parents should do or not do and instead consider how their constructions positioned parents in ways that had implications for what parents could say or do in academies.

**Stage 5: Practice.** The relationship between discourses and practice (meaning behaviours or actions) was considered by identifying the implications of the discursive constructions for the actions of coaches and the activities within academies, and examining how these practices in turn reproduced the discourses that legitimate them.

**Stage 6: Subjectivity.** The final stage of Willig's (2008) analysis was modified for the purpose of this research by focusing on the relationship between discourses and *parents'* experiences, rather than the implications for the subjectivity of coaches. In line with the overall research purpose of this thesis, the phenomenological consequences for parents of

[7] Within the texts, a variety of objects and subjects were discursively constructed including players, coaching, academies and football development. However for the purpose of addressing the research question, the analysis focused on the ways in which parents were constructed in interviews.

being positioned within the identified discourses were explored. Following Merleau-Ponty's (1962) notion that all experience is relational, this approach assumed that parents' experiences were shaped through their interaction with coaches, and that the discourses used by coaches had implications for their interactions with parents. Therefore, to understand how coaches (through their discursive constructions) shaped the subjective experiences available to parents, the phenomenological descriptions provided by parents (from the interviews presented in chapters three and five of this thesis) were considered in relation to the discursive constructions and subject positions identified in this analysis.

**Table 10: Extract of Foucauldian Discourse Analysis**

| Data Extract | Discursive Construction | Interpretation |
|---|---|---|
| Nicky: And so what experience do you have generally of working with parents in the academy setting<br>C5: Yep umm so (.) obviously pre- sort of season meetings so I host quite a lot of pre-season meetings, uh and end of season meetings. Uh and that tends to be in more of a group setting, kind of setting the boundaries and umm expectations for the year ahead or reflecting and reviewing on the year that's just gone by. | Pre-season meetings with groups of parents to set boundaries and expectations for what is appropriate and not appropriate, and review the previous year. | Pre-season meetings to set boundaries and expectations |
| Umm but also with our (.) umm we have half yearly reports so we've just conducted those now (.) across the 9's, 10's and 11's, so we'll sit down with each player and their parents or guardians, umm to discuss how their son is doing, umm we follow a four corner format for that. Umm and also end of year retain or release meetings. | Half yearly reports with players and parents to discuss how players are doing | Reports – school language<br>Parents in meetings to discuss player progress |
| But on top of that its regular communication, phone calls, ad hoc coffees, little chat, everything okay, umm I think it's always important to ensure that the parent feels they can pick up the phone to you at any time (.) and vice versa. So that's- in that early meeting so that pre-season meeting it's always 'please you know-' and what it also allows you to do is kind of (.) set the boundaries as you know what's deemed to be appropriate and what's not appropriate | Regular communication – ad hoc coffees, little chats – informal, friendly. Parents should feel they can pick up the phone | Regular communication is informal, friendly and accessible to parents |

It is inescapable when performing a Foucauldian discourse analysis that in the process of describing the knowledge formed by the discourses used in the transcripts, another form of 'scientific' knowledge is produced by the analysis. Therefore, the analysis presented does not claim to represent a 'true' version of reality. It is acknowledged that other readings of the

discourses are possible and may offer alternative interpretations and understandings of the parent-coach relationship.

## Analysis and Discussion

The discourses coaches drew upon in interviews concentrated around a contest of power with parents for responsibility for the development of players. Four discursive strategies were identified as used by coaches to establish that player development was the sole responsibility of coaches and to minimise parents' role in the coaching process: coaches as experts; "good" and "problem" parents; keeping parents at "arm's length"; and parents as customers. These constructions and the associated practices which reproduced the discourses are discussed, followed by an interpretation of the power relations in the parent-coach relationship.

### Coaches as Experts in Youth Football Development

By constructing coaches as experts in the field of youth football development, and parents as non-experts, coaches established their rights to be responsible for the development of players. To demonstrate expertise, coaches drew upon cultural discourses of professionalism and the emerging status of sports coaching as a recognised professional occupation (Taylor & Garratt, 2010). In line with idealised understandings of professionalism (Freidson, 2001), coaches' expertise was constructed as possessing specialist knowledge, accredited qualifications and practical experience relative to parents.

> C4: Unfortunately in this country you've got a lot a- a lot of parents who watch football and all of a sudden they're qualified (.) football coaches. And they know better than us. Listen all parent- all kids listen to their parents >I know that I listened to my dad< when I was young playing football, umm (.) but they gotta understand that the way we're trying to develop the players ↑he:re (.) might be slightly different to how they were developed or what they think is (.) is expert coaching.
>
> Nicky: What do you think parents can do to help (.) you as coaches help °players to [develop ]
> C5: [Trust us.] Trust us, ↓um::m (.) I think they need to umm (.) ↑trust us enough to:: be honest with them. Which I hope we are, (.) trust our expertise and experience, and uhh not be afraid to approach us though.
>
> C3: Parents, see the world through their ↑view huhuh and they're-

> you know they'll (.) they'll understand that and I gue:ss (.) you know ↑coaches will have their view as well, but once you start accumulating ye:ars of experience you kind of get a feel for the ↑level, and what's required, and you try and apply that as f:airly and equitably to all of the players as you can (.) ↓do, and inevitably there'll be some who'll be better than ↑others (.) and you have to make those judgements. And the parents arguably are less experienced, less knowledgeable, and are desperately keen for their son to succeed, and they are not p'rhaps as objective as they could be with some of these decisions

Invoking the discourses of expertise and professionalism in this way functioned to support the claim that coaches were competent to be solely and autonomously responsible for player development and that their professional judgement could be trusted by parents. As part of the process of sports coaching becoming a professionally recognised activity, what counts as expert or specialist knowledge – essential to establishing the status of a professional – has been contested and remains undefined (Taylor & Garratt, 2010). Coaches in their accounts negotiated this ambiguity by describing their expertise in comparison to parents. This action acknowledged that some parents may have claims to knowledge in this domain (derived from experience of playing or coaching football themselves) but positioned their knowledge as uninformed by recognised qualifications, not underpinned by significant practical coaching experience, or influenced by their subjective bias towards their son – and therefore less credible.

To further establish their professional expertise in youth football development, education metaphors were commonly used by coaches to align academies with educational institutions, and coaches with teachers. Teaching is an occupation in which professionalism and expertise is established through its qualification and training structure, and teachers' status and authority is accepted within communities (Hargreaves, 2000). Aligning coaching to teaching performed two functions: to assert that coaches' professional expertise and judgement should not be subjected to parent scrutiny; and to minimise the role of parents in the coaching process.

> C1: I've got four girls four daughters grown up now, I would never ever think of going in to: the maths class, (.) and telling the maths teacher how to teach maths to my ↑daughters. So why should they tell me how to coach football.

In this quote, C1 worked up his identity as an experienced parent to establish his rights to

know about parenting, and used the extreme case "never ever" (Pomerantz, 1986) to enhance his claim that parents should not question coaches' expertise in academies. Similarly, in the quote below, C3 constructed parents' motives as typical ("every lesson", "every day") and unreasonable, by problematising how their behaviour would be perceived in a school environment. By deploying active voicing (an emblematic or generalised 'quote' representing the voice of another; Wooffitt, 1992), he removes his personal stake from the account, which served to present his claim as based on commonly accepted knowledge or 'truth' of the relationship between teachers and parents.

> C3: >Like I say it's- you know< ar:e yo:u at the kid's schoo:l, do you go and sit at the back of every lesson this kid has (.) every da:y at school, are you in the car park with his teacher, no:: ↑you're not. (.) People would think you were ↑mental if you did that, wouldn't you (.) ↑'I'm sitting in the back of the classroom today, (.) to check what's happening'

Educational discourse was also reflected in academy practices, for example "end of year reports", "A – E grading systems", "coaching syllabuses" and "parent evenings". Comparing academies to educational institutions was a discursive strategy used by coaches to limit parents' claim to authority in this setting. For example, by associating parents' limited involvement with children's success at school, C10 provided a rationale based on measurable educational outcomes for why parents should adopt a similar approach in academies:

> Nicky: How do you think (.) parents: can help players to develop in academies
> C10: Umm (.) from my experience, the mo:re the parents can keep out of it (.) the better. I think parents (.) need to >try and get it as close to< a schoo:l environment as- as they could. You know, (.) parents drop their children off for school, and they pick them up. That- that's what happens and children lea::rn and pass exams.

The discourse of expertise invoked by coaches positioned parents as uninformed and lacking in knowledge of youth football development. Parent education workshops were common practice within academies, and were intended to inform parents about topics including sports nutrition, psychology and injury prevention. Although purporting to up-skill parents through knowledge sharing, these workshops reinforced to parents that the field of youth football development was highly technical, specialised and scientifically informed.

This practice further positioned parents as deficient in knowledge and therefore without a legitimate claim to understand player development. It was implicit that coaches possessed the knowledge being discussed in these workshops, as the sessions were organised by the academy but not attended by coaches.

Education workshops also functioned to define and establish the remit of parents in player development – to support and encourage players to follow academy guidance at home. Advice on how players should prepare for matches through the correct diet and rest for example was provided by sports-science professionals. In the parent interviews, parents commonly described helping their son to adhere to this guidance, suggesting that they acted in accordance with this discourse and accepted this as part of their role in player development (see chapter three p.63). This reflects the wider parenting discourse (discussed in chapter five p.102), that following advice from experts is the best route to enhancing child outcomes (Lee, 2014), and highlights that information from recognised science-related occupations was considered credible by parents. By taking up the subject position as non-expert in this situation and choosing to follow expert guidance, parents experienced a sense of fulfilling their responsibility to facilitate their son's development in football.

> Nicky: How do you think parents can help their sons (.) most in football.
> Father of under-11 player: Ooh that's a good question that is. (.) Apart from uhh: (.) perhaps umm- (.) teach em as you would in- in ↓li:fe, to cope with what's- what's gonna happen in life. (.) You're gonna have disappointments, you're gonna have good ti:mes. You can teach them- talk them through that I suppose a little bit more, (.) uhh diet is very important which is- that <u>is</u> something that the parents <u>can</u> do . . . <u>Di</u>et wise I'm trying to (.) steer him more to (.) more of what they've told us >they've give us a diet sheet< <u>pas</u>ta and things like that

However, in other contexts the non-expert positioning was more problematic for parents. As detailed in chapter three (p.57), parents accepted or resisted the transference of responsibility for their son's football development to coaches to different extents. Some parents were happy to relinquish responsibility, whereas others described learning to trust coaches, or challenged the coaches' role in player development. This experience was shaped by the degree of trust to which parents attributed to coaches to know how to develop players and to be fair and honest toward their son.

Father of under-10 player: I just think if you come here, (.) you've got to buy into the <whole academy experience>. And you've got to put your trust in ↑the academy, and the coaches, and let them do their job. Don't interfere. Umm (.) keep ya mouth shut and just let them get on with it.

Mother of under-15 player: ↑I always work from the principle of I- of people are trustworthy, people are open, people are honest (.) but it feels like there's a whole other agenda: going on that you're just not party to and >it's sort of like< well I'll ↑support Jason because this is what Jason wants to do but it doesn't (.) fe:el right. (.) And am I setting my son up to fail. (.) That's where I probably feel quite <uncomfortable>

This suggests that in academies, trust is necessary to develop effective relationships between coaches and parents. Trust and competence are implicitly linked to notions of professionalism (Freidson, 2001). Therefore, the contested nature of expert knowledge in the field of sports coaching (Taylor & Garratt, 2010) may mean it is difficult for coaches to establish parents' trust in their professional judgement based on competence or technical knowledge alone. This supports Knight and Harwood's (2009) finding that the perception of the professional status of tennis coaches was indicated as a barrier to coaches gaining parents' trust and respect. Furthermore, as the mother's quote above intimates, parents can mistrust coaches' motives and be suspicious of decisions when uncertain about the security of their son's place in a squad; a common feature of parents' experiences (see chapter three p.66 and chapter five p.118). This illustrates that relations of trust between parents and coaches can be inhibited by the underlying objective of academies; to produce players for the professional adult game. Although there may be some convergence between the goals of coaches and parents, coaches ultimately retain the power and responsibility to make decisions which inevitably affect children and their parents. In addition, this indicates how coaches were positioned within and constrained by the wider elite youth football culture. As a professional occupation, coaches were responsible and accountable for delivering their employer's objectives, in an environment where few players succeed (see chapter one p.5). This meant that coaches were required to follow academy practices, including only retaining those players who were judged to have the potential to become a future 'saleable asset' to the club (Giulianotti, 1999; 2002).

**“Good” and “Problem” Parents**

In interviews coaches shifted from a discourse which acknowledged that parents facilitated players’ participation and were an important influence in players’ lives, to one that problematised parents’ involvement in academies as disruptive to the coaching process. Coaches distinguished between “good” or “problem” parents and classified individuals accordingly. Good parenting in this setting was constructed by coaches as being under-involved, exerting minimal pressure on players and fostering players’ independence. Problem parents were described as “busy”, interfering or over-involved, which aligns with coaches’ perceptions of parents as reported in previous studies (Holt & Dunn, 2004; Mills et al., 2012). Busy parents were those deemed to ask questions too often and frequently seek feedback on their son’s performances, which coaches interpreted as parents seeking reassurance that their child’s place in the academy squad was safe. This categorisation of parents was underpinned by wider cultural discourses of what constitutes good parenting and the notion of parental determinism (Furedi, 2002), which assumes that players’ behaviour and development were directly influenced by their parents (see chapter five p.101 for a discussion). The positioning of parents as determinants of their child’s football development provided a rationale for coaches to intervene if parents were judged to be hindering the coaching process. This reflects the Foucauldian (1982) concept of *dividing practices*, in which the classification of individuals – in this case, good or problem parents – objectifies people and constructs knowledge which justifies the isolation and control of groups, and reproduces unequal power relations.

Although at times in the interviews, coaches demonstrated empathy with the demands placed on parents, discussed the need to understand and develop relationships with individual families, and acknowledged that “problem” parents were in the minority, the dominant discourse of the problem parent served to provide a warrant for certain academy practices and for managing parents as a homogenous group.

> C1: You know the parents, they do sacrifice a ↑lot (.) and I really appreciate that and understand that, but I’ve- I just say to em just ↑be a good taxi driver.

Various strategies were employed in academies to minimise the role of parents in the player development process – while being seen to include them – in order to limit the effects of problem parenting. Pre-season induction meetings and parent codes of conduct (see Appendix A) were used to set rules and expectations for parent behaviour. Coaches described

the importance of instilling the club's 'philosophy' and establishing boundaries for appropriate communication to developing effective relationships with parents. These practices functioned to reproduce the discourse that coaches possessed expert knowledge of, and were solely responsible for player development, which in turn minimised parents' role in the coaching process. In the quote below, C5's reference to Westville Academy's 'DNA' emphasised how the club's approach to player development was not open for parents to challenge.

> C5: I think that- that key one is around just setting ↑clear boundaries and you- educating them on wh:y you do: what you do and why we do what we do. And that we're never gonna change. We're not gonna change. This is how we do it this is our dna this is who we are.

Westville Academy had also introduced an open and closed training session policy, where two sessions were open to parents to watch and the following two sessions were "behind closed doors" (C5). The rationale for this practice was framed in terms of player development and parental determinism discourses:

> C5: Some clubs have >come and watch< every single session, (.) but the danger there is that some ↑particularly the younger ones they- everything they do they're looking at their mum or dad for recognition as to what they've done and that can actually: (.) paralyse them in terms of their development.

> C4: You don't want the kid to always be looking up (.) or- >you know whenever he does somethin< o:r, he's then going to get collared (.) after training as well as after a game °now coz they see the training- ↑'why didn't you do that' [ ] or- (.) 'Jamie only spoke three times to you but he spoke <four times> to somebody else? why's he not spoke to you four times'

In these quotes parents were positioned by coaches as a risk to players' development and well-being ("paralyse them"; "get collared"). C4's quote also displayed an awareness of being observed by parents while coaching, suggesting that the closed sessions enabled coaches to avoid potential criticism from parents. In contrast, Westville's decision to distance parents was criticised by C6: "they [parents] might see what you're doing but they don't know what you're saying (.) so I think that creates part of a barrier". Furthermore, the implementation of strategies designed to minimise the role of parents in player development

was influenced by the club's position and status in football, as this observational field note suggests:

> Later, in the privacy of the coaches' room, I discussed the idea of 'parent-free sessions' with Lee (Southfield lead coach, 12s – 16s). "We'd never get away with it Nicky, not when the parents can watch their kid play at City and United" (local rival clubs). (Field notes, March 2013)

**Keeping Parents "at arm's length"**

Coaches idealised a relationship with parents that was open, but at the same time kept parents "at arm's length" (C1, C5). This meant that coaches constructed their interaction with parents as a balance between maintaining open, honest and regular communication with parents, but avoiding becoming too close or providing too much information. The practice of being 'visible' to parents (by being contactable via multiple forms of communication and greeting parents in reception areas) was described as a strategy designed to enhance communication. For example, coaches praised parents when they provided personal information about their son that coaches perceived could help them understand players better and enhance the coaching process, reflecting a player-centred coaching discourse (commonly emphasised within academy policies e.g. Cushion & Jones, 2014). Although coaches described the extent to which they were open and accessible for parents to inform them of any significant events or issues that players were experiencing, some expressed surprise that parents rarely chose to contact them.

```
C2: I'm a↑ma:zed at how many parents don't ring me when their
boys are struggling. (.) To get my opinion on what would be best
       [way ] forward.
Nicky: [Okay]
C2: I- I'm gob-smacked.
```

Here, C2's statement worked up his identity as an approachable and player-centred coach and criticised parents for not communicating more. This discursive strategy also defined a remit for interacting with parents – to enable coaches to do their job better, and positioned parents as a barrier to the coach-player relationship. This aligns with Knight and Harwood's (2009) finding that coaches experienced stress when they perceived their effectiveness as a coach was inhibited by parents' involvement.

However, despite being 'visible' to enhance communication with parents, coaches described carefully managing the information that they shared with parents.

C9: You can get (.) too- too friendly that they a- they actually- (.) then it becomes that they're al:ways constantly asking ya (.) how their kid's doing. [so it] it- it gets too familiar umm and=
Nicky: [Right]
C9: =I- I don't- there's nothing wrong with being familiar with parents, coz the- they're massive part of what we do here (.) without them, (.) bringing the kids and the transporting them and the support mechanism (.) all that is, is key. umm (.) but I think getting too close (.) sometimes is err: (.) can be a little bit dangerous in terms of (.) then they start asking for individual feedback (.) f:ar too often.

In this account, parents' frequent requests for feedback on their son's performance were constructed as unwelcomed and that this was a risk coaches took if they became too close to individual parents. In shifting from speaking about coaches generally ("you") to a personal evaluation ("I don't-"), C9 demonstrated that he recognised and appreciated the role of parents, which positioned himself as a coach who was empathetic and approachable. This functioned to substantiate his claim that it was parents that make close relationships difficult, rather than coaches, and justified why keeping a distance from parents was necessary. This implies that interaction between parents and coaches in academies took place on coaches' terms. As an example of this, coaches described carefully managing providing feedback on players' performances to parents.

C2: A parent may ask you:: in February, will they be retaining my son.
Nicky: Right ok
C2: And the ↑standard answer should be:: '↑hopefully, but we can't make any promis(h)es' (.) but other coaches have in the past ↑younger ones, (.) have said yes. (.) And they can't say that because we- we don't know a hundred ↑percent . . . That happens a lot you know coaches say stuff where- >but they get put on the spot< by parents you know the- the- and they'll throw it in at the- (.) the oddest time. The ↑worst thing is making promises they can't keep (.) coz parents will hold you to it one hundred percent

In this extract, C2 criticised parents for approaching coaches at inappropriate times. This was a common compliant presented in the interviews, with parents being described as "lurking" (C5) before "hijacking" (C3) coaches to ask questions for example. This use of

language suggests that interaction instigated by parents was objected to by coaches when they were unprepared. C2 justified giving generic responses to impromptu questions in order to avoid future conflict because parents "will hold you to it one hundred percent". Other practices included scheduling a meeting with parents at a later date to discuss their questions. This allowed coaches to gather relevant information and bring a colleague (sometimes a more senior member of coaching staff) into the meeting with them, in order to hold the conversation on their terms and in their environment.

> Parent meetings were held in the manager's office at the academy, identified by a business-like sign on the door. The room is set up with a large desk and executive chair one side, and foldaway chairs opposite. Parents can only enter the 'back room' area when invited by staff. The route to the manager's office takes parents through the coaches' room, filled with tactics whiteboards, clipboards and cones. This is unmistakably the coaches' territory. (Field notes, November 2010)

> Nicky: And ↑what would you say is your overall approach to working with (.) parents
> C10: Open, completely open, always available, always happy to talk, (.) providing it's in private, it's in the appropriate place at the appropriate time.

> C6: If there's anything you want to kno::w, get in touch with us, and arrange a meeting. But (.) we would do that knowing what they want the meeting about.

These practices functioned to position coaches as accessible to parents, but reinforced that they were in control in academies and reproduced the power relation that coaches had rights to be responsible for the work of academies; to develop players.

The discourse of being open but keeping a distance from parents aligned with parents' descriptions of their experiences of interaction with coaches in academies. Some parents felt that they could approach coaches about any issues they had and would receive honest responses. Whereas others perceived that parents were made to feel unwelcome at academies or that coaches withheld information about their son's future in the squad.

> Father of under-11 player: Woody and Wrighty are very honest with me. I know:: what they think of him because they ↑tell me what they think of him. Which is great ↓as a coach to a parent.

Mother of under-10 player: I feel, <I could speak to> the coaches or John Davis I could- I feel I could speak to him if I ↑had an issue with regard to if I couldn't get Rhys he:re, or if Rhys wasn't happy, or ↑any:thing like that, I feel I could have an open frank conversation with John Davis (lead coach)

Father of under-17 player: At ev:ery club it is made very very clear, (.) that parents aren't welcome. (.) And I bet you've had a ↑few: parents tell ya that.

Mother of under-15 player: ↑I >just get the feeling that they don't< want parents around. They make it as uncomfortable and difficult for parents as possible

Father of under-16 player: And we had an hour long chat but- (.) I ↑still didn't get anything out(h) of (h)him you know st- it's the ↑same old thing you know he wouldn't give anything away.

However, parents mostly acted in accordance with academy guidance and understood that asking questions outside of formal appraisal meetings was interpreted as 'interfering'. Observing others parents reinforced that which was deemed acceptable behaviour (see chapter three p.59). This suggests that within academies, the actions of parents were influenced through a *normalising judgement* (Foucault, 1991), whereby the omnipresent surveillance of coaches and parent peers, combined with the perceived potential threat of punitive action against their son if parents did not follow academy rules, implored parents to conform and adjust their behaviours where necessary.

**Parents as Customers**

In contrast to the problem parent discourse, at other points during the interviews, parents were constructed as "customers". Coaches acknowledged that keeping parents happy was important, as parents had the potential to impact upon a club or a coach's reputation if they complained.

C5: What we can't have happen is- is an irate parent whose boy maybe is underperforming and relea:sed, (.) umm leave kicking and screaming, throwin around allegations that we don't support boys (.) effectively enough and appropriately enough. (.) And that's reputation- football's: you know if your reputation is tarnished in this game around how you manage young people, then you're out

of the game (.) it's as simple as that.

This reflects the construction of football clubs as commercial organisations, which positioned parents as customers and players as commodities. Coaches drew upon discourses of academies as businesses in a competitive market in order to justify behaviours which could be perceived as unfair. For example, coaches described interacting differently with parents of players who were judged to be more desirable to clubs, using commercial language (e.g. "bottom line").

C10: Our perception of that (.) bo:y in terms of where he sits in the ↑scheme of things will also determine the communication. So you know if you do have a boy that's a rea::lly high flyer (.) then (.) you are gonna communicate slightly differently to some parents than- than if the boy is (.) unlikely to make it through the ↑journey. You have to avoid (.) umm certain confron↑tation with those parents, because (.) you know that could lead to: a parting of the ↑ways which is clearly what we don't ↑want. Coz ultimately parents can take their children ↑out (.) if they want to
Nicky: Goodness. [It certainly-]
C10: [That's our ] ↑business. That's our business

C1: When one or two think (.) that they're making more progress than others they can be a bit more demanding. And (.) bu:t↑ you have got to look after your ↑better players. That's the bottom line (.) cos that's what we're here for to produce better players

The practice of placating parents or accommodating their demands is in line with Cushion and Jones' (2006) observation that academy coaches had a different relationship with and a positive bias towards "favourite" full-time academy players, who embodied and displayed professional ideals. In contrast, the potential talent of players appeared more significant in determining the status of "favourites" among younger academy players. This suggests that the power relations between parents and coaches were constituted by coaches' perceived football ability of players and potential future financial value to the club. This reflects the commodification of football, a process through which players can acquire a market-centred meaning (Giulianotti, 1999; 2002). In academies, this meant that for players whose parents were influential in deciding which club their child played for, coaches' relationships with parents also developed a commercial meaning.

Before signing a contract for their son to play at a professional academy, parents acted in accordance with the subject position of customers. In interviews, many described the process of choosing which club to commit to after players had received multiple offers to join academies (see chapter three p.60). However, it became more difficult for parents to maintain a position as a customer once their son was signed, as coaches were less likely to highly praise their child's football ability (arguably to lower parents' expectations), and some parents felt restricted by contracts which they perceived were in the club's favour.

> Mother of under-9 player: You do your first report and (.) all: the previous years 'oh they're wonderful, we need them' and then the first report you're being told 'well, you know they're only average you know'.

> Father of under-16 player: It's a ↑one sided contract ↓at the end of the day, we all kno(h)w(h) tha(h)t (.) you know umm it's all in their favour. The club holds you. You know and umm
> Nicky: But I [think- I think lots-]
> Father: [it's- it's unfortunate because] it's a business now isn't it and you know (.) it's a bit of a meat market let's be honest.

> Mother of under-15 player: And we <u>kne:w</u> that that- you can be signed on for two years and be gone in two weeks. I mean you know the contract means nothing: (.) in terms of your rights within that contract <u>it</u> <u>is</u> very much about the clubs contract with you

This suggests that parents were also entwined in the discourse of the commercialisation of youth football. When they perceived that the market-centred meaning that their child acquired upon joining an academy had altered, parents experienced uncertainty and frustration. This meant that parents could struggle to adjust to changes in their status as a customer, and accept that it was coaches who now decided whether players were judged to be of value to the club, rather than parents determining whether the club would be of benefit to their son.

Alluding to this tension between parents and coaches surrounding the player assessment process, being 'honest and transparent' was constructed by coaches as a strategy used to demonstrate fairness and to prepare parents for the potential that their son could be released. Releasing players was described as a difficult process, but one that could be made

simpler if parents were informed that their son was not meeting expected performance standards in advance. Holding regular player meetings was a practice used to provide this information to parents. However, meetings were constructed as part of the player-centred academy discourse; for the purpose of giving feedback to players, and so the extent to which parents had rights to speak in these meetings was unclear. Player meetings could therefore function to close down parents' subject position as customers.

Aware of the potential for the 'parent as customer' to damage personal reputations; to avoid accusations of unfairness, coaches also compiled evidence in order to justify their decisions objectively if questioned by parents, for example results from fitness and physiological testing, or data from matches:

```
C5: So we play a game, so it's four 20 minute periods I think as
long as they play two 20 minute periods that's fine. What we have
to be conscious and careful of is (.) how many times they start
as sub you know so we have to be quite (.) c- clever at how we
track and [record that] because (.) you know (.) it could be=
Nicky:    [yeah   yeah]
C5: =seen as ammunition for the (.) des:perate parent, where they
will come back and machine gun you with (.) all these stats

C3: One of the parents of one of the keepers (.) I'm guessing was
feeling the pressure because they thought their son might be
released, at the end of the session's come marching: over and (.)
smashed my assistant aside, because he want- they wanted to- that
was my first line of the defence huh [was the] assistant (.) and=
Nicky:                              [hahahuh]
C3: =they [went] 'no I wanna speak to the main man', and they=
Nicky:    [yeah]
C3: =proceeded to rant at me about how unfair it was that their
keeper- their son was having to be a [ ] when he's a goalkeeper
(.) and that other goalkeeper's getting more time, so I just took
the stopwatch out and the session planner and I said 'I think
you'll find, that they had exactly the same time (.) and here's
the evidence'
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The use of combative language in these quotes ("ammunition", "machine gun", "smashed aside", "line of defence") reflect the coaches' experience of conflict and confrontation in their interaction with parents. Parents' emotional involvement was often

attributed as the reason for why parents did not always accept coaches' decisions. By constructing parents as "desperate" or "feeling the pressure", C5 and C3 positioned parents as irrational and subjective. This functioned to discredit parents' view of their son's ability, and establish coaches' opinions as objective and informed, and therefore, fair. Smoll et al. (2011) highlighted that perceptions of a child's ability can be a source of conflict between parents and coaches in youth sport settings. The findings of this analysis suggest that in youth football, this conflict occurs within a power relation, in which coaches retained control over deciding whether players were good enough and parents' perceptions of their child's ability were mostly dismissed.

When parents interpreted that their status as a customer was changing, they became more aware of coaches' actions which could be perceived as favouritism, which would indicate differences in the desirability of players to the club.

> Mother of under-15 player: I think there are: umm boys that fit (.) and then boys that don't. (.) There are boys that are favoured there are boys that are:n't, and >some boys are given more< chances than others and you don't know how your boy gets from that place to that place.

This was also reflected in Luke's account in chapter five (see p.124), who recognised that his father was treated differently at the academy: "it's one of the rules the parents aren't allowed to shout and uh (.) but he'd sort of get away with it", which suggests that players were sensitive to coaches' behaviour towards parents too. In summary, the discourse of football clubs as commercial organisations and the associated commodification of academy players influenced coach-parent interaction and meant that both had to discursively manage the problematic knowledge that all players were equal, but some were more equal than others.

**Power and the Parent-Coach Relationship**

Foucault's (1991) concept of the *panopticon* offers a useful lens to understand the relations of power between parents and coaches in this setting. Panopticonism describes how docile bodies (self-regulated, norm-following) can be constructed through a process of surveillance and discipline. Within the panopticon, physical space is organised so that people may be permanently observed from a central position, but from moment to moment are uncertain whether the gaze of those in authority is upon them. This encourages individuals to objectively assess and correct their own behaviours in accordance with cultural norms; reproducing power relations. Adopting a post-panoptic view of the observation and control operating in elite youth football and rugby academies, Manley et al. (2012) discussed how

multiple sites of surveillance were present in academies (rather than from a central position), which operated to monitor the behaviours and assess the progress of players. The disperse network of coaches, managers, physiotherapists, sports scientists, teachers and parents created an omnipresent gaze which served to produce self-disciplined, docile players, ready for the professional game.

Extending this concept, the findings of the present study suggest that not only players, but parents and coaches were subjected to multiple forms of surveillance and disciplinary techniques within academies; which reproduced docile parents who followed academy guidance and docile coaches who were complicit in institutional practices. Parents evaluated and adjusted their own behaviour through the normalising judgement (Foucault, 1991) of coaches, parent peers (see p.154 and chapter three p.59) and also players themselves:

> Luke, under-17 player: It's one of the rules the parents aren't allowed to shout

> Noah, under-11 player: Yeah on the report thing it says that [the coach] said that only to say good comments but my dad says bad comments as well, so he shouldn't really do that, so that's annoying that he does that.

Academy coaches were similarly aware of the gaze and normalising judgement of parents, as illustrated through the participants' discussion of the impact of closed training sessions – as minimising parents' criticism or as increasing the potential for parents' misinterpretation of coaching practices, and lends support to Partington and Cushion's (2012) finding that coaches presented an idealised impression of coaches when observed by parents. Moreover, the spatial organisation of the training sessions (pitches with no physical boundaries to enclose practice from view and different age group squads training simultaneously) meant that coaches were permanently visible, but could not tell when they were being observed by those in the academy hierarchy.

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C6: If they wanna come out and we're on that astro turf, and the
parent stands up against the fence watchin: what we do:↑ (.)I've
got no problem with that. (.) Coz it's not going to put me off.
Nicky: No
C6: I'm also conscious that ↑anyone can look out of any of these
balconies,[       ] that are actually much more important to me=
Nicky:    [oh yeah]
C6: =coz they can be senior staff watchin what I'm doing. And it
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> happened nine o' clock Saturday mornin, that I trained at the far end of that astro turf, and the first team- umm restaurant door was open, and some of the senior people watched the 15s ↑training. >So they could be watching the 15s training or they could be< watching me: taking them. So a load of ↑parents there are not gonna worry me.

This *hierarchical observation* (Foucault, 1991), functioned to ensure coaches conformed with dominant academy practices for interacting with parents, such as keeping parents close but at arm's length, as non-compliance could be monitored and disciplined by senior staff:

> C8: If you are spending (.) not ↑enough time with the parents, you get pulled and say 'well really you should maybe interact with them a little bit more', or if you are spending too much time, it's like 'what are you doing? why are you spending all that time we don't have to do that.'

This, therefore, suggests that parent-coach relationships were positioned within, and in part constituted through the academy culture. The dominant institutional norms, expectations and practices were reproduced through parent-coach interactions, which constrained the possibilities for parents' subjective experiences in this setting. Furthermore, this research questions the extent to which coaches were able to resist practices imbued with the politics and power of the professionalised, commercialised elite youth football culture, and suggests that alternative knowledge which allows coaches to critically reflect upon and challenge academy practices may be beneficial.

## Conclusion

This analysis of coaches' discursive accounts presents a complex description of how parent-coach interactions occurred within an imbalanced power relation, which centred on establishing the rights to be responsible for developing players in elite youth football academies. The dominant discourse of the problem parent; emotionally attached to their son's football, overly demanding of coaches' time, uneducated about youth football development and disruptive to the coaching process, was invoked to justify practices designed to control parents and minimise their involvement in academies. However, relationships with individual parents varied according to perceptions of a player's ability, which meant that parents of players who were positioned as financially valuable to the club were placated.

Although coaches exerted power to guide the conduct of parents, it is not suggested that this was a deliberate process, as coaches were enmeshed in wider cultural discourses of

the commercialisation of football, player-centred coaching and parent determinism. Indeed, coaches took care to develop and manage relationships with parents, but relationships could be undermined by coaches' concern with guarding against anticipated criticism and parents' mistrust and suspicion of coaches' motives. Trust was therefore highlighted as an important component of developing effective relationships between coaches and parents in football academies.

This study aimed to contribute to understanding how the experiences of parents of elite youth footballers were shaped by the parent-coach relationship. The analysis presented has begun to increase understanding of how the discourses used by coaches had implications for parents' subjectivity. Parents took up the subject positions made available through coaches' discursive constructions in ways which enabled them to experience a sense of fulfilling their responsibility to facilitate their son's development, or to avoid potential punitive consequences for their son. At times, parents resisted their discursive positioning and challenged coaches' claim to be solely responsibility for player development, but this was accompanied with an experience of uncertainty and frustration.

Theoretically, this analysis offers further support to the findings presented in chapter five of this thesis (p.132) which demonstrated that relations of power between parents, players and coaches were an essential feature of participants' experience. Research that starts from a perspective of understanding that parent-coach interaction occurs within a relation of power (Foucault, 1982), therefore has the potential to produce more critical interpretations of coaching practices and parenting behaviours in youth sport settings.

Considering the applied implications of this analysis, although there was some support among coaches to ban parents from academies entirely, the findings suggest that coaches in this study may benefit from engaging more with parents to reduce mistrust and suspicion. However, the findings question the efficacy of Smoll et al.'s guidance for enhancing parent-coach relationships in the football academy culture, highlighting the limitation of constructing universal advice for those working in youth sport settings (Gilbert & Hamel, 2011; Horn, 2011). For example, Smoll et al. (2011) recommend a pre-season meeting strategy for dealing with problem parents as "the *key* to reducing the chance of unpleasant experiences" (p.21, emphasis in original), where coaches provide information to improve parents' understanding of the objectives of youth sports and to gain their support. In football academies, pre-season meetings were a practice bound up in discourses which positioned coaches as experts and as responsible for player development, and minimised parents' role in the coaching process. The extent to which parents were happy to relinquish

responsibility to coaches and trusted them, meant that parents did not accept information provided in pre-season meetings passively or uncritically, as Smoll et al.'s recommendation suggests. This is not to imply that pre-season meetings between parents and coaches may not be beneficial, rather that the specific social and cultural context should be considered when planning the content and delivery of sessions.

Alternatively in football academies, group sessions where parents are encouraged to ask questions and discuss their concerns, where the coach's role is to listen and learn, not argue or defend, may be a useful strategy for enhancing relationships between parents and coaches. Blom et al. (2013) suggested that sport psychology practitioners can act as a facilitator in parent-coach educational sessions as they can mediate, act as neutral party, and importantly, offer potential perspectives of young players. Given the potential for imbalance in the relationship between coaches and parents in football academies, this may be an effective practice to adopt. Establishing two-way dialogue in this way has the potential to enhance parent-coach relationships, but rather than through coaches educating parents to influence their behaviours as Smoll et al. (2011) suggest, communication can be viewed as reciprocally beneficial. When parents trust and have confidence in coaches, they can be strong advocates for coaches' professionalism, and as highlighted in chapter five (p.130), parents can potentially support the coaching process by offering a perspective based on an empathetic understanding of their son's everyday subjective experience.

# CHAPTER SEVEN: Conclusions and Implications

This chapter presents the theoretical, methodological and practical implications arising from this research, to illustrate how this thesis has made a significant contribution to knowledge and understanding of the phenomenon of parenting in elite youth football. As highlighted in the introduction to this thesis (p.3), parents are a unique influence in the sporting lives of children and an enduring feature of the youth sport landscape. However, in the media and in academic literature, parents have been constructed as problematic, criticised for a lack of awareness of their behaviours and held accountable for inhibiting their child's improvement and progression in sport. The cultural stereotype of the 'problem' parent has provided a mandate for the introduction of sports organisation policies designed to control and regulate parents' behaviour. This understanding of parent-child relationships as potentially deficient has been reproduced in sport psychology literature – reflecting the assumptions of parental determinism (Furedi, 2002) – leading to calls to 'educate' parents, in a manner which assumes there is a universal solution to enhancing parenting in youth sport settings (see chapter five p.102).

The disproportionate focus on examining parental involvement in youth sport and associated child outcomes within the current literature has meant there is currently a lack of research which explores how parenting within youth sport is experienced as a personal, social-cultural phenomenon (see chapter one p.5). Specifically, an in-depth understanding of how parenting is experienced within elite youth sport settings, which includes children's accounts of their interaction with parents, has not been considered. The research presented in this thesis has begun to address these limitations by exploring the phenomenon of parenting in the highly challenging, competitive culture of elite youth football, where players hold ambitions to become professional footballers and can acquire a market-centred meaning to clubs (Cushion & Jones, 2006; Giulianotti, 1999; 2002; Jones, Armour & Potrac, 2003). Using a phenomenological approach enabled the personal, social and contextual aspects of participants' experiences to be examined.

## Theoretical Implications

By embracing the phenomenological focus of describing how the world appears and what it means to people, this research has contributed to the youth sport parenting literature through a return to the descriptive stage of psychological research, often neglected in the rush to explain and predict phenomena (Langdridge, 2008). Adopting a phenomenological methodology allowed for a rich, detailed description and nuanced interpretation of participants' everyday lived-experiences of parenting to be constructed. The findings have

demonstrated how parenting in elite youth football can be viewed as an embodied, temporal and culturally-situated experience, constituted through interaction and relations of power. By illustrating the complex, dynamic nature of parenting in the specific context of elite youth football, this research has highlighted the importance of conceptualising parenting as a social, culturally-embedded process.

Consequently, this research challenges the theoretical assumptions which underpin studies that seek to identify the "optimal" or "expert" parental involvement that will lead to positive child outcomes. Firstly, the assumption that parenting behaviours can be universally constructed as either "appropriate" or "inappropriate", transforms parenting from an interpersonal relationship into a skill set which parents must learn to be effective and enhance child outcomes (Lee, 2014; Ribbens McCarthy & Edwards, 2011). As illustrated in chapter five (p.130), parents' lived-experience of supporting their son in elite youth football was shaped by an empathetic understanding of their child's everyday subjective experience, identity and personal goals, which guided how parents advised and supported their son to effectively negotiate transitions in football. Understanding parenting behaviours from within the context of the parent-child relationship therefore presents an alternative to the construction of parenting as a set of tasks to be achieved and questions the extent to which descriptive lists of behaviours, although comprehensive, reflect parents' unique, everyday experiences. Moreover, this assumption risks constructing a dichotomy from which others can evaluate parents. This was prevalent within elite youth football, where the normalising judgement (Foucault, 1991) of coaches, players and parent peers meant parents assessed and adjusted their own behaviour in accordance with institutional norms and behavioural expectations; and became socialised into the academy culture (see chapter three p.55).

Secondly, the theoretical assumption that child outcomes are directly determined by the actions of their parents, through a unidirectional relationship between parents and children, fails to account for children's agency in the parenting process (Faircloth et al. 2013). The findings in this thesis illustrated, for example, how players attributed meaning to parent behaviours differently, in accordance with their own personal agendas, and actively managed their experiences of conflict with parents (see chapter four p.89; p.97). This suggests that children can be viewed as active subjects who mutually constitute their relationship with parents through interaction and supports the need for a view of parenting that accounts for how interaction is experienced by parents *and* children, rather than a sole focus on explicating optimal parental involvement.

**Power, politics and professional contracts.** This research has demonstrated how parenting in elite youth football was constituted through the relations of power between players, parents, coaches and the academy (see chapter four p.94, chapter five p.132 and chapter six p.144). This provides evidence to suggest that research which starts from a theoretical position that parent-player interaction occurs within a power relation offers much potential for enhancing understanding of parenting in youth sport. This approach positions children as active subjects who have the freedom to determine how to respond to parenting behaviours designed to guide their actions and can highlight how children can negotiate, resist and be resilient to the authority of parents. This addresses the limitation of research underpinned by the assumptions of developmental psychology, which views children as passive recipients of adult's socialisation efforts and assumes that all children will respond to parent behaviours in a similar manner (Burman, 1994; Mayall, 2002).

Furthermore, an examination of power relations allows for more critical interpretations of how interaction between parents and children are enabled or constrained by the sport context. In elite youth football, the dominant institutional norms, expectations and practices were reproduced through parent-player interactions. The culture of surveillance and discipline within academies; where players were continually assessed, expected to meet performance targets in given timeframes, and punished for failing to conform to normalised standards – ultimately through release; were reflected in parents' desire to provide corrective instruction and the value players placed on performance feedback from their parents (see chapter three p.64, chapter four p.91 and chapter five p.124).

The meaning of academy football as a route into the adult professional game meant that parents and players complied with the objectification and social control of bodies operating within academies, such as following academy guidance for diet and lifestyle at home (see chapter four p.87). The temporal significance of players' next transition in football shaped the extent to which parents enabled players to conform to this guidance, as parents understood, shared and acted in accordance with players' personal projects – the pursuit of a professional playing contract.

Through their selection to an academy and successful progression through the annual transition points in youth football (signified by a contract renewal), players constructed their identities as footballers with the potential to be successful and 'make it' in the game (see chapter four p.90). Similarly, through their interaction with their son, parents' identities were enhanced to include 'being the parent of a talented child', meaning their moral worth became intrinsically linked to their son's position in the academy squad (see chapter three p.60). The

increased responsibility that parents experienced to facilitate their son's development in football meant that at times, parents were compelled to participate in academy practices which they perceived might have a negative impact on their son, such as travelling home from training late at night or participating in additional physical conditioning (see chapter three p.65 and chapter five p.122).

The professionalisation of elite youth football has led to the construction of football clubs as commercial organisations and the commodification of players (Giulianotti, 1999; 2002), meaning that in academies, only those players judged to have the potential to become a future 'saleable asset' to the club were retained each season. This political agenda permeated the participants' experiences described in this thesis. For example, trust in the parent-coach relationship was inhibited by the power and responsibility that coaches held to make decisions which would affect players' future in football (see chapter six p.148).

Together, these findings have provided a detailed description of how the cultural context of elite youth football can shape the parenting process. Adopting a theoretical perspective that allows for the power relations within a social context to be examined can go some way to addressing the current limitations of the youth sport parenting literature, where the influence of the sport environment has largely been overlooked. In summary, conceptualising parenting as a social, culturally-embedded process therefore offers an alternative theoretical foundation for future youth sport parenting research.

**Methodological Implications**

**The 'promise' of phenomenology.** The research presented in this thesis has demonstrated how a phenomenological approach opens up possibilities for new and alternative understandings of phenomenon, by grounding analysis in how the world appears to people. This avoids producing overly-abstracted research findings that are distance from peoples' everyday lived-experiences of subtle and nuanced psychological phenomena, such as parenting in youth sport (Todres & Wheeler, 2001). Perhaps most significantly, phenomenology brings the body back in to psychological research (Allen-Collinson, 2009). The embodied experience of parenting described in this research – the restriction of parents' physical movement on the sideline; players' embodied experience of performing under the gaze of parents; and the corporeal expression of closeness in the parent-player relationship for example – illustrates how an explicit focus on the body can produce vivid research findings (see chapter three p.56, chapter four p.93 and chapter five p.129). A phenomenological approach to understanding youth sport parenting therefore has the potential to address the limitation of the existing research which has predominantly examined

what parents do, rather than what it is like for parents (see chapter one p.4). The capacity and 'promise' of phenomenology to contribute to knowledge in the study of sport has been previously advocated by authors (e.g. Allen-Collinson, 2009; Kerry & Armour, 2000). This thesis further endorses this position.

Chapters four and five of this thesis have addressed the marginalisation of children's voices in youth football (Pitchford et al., 2004) and in doing so highlighted how including children's first-person accounts of their interaction and relationships with parents in youth sport research can enhance understanding of the parenting process. This builds on previous studies which have explored children's perceptions of parent behaviours in sport (Knight et al., 2010; 2011; Omli & Wiese-Bjornstal, 2011). In particular, researchers may wish to consider a phenomenological methodology when undertaking research with children. Its focus on exploring how the world appears to people positions children as the experts on their lived-experiences, encouraging them to express in their own words, how they make sense of their worlds and issues that affect them (Ryba, 2008). By combining an existential lifeworld approach with a focus group method and interactive interview techniques – having firstly reflected critically upon the status of personal accounts obtained through group interaction – the methodology presented in chapter four (p.74) offers a new and unique approach to including children in research.

**Pluralistic qualitative data analysis.** Drawing on the notion of multi-perspectivalism (Kellner, 1995), multiple qualitative analytical techniques were used within this thesis to explore data from different epistemological perspectives, providing sensitivity to the variation and complexity of participants' experiences (see chapter two p.36). The application of phenomenological and discursive qualitative analytical techniques to the same data (which diverged on the extent to which the world can be understood through language), enabled different aspects of participants' experiences to be explored. For example, in chapter four (p.75), the use of a phenomenological lifeworld interpretation alongside a conversation analysis, highlighted how players' performed their identity as footballers through interaction as well as the embodied experience of playing academy football. This form of pluralistic data analysis opens up multiple possibilities for interpretation, as it avoids privileging any particular analytic framework over another, and therefore offers the potential to produce multi-faceted understandings of psychological phenomena.

**Applied Implications**

As Langdridge (2007) suggests, knowledge produced from the interpretation of people's phenomenological descriptions should be used to "make a difference to the lived

world of ourselves and others" (p.9). This section therefore considers how the key findings of this research have the potential to inform applied practice.

**Supporting parents.** By undertaking research into how the phenomenon of parenting in elite youth football was experienced as lived, this research has endeavoured to reframe the discussion from how to fix 'problem' parents, to understanding and empathising with what being a 'sport parent' means to individuals in their day-to-day lives. Specifically, the findings in this thesis have provided insights that can inform parent support and educational initiatives within youth football academies.

Firstly, this research challenges the notion that parents require education in order to learn skills and acquire knowledge which will enable them to enhance the experiences and development of their child in sport (e.g. Harwood & Knight, in press; Knight & Holt, 2014). Entrenched in cultural discourses of parental determinism, this claim justifies a need for evidence-based, 'expert' knowledge of parenting (Furedi, 2002; Lee, 2014). In contrast, chapter five (p.130) demonstrated how this assumption does not recognise parents' capacity to understand and empathise with their child's lived-experience. This relational understanding was developed over time through interaction with their child, and could be enhanced through the closeness of the shared experience of football (see also chapter three p.61). This suggests that further research and critical discussion is required to establish the circumstances in which expert advice for parents of elite youth footballers is legitimate and warranted, or when active support for parental instinct and judgement as to what is best for their child can be encouraged.

Arguably, there is value to providing parents with certain information, given the challenges that participants faced as their child progressed in football (see chapter three p.69). To ascertain what may qualify as legitimate information, understanding the advice and support that parents themselves would like may be a useful starting point; as Knight and Holt (2013a; 2013b) have identified in youth tennis. However, in elite youth football settings caution should perhaps be applied when interpreting parents' responses, given the acceptance of subject positions that minimised parents' role within academies (see chapter six p.147). Therefore, studies should be carefully designed to examine the reproduction of institutional norms in research which seeks to gather parent views on their educational needs.

In consideration of the significance of transitions in elite youth football to the participants in this thesis (see chapter three p.69, chapter four p.86 and chapter five p.131), one aspect of information which may be of benefit for families to receive, are details regarding the nature and expectations of football academies and the youth football

performance pathway. The Premier League has produced a guidance document for parents when a player first signs to an academy, to ensure parents are "fully informed of the registration process and the full implications of joining the Academy" (EPPP, 2011 p.8). However, this does not include information on *what it is like* for parents or players. Having a comprehensive understanding of the commitment required for their sons to play at an academy and how this changes as players progress may enable parents to be better prepared to support their son to negotiate transitions in elite youth football.

Secondly, the findings from this research question support Holt and Knight's (2014) concern regarding the efficacy of a "one-size-fits-all" approach to supporting parents in sport. The differences between mothers' and fathers' experiences of parenting in elite youth football emphasised a need for more individualised guidance and support, rather than treating parents as a homogenous group (see chapter three p.70 and chapter five p.130). Moreover, parent-child relationships were shaped by interactions with other family members (see chapter five p.133). This suggests that sport psychology practitioners working in elite youth football environments may wish to consider adopting a family systems approach, which places attention on interpersonal relationships rather than on parent behaviours and child outcomes (see chapter five p.134).

Thirdly, the findings in chapter six (p.144) illustrated that parent-coach pre-season meetings were bound up in discourses surrounding a contest of power for the overall responsibility for player development. This challenges the assumption that the information in parent education sessions can be delivered by coaches and received by parents in an unproblematic fashion (e.g. Smoll et al., 2011), as parents and coaches cannot step outside the power relation that constrains this relationship. Alternatively, parent and coach group discussions, delivered by a facilitator such as sport psychology practitioner who can act in a mediation role (Blom et al., 2013), may be beneficial. If both parents and coaches can be encouraged to listen and empathise with the concerns and experiences of the other, this reciprocal communication stands to be mutually beneficial (see chapter six p.162).

**Supporting youth football academies.** This research has provided a critical perspective on the elite youth football culture and related academy practices. The intention in doing so was not to pass judgement, but to raise a "political consciousness" that may encourage cultural members to reflect upon existing practice (Tracy, 2010 p.846). This research raises a number of questions concerning the implications of institutional norms, expectations and practices for players, parents and coaches, which are outlined below.

In consideration of the unchallenged acceptance of academy rules among players in

the under-11 age group (see chapter four p.88), the extent to which young players are able to challenge or resist cultural expectations for self-regulated behaviour, or are empowered to contribute to evaluating their own performances is unclear. This contradicts the player attributes of self-awareness, independence and personal responsibility identified by youth football coaches as influential to successful progression in football (Cook et al., 2014; Holt & Dunn, 2004; Mills et al. 2012). Paradoxically, coaches have also indicated that discipline and conformity to institutional expectations are important characteristics for aspiring players to develop (Cook et al., 2014; Holt & Dunn, 2004). The commitment demonstrated by the players in this research to the self-discipline required of a model academy footballer, suggests that coaches may perceive some player attributes as more desirable than others. Certainly, there appears to be incongruence between what coaches may say is important to successful progression in football and the emphasis placed on the development of these attributes in practice.

Furthermore, these findings question how achievable it is for players to maintain a balanced lifestyle and develop identities outside of football, given the structure of the weekly training commitment and the expectation to continuously develop and perform consistently (see chapter three p.65 and chapter five p.112). Players' willingness to make sacrifices, in particular to time spent with family and friends, has also been recognised by coaches as a factor crucial to successful progression in football (Cook et al., 2014; Holt & Dunn, 2004; Mills et al. 2012). Academy staff may wish to consider from what age these sacrifices are appropriate, or beneficial, given the possible drawbacks of developing a strong athletic identity, such as difficultly coping with criticism, injury or the transition out of sport (Brown & Potrac, 2009; Jones, Glintmeyer & McKenzie, 2005).

As part of the socialisation process of parents into the football academy culture, parents were encouraged to relinquish responsibility to coaches and refrain from challenging academy practices (see chapter three p.57). As discussed earlier in this conclusion, parents described feeling compelled to participate in academy practices despite their apprehension about the consequences for their son. Parents also expressed uncertainty as to whether the commitment required for their son to play at an academy was worth it, given the potential for negative experiences (see chapter three p.65). However, across the parent interviews, there were few examples of resistance to academy practices. At times, parents acquiesced to coach requests to gain approval and avoid jeopardising their son's place in the squad, reflecting the imbalanced power relation between parents and coaches in academies (see chapter five p.160). This questions the degree to which parents experienced agency to enable them to raise

concerns related to the welfare of their child. There may be, therefore, a need to find ways to empower parents to have meaningful conversations with coaches when they recognise issues with their son, and avoid acting as "silent bystanders" to potentially harmful practices (Kerr & Stirling, 2012 p.201). Sport psychology practitioners, who can act as a neutral party, can potentially mediate communication between parents and coaches when concerns about player welfare arise (Blom et al., 2013).

The professional status of coaches meant that they were required to follow academy practices such as assessing squads to inform decisions pertaining to the retention or release of players and keeping parents "at arm's length" (see chapter six p.151). Although coaches developed and managed relationships with parents in academies carefully, trust in the parent-coach relationship could be inhibited by the underlying objective of academies; to produce players for the professional game, which coaches were responsible and accountable for delivering. The hierarchical observation (Foucault, 1991) operating within academies functioned to ensure coaches conformed to dominant practices, as non-compliance could be monitored and disciplined by senior staff. This suggests that the capacity of coaches to reflect upon and resist academy practices which undermined trust and openness in parent-coach relationships may be limited and warrants further investigation.

Markula and Pringle's (2006) pedagogical strategy offers an approach for transforming practice in a critical yet ethical manner. Using Foucault's (1980) work on the intrinsic association between knowledge and power, this strategy aims to disrupt the knowledge foundations that legitimate power and produce alternative understandings of how people know themselves and others (in particular understandings which are marginalised or unorthodox), to promote more equal power relations. Following this approach, elite youth football academies should not be conceptualised as inherently problematic, or oppositely, morally worthy. However, there appears to be a need for further research which constructs alternative knowledge, and for this to be disseminated in a manner which encourages players, parents and coaches to critically reflect upon and potentially challenge academy practices.

**In Conclusion…**

Returning to the New Statesman article (p.1), Gary Lineker called for a revolution:

> We need a parental cultural revolution. If we could just get them to shut the fuck up and let their children enjoy themselves, you would be staggered at the difference it would make.

I do not disagree. However, I suggest that it is not a parental cultural revolution, but a cultural

revolution that is needed in English elite youth football – in which the experiences of those who participate in this setting are valued and listened to, and academy practices are openly discussed and critically reflected upon – that has the greatest potential to enhance the experiences of players, coaches and indeed, parents themselves.

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# APPENDICES

## Appendix A: Example Football Academy Parents' Code of Conduct

- Adhere to the Football League Youth Development players' and parents' guide for Football Academies.
- Remember young people are involved in soccer for their enjoyment, not yours.
- Encourage your child always to play by the laws of the game.
- Help young people work towards skill, improvement and good sportsmanship.
- Set a good example by applauding good play on both sides.
- Never ridicule, humiliate or shout at young players for making a mistake or losing a match.
- Do not place emphasis on winning at all costs.
- As a spectator, do not use profane language or harass referees, coaches or players.
- Do not publicly question the referee's judgment and never their honesty.
- Encourage in your child an appreciation of mutual respect for team mates and opponents.
- Parent/guardians may be asked to view Academy games from the opposite touchline to that being used by the coaching staff of both Clubs.
- Any questions regarding games or training should be directed towards the Team Coach.
- Please help your son to abide by his own Code of Conduct.

## Appendix B: Academy Player Focus Groups Research Invitation Letter

**Player Experiences of Football Academies Research Invitation**

Loughborough University, in partnership with the Football Association (FA), is carrying out a three year research project designed to better understand how parents can help their sons develop psychological skills in football and to learn how parents and players can be better supported in football academies.

Loughborough University, in partnership with the Football Association (FA), is carrying out a three year research project designed to better understand how parents can help their sons develop psychological skills in football and to learn how parents and players can be better supported in football academies.

We are currently seeking children who play at professional football academies to be involved in this research and would like to take this opportunity to invite your son to be part a study which aims to explore players' experiences of football academies and how players think parents can help them in football.

We would like your son to be part of a series of up to four focus group interview sessions with other players from the under-11 age group academy squad. Sessions will be held at <INSERT LOCATION> on the following dates <INSERT DATES>.

The focus groups will last for 20 to 30 minutes and will be led by Nicky Clarke from Loughborough University. All player identities will be kept anonymous and all conversations will be fully confidential.

Information from the focus group interviews with a number of players will be analysed, collated and written up for a research publication. Summary findings will be reported to the FA's research committee to inform policy on how players and parents could be better supported in academies.

If your son is interested in taking part and you are happy for him to do so, please read the Information Sheet for Parents enclosed, and return the Parental Informed Consent for Child Form by email or to the address above by <INSERT DATE>.

## Appendix C: Academy Player Focus Groups Information Sheet for Parents

**Player Experiences of Football Academies**

# Information Sheet for Parents – Focus Group Interviews with Players

**Introduction**

Thank you for your interest in the player experiences of football academies research project that Loughborough University is carrying out in partnership with the Football Association (FA) and <INSERT CLUB>.

The purpose of this sheet is to provide parents with additional information about the focus group interviews with players.

This study follows the ethical guidelines of Loughborough University and has been approved by the University's Ethics Committee. After reading this document, if you have any additional questions please ask the main investigator.

**Main investigator:**

Nicky Clarke
School of Sport, Exercise and Health Sciences
Loughborough University
Loughborough
Leicestershire, LE11 3TU
Email: N.J.Clarke@lboro.ac.uk Tel: 07961 502202

**Research team:**

Dr Chris Harwood
Dr Chris Cushion
School of Sport, Exercise and Health Sciences
Loughborough University
Loughborough
Leicestershire, LE11 3TU
Email: C.G.Harwood@lboro.ac.uk Tel: 01509 226342
Email: C.Cushion@lboro.ac.uk Tel: 01509 223273

**Research Project Questions**

***What is the purpose of the study?***

Loughborough University, in partnership with the FA, is carrying out a research study designed to explore players' experiences of football academies and how young players would like their parents to help them in football.

We would like to interview groups of five players (of the same age) to understand what it is like to be an academy footballer and how they think parents can help players in football.

***Who is doing this research and why?***

This research project is being led by Nicky Clarke (a PhD research student) and Dr Chris Harwood (a Reader in Sport Psychology) from Loughborough University. The research is part of a three year project investigating how parents can help their sons develop psychological skills in football, supported by Loughborough University and the FA. The focus group sessions will be led by Nicky Clarke.

***Once my child has taken part, can we change our mind?***

Yes! After you and your son have read the information provided and asked any questions you may have, we will ask you to complete the *Parent Informed Consent for Child Form* and your son, the *Willingness to Take Part Form*. However if at any time, before, during or after the session you or your son wish to withdraw from the study please just contact a member of the research team. You can withdraw at any time, for any reason and you will not be asked to explain your reasons for withdrawing.

***Will my child be required to attend any sessions and where will these be?***

We would like to invite your son to attend four focus group sessions (with four other players). Where possible, it is expected that players attend all four focus groups. Sessions will be held at <INSERT CLUB>, after Saturday morning training.

***How long will it take?***

Each focus group session will last between 20 and 30 minutes.

***What will my child be asked to do?***

During the sessions Nicky Clarke will ask your son and the group questions about what it is like to be an academy footballer and how he feels parents can help players in football. Players will be encouraged to describe their experiences in their own words and it will be made clear that there are no right or wrong answers.

There is no expectation for your son to answer any question he does not wish to talk about and he can withdraw from the session at any time. In order to ensure what players say is captured accurately, the interviews will be recorded on a digital voice recorder.

***Will my child's taking part in this study be kept confidential?***

Yes. All conversations will be fully confidential. Player identities will be kept anonymous and no individuals or organisations mentioned by name in an interview will be identifiable. Audio recordings and transcriptions of conversations will be encoded to maintain anonymity.

The only exception to our confidentiality policy is if a disclosure if made that indicates a child may be at risk of harm or is being harmed. In this instance the football academy welfare officers will be contacted.

Data will be stored safety and securely and held for ten years, after which it will be destroyed, in line with the Data Protection Act 1998. The data will be owned by Loughborough University and will only be used for the purpose of this study as outlined above.

***What will happen to the results of the study?***

Information from focus group interviews with a number of players will be analysed, collated and written up for a research publication. Summary findings will be reported to the FA's research committee to inform policy on how players and parents could be better supported in football academies.

***I have some more questions, who should I contact?***

Nicky Clarke on email: N.J.Clarke@lboro.ac.uk or mobile: 07961 502202.

***What if my son or I are not happy with how the research was conducted?***

The University has a policy relating to Research Misconduct and Whistle Blowing which is available online at http://www.lboro.ac.uk/admin/committees/ethical/Whistleblowing(2).htm

Thank you for reading this information sheet. If you are happy for your son to take part in the study, please complete the **Parent Informed Consent for Child Form** and return it to Nicky Clarke.

## Appendix D: Academy Player Focus Groups Research Information Sheet for Players

**Player Experiences of Football Academies**

# Information Sheet for Players

We are researchers from Loughborough University who are interested in finding out more about what it is like to play football at an academy and how parents help players in football.

To do so, we would like to talk to groups of academy players to understand what you enjoy and what you sometimes find difficult about being at an academy, and what things parents do or don't do that help players in football.

The purpose of this sheet is to provide you with information so that you can decide whether you would like to take part in the focus groups. If you have any questions after reading this please ask Nicky Clarke, who you will meet at the sessions.

**Research team:**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Nicky Clarke | Email: N.J.Clarke@lboro.ac.uk | Tel: 07961 502202 |
| Dr Chris Harwood | Email: C.G.Harwood@lboro.ac.uk | Tel: 01509 226342 |
| Dr Chris Cushion | Email: C.Cushion@lboro.ac.uk | Tel: 01509 223273 |

Postal address: School of Sport, Exercise and Health Sciences
Loughborough University
Loughborough
Leicestershire, LE11 3TU

**Questions about the interview**

***Why do you want to talk to players?***

What you think about the academy you play at and how you feel your parent or guardian helps you in football is important. The aim of this research is to better understand what it is like for players so that football clubs can improve how they look after players and their parents.

***What will happen in the focus group sessions?***

The sessions will take place at <INSERT CLUB>. You will be part of a group of five players who have been selected from your age group. Nicky Clarke will lead the sessions and will ask you some questions about:

- what you enjoy about playing at an academy
- what you sometimes find difficult about playing in an academy
- what things your parent or guardian does that help you with your football

By being with your team mates we hope you will be able to share your own thoughts and come up with some ideas between you. Everyone's point of view is important and there are no right or wrong answers. You don't have to answer any question you don't feel comfortable talking about and you can withdraw from the session at any time.

Interviews will be recorded on a digital voice recorder.

***How long will it take?***

There are four sessions in total, each of which will last between 20 and 30 minutes.

***Will what I say be confidential?***

Yes. Only the research team from Loughborough will be able to listen to what you say in the interviews. We change people's names so that players, their parents and their coaches cannot be identified.

***Once I have taken part, can I change my mind?***

Yes. After you have read this information and asked any questions you may have we will ask you to complete a *Willingness to Take Part Form*. However if at any time, before, during or after the sessions you wish to withdraw from the study, for any reason, you can do so and you won't be asked to explain why.

Thank you for reading this information sheet! If you are happy to take part in the study, please complete the **Willingness to Take Part Form** and return it to Nicky Clarke.

**Appendix E: Academy Player Focus Groups Willingness to Take Part Form**

**Player Experiences of Football Academies**

# Willingness to Take Part Form

(to be completed after the Information Sheet for Players has been read)

**If you would like to take part in this study then please read the information below. If you are happy and agree with all of the statements, please sign in the space provided.**

1. The purpose of this study has been explained to me.
2. I have read and understood the *Information Sheet for Players*.
3. I have been able to ask any questions that I had.
4. I understand that it is my choice to take part in this study.
5. I understand that I have the right to withdraw from this study at any stage without giving a reason.
6. I understand that all the information I provide will be treated in strict confidence.
7. I agree to take part in this study.

Your name _____

Your signature _____

Signature of researcher _____

Date _____

**Appendix F: Academy Player Focus Groups Parent Informed Consent Form**

**Player Experiences of Football Academies**

# Parent Informed Consent for Child Form

(to be completed after the Information Sheet for Parents – Focus Group Interviews with Players has been read)

**Please read the following statements. If you are happy and agree with each of the statements, please sign in the space indicated at the bottom of this form and return it to the investigator.**

- The purpose and details of this study have been explained to me. I understand that this study is designed to further scientific knowledge and that all procedures have been approved by the Loughborough University Ethical Advisory Committee.
- I have read and understood the information sheet and this consent form.
- I have had an opportunity to ask questions about my child's participation.
- I understand that my child is under no obligation to take part in the study.
- I understand that either my child or I have the right to withdraw from this study at any stage for any reason, and that either my child or I will not be required to explain the reasons for withdrawing.
- I understand that all the information my child provides will be treated in strict confidence and will be kept anonymous and confidential to the researchers unless (under the statutory obligations of the agencies which the researchers are working with), it is judged that confidentiality will have to be breached for the safety of the participant or others.
- **I give permission for my child to participate in this study.**

Parent/guardian name: _____

Parent/guardian signature: _____

Signature of investigator: _____

Date: _____

## Appendix G: Academy Parent and Player Research Invitation Letter

**Parent and Player Experiences of Football Academies Research Invitation**

Loughborough University, in partnership with the Football Association (FA), is carrying out a three year research project designed to better understand how parents can help their sons develop psychological skills in football and to learn how parents and players can be better supported in football academies.

We are currently seeking parents and players to be involved in this research and would like to take this opportunity to invite you to be part a study which aims to explore parent and player experiences of football academies.

We would like to interview parents to listen to your views on what the role of a parent of a young football player involves and your experiences of being at a football academy. Interviews will last between one and two hours and can be arranged at a time and place of your convenience.

Secondly, we would like to speak to academy players aged between 12 and 17 years of age to understand what it is like to be an academy footballer and how they think parents can help players in football. Interviews will last between 30 and 60 minutes and can be arranged at a venue chosen by their parent. Parent and player identities will be kept anonymous and all conversations will be fully confidential.

Information from interviews with a number of parents and players will be analysed, collated and written up for a research publication. Summary findings will be reported to the FA's research committee to inform policy on how parents and players could be better supported in academies.

If you are interested in taking part, please complete the slip below and return it by email or to the address above by <INSERT DATE>.

---

***Parent and Player Experiences of Football Academies Research Invitation***

| | |
|---|---|
| *Parent name:* | |
| *Contact email:* | |
| *Contact telephone:* | |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Contact preference (email or phone):* | | *Relationship to child:* | |
| *Child's academy age group e.g. under-9s:* | | *Number of seasons at academy:* | |

## Appendix H: Academy Parent Research Information Sheet

**Parent and Player Experiences of Football Academies**

# Information Sheet for Parents – Interviews with Parents

**Introduction**

Thank you for volunteering to be part of the football parent research project that Loughborough University is carrying out in partnership with the Football Association (FA). We are very grateful to you for taking the time to share your experiences of being a football parent with us.

By understanding more about what it is like for families of academy players, it is hoped that the findings of this new and innovative research will be used by the FA to help clubs and coaches support parents better in their role.

The purpose of this sheet is to provide you with further information about the research. This study follows the ethical guidelines of Loughborough University and has been approved by the university's ethics committee. After reading this document, if you have any additional questions please ask the main investigator.

**Main investigator:**

Nicky Clarke
School of Sport, Exercise and Health Sciences
Loughborough University
Loughborough
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Email: N.J.Clarke@lboro.ac.uk Tel: 07961 502202

**Research team:**

Dr Chris Harwood
Dr Chris Cushion
School of Sport, Exercise and Health Sciences
Loughborough University
Loughborough
Leicestershire, LE11 3TU
Email: C.G.Harwood@lboro.ac.uk Tel: 01509 226342
Email: C.Cushion@lboro.ac.uk Tel: 01509 223273

**Research Project Questions**

***What is the purpose of the study?***

Loughborough University, in partnership with the FA, is carrying out a research study designed to explore parents' experiences in football. We would like to interview parents to listen to your views on what the role of a parent of a young football player involves and your experiences of being at a football academy.

***Who is doing this research and why?***

This research project is being led by Nicky Clarke (a PhD research student) and Dr Chris Harwood (a Reader in Sport Psychology) from Loughborough University. The research is part of a three year project investigating how parents can help their sons develop psychological skills in football, supported by Loughborough University and the FA.

***Once I take part, can I change my mind?***

Yes! After you have read this information and asked any questions you may have we will ask you to complete an Informed Consent Form. However if at any time, before, during or after the session you wish to withdraw from the study please just contact a member of the research team. You can withdraw at any time, for any reason and you will not be asked to explain your reasons for withdrawing.

***Will I be required to attend any sessions and where will these be?***

We would like to arrange individual interviews with parents, which can be arranged at a time and place that is convenient to you.

***How long will it take?***

Interviews will last between 60 and 90 minutes.

***What will I be asked to do?***

During the interview Nicky Clarke will ask you a number of questions about your views on what the role of a parent of a young football player involves and your experience of football academies. You are encouraged to express your thoughts freely, in your own words, as there are no right or wrong answers.

There is no expectation for you to answer any question you do not wish to talk about and you can finish the interview at any time. In order to ensure what you say is captured accurately interviews will be recorded on a digital voice recorder.

***Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?***

Yes. All conversations will be fully confidential. Parent identities will be kept anonymous and no individuals or organisations mentioned by name in an interview will be identifiable.

Audio recordings and transcriptions of conversations will be encoded to maintain anonymity. Data will be stored safely and securely and held for ten years, after which it will be destroyed, in line with the Data Protection Act 1998. The data will be owned by Loughborough University and will only be used for the purpose of this study as outlined above.

***What will happen to the results of the study?***

Information from interviews with a number of parents will be analysed, collated and written up for a research publication. Summary findings will be reported to the FA's research committee to inform policy on how parents could be better supported in their role. All parents who take part in the interviews will receive a summary of the research findings and recommendations.

***I have some more questions, who should I contact?***

Nicky Clarke on email: N.J.Clarke@lboro.ac.uk or mobile: 07961 502202.

***What if I am not happy with how the research was conducted?***

The University has a policy relating to Research Misconduct and Whistle Blowing which is available online at: http://www.lboro.ac.uk/admin/committees/ethical/Whistleblowing(2).htm

Thank you for reading this information sheet. If you are happy to take part in the study, please complete the **Parent Informed Consent Form** and return it to Nicky Clarke.

## Appendix I: Academy Parent Informed Consent Form

**Parent and Player Experiences of Football Academies**

# Parent Informed Consent Form

(to be completed after the Information Sheet for Parents – Interviews with Parents has been read)

**Please read the following statements. If you are happy and agree with each of the statements, please sign in the space indicated at the bottom of this form and return it to the investigator.**

- The purpose and details of this study have been explained to me. I understand that this study is designed to further scientific knowledge and that all procedures have been approved by the Loughborough University Ethical Advisory Committee.
- I have read and understood the information sheet and this consent form.
- I have had an opportunity to ask questions about my participation.
- I understand that I am under no obligation to take part in the study.
- I understand that I have the right to withdraw from this study at any stage for any reason, and that I will not be required to explain my reasons for withdrawing.
- I understand that all the information I provide will be treated in strict confidence and will be kept anonymous and confidential to the researchers unless (under the statutory obligations of the agencies which the researchers are working with), it is judged that confidentiality will have to be breached for the safety of the participant or others.
- I agree to participate in this study.

Your name _____

Your signature _____

Signature of investigator _____

Date _____

## Appendix J: Academy Player Research Information Sheet

**Parent and Player Experiences of Football Academies**

# Information Sheet for Players

We are researchers from Loughborough University who are interested in finding out more about what it is like to play football at an academy and how parents help players in football.

To do so, we would like to interview academy players to understand what you enjoy and what you sometimes find difficult about being at an academy.

The purpose of this sheet is to provide you with information so that you can decide whether you would like to take part in an interview. If you have any questions after reading this please ask Nicky Clarke, who you will meet at the interview.

**Research team:**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Nicky Clarke | Email: N.J.Clarke@lboro.ac.uk | Tel: 07961 502202 |
| Dr Chris Harwood | Email: C.G.Harwood@lboro.ac.uk | Tel: 01509 226342 |
| Dr Chris Cushion | Email: C.Cushion@lboro.ac.uk | Tel: 01509 223273 |

Postal address: School of Sport, Exercise and Health Sciences
Loughborough University
Loughborough
Leicestershire, LE11 3TU

**Questions about the interview**

***Why do you want to talk to players?***

What you think about the academy you play at and how you feel your parent or guardian helps you in football is important. The aim of this research is to better understand what it is like for players so that football clubs can improve how they look after players and their parents.

***What will happen in the interview?***

You and your parent/guardian will be able to choose where the interview will take place. Nicky Clarke will be the interviewer and will ask you some questions about:

- what you enjoy about playing at an academy
- what you sometimes find difficult about playing in an academy
- what things your parent or guardian does that help you with your football

You don't have to answer any question you don't feel comfortable talking about and you can finish the interview at any time. Interviews will be recorded on a digital voice recorder.

***How long will it take?***

Interviews will last between 30 and 60 minutes.

***Will what I say be confidential?***

Yes. Only the research team from Loughborough will be able to listen to what you say in the interview. We change people's names so that players and their parents cannot be identified.

***Once I have taken part, can I change my mind?***

Yes. After you have read this information and asked any questions you may have we will ask you to complete a *Willingness to Take Part Form*. However if at any time, before, during or after the interview you wish to withdraw from the study, for any reason, you can do so and you won't be asked to explain why.

Thank you for reading this information sheet! If you are happy to take part in the study, please complete the **Willingness to Take Part Form** and return it to Nicky Clarke.

**Appendix K: Academy Player Willingness to Take Part Form**

**Parent and Player Experiences of Football Academies**

# Willingness to Take Part Form

(to be completed after the Information Sheet for Players has been read)

**If you would like to take part in this study then please read the information below. If you are happy and agree with all of the statements, please sign in the space provided.**

1. The purpose of this study has been explained to me.
2. I have read and understood the *Information Sheet for Players*.
3. I have been able to ask any questions that I had.
4. I understand that it is my choice to take part in this study.
5. I understand that I have the right to withdraw from this study at any stage without giving a reason.
6. I understand that all the information I provide will be treated in strict confidence.
7. I agree to take part in this study.

Your name _____

Your signature _____

Signature of researcher _____

Date _____

## Appendix L: Academy Parent Informed Consent for Child Form

**Parent and Player Experiences of Football Academies**

# Parent Informed Consent for Child Form

(to be completed after Information Sheet for Parents – Interviews with Players has been read)

**Please read the following statements. If you are happy and agree with each of the statements, please sign in the space indicated at the bottom of this form and return it to the investigator.**

- The purpose and details of this study have been explained to me. I understand that this study is designed to further scientific knowledge and that all procedures have been approved by the Loughborough University Ethical Advisory Committee.
- I have read and understood the information sheet and this consent form.
- I have had an opportunity to ask questions about my child's participation.
- I understand that my child is under no obligation to take part in the study.
- I understand that either my child or I have the right to withdraw from this study at any stage for any reason, and that either my child or I will not be required to explain the reasons for withdrawing.
- I understand that all the information my child provides will be treated in strict confidence and will be kept anonymous and confidential to the researchers unless (under the statutory obligations of the agencies which the researchers are working with), it is judged that confidentiality will have to be breached for the safety of the participant or others.
- **I give permission for my child to participate in this study.**

Parent/guardian name: _____

Parent/guardian signature: _____

Signature of investigator: _____

Date: _____

## Appendix M: Academy Coach Research Invitation Letter

## Football Coaches' Experiences of Working with Parents

***Introduction***

Loughborough University in partnership with the Football Association is researching how parents can affect youth football player development. As part of this project, our aim is to speak to coaches in academies to understand what it is like to work with parents in this setting. We would like to take the opportunity to include your club in this research.

***Why is this research being conducted?***

By understanding coaches' perceptions and experiences of working with parents we hope to identify parent actions that can enhance player development and how clubs can better support new coaches to work effectively with parents.

***What does being part of this study involve?***

We would like clubs to help put us in touch with coaches currently working in academies who have experience of coaching players aged between 8 to 16 years. Coaches will take part in individual interviews with Nicky Clarke where they will be asked to describe what it is like working with parents in football and what coaches think parents can do to help players develop in academies.

***Will the club's participation in this study be kept confidential?***

Yes. All interviews will be fully confidential. Coach identities will be kept anonymous and no individuals or organisations mentioned by name in an interview will be identifiable.

***What will happen to the results of the study?***

Information from interviews with a number of coaches from different clubs will be analysed, collated and written up for a research publication. All clubs that provide access to coaches for this study will be provided with a report outlining key findings. There will be an opportunity to discuss any implications from the study with a member of the research team.

***If you would like to take part or have further questions please contact***

Nicky Clarke, School of Sport, Exercise and Health Sciences, Loughborough University, Leicestershire LE11 3TU Email: N.J.Clarke@lboro.ac.uk Tel: 07961 502202

Dr Chris Harwood, School of Sport, Exercise and Health Sciences, Loughborough University, Leicestershire LE11 3TU Email: C.G.Harwood@lboro.ac.uk Tel: 01509 223273

## Appendix N: Academy Coach Research Information Sheet

**Football Coaches' Experiences of Working with Parents**

# Information Sheet for Coaches

**Introduction**

Thank you for volunteering to be part of the research project that Loughborough University is carrying out in partnership with the Football Association (FA). We are very grateful to you for taking the time to share your experiences of working with parents in football with us.

By understanding what it is like as a coach to work with parents in academies, we hope to identify parent actions that can enhance player development and how clubs can better support new coaches to work effectively with parents.

The purpose of this sheet is to provide you with further information about the research. This study follows the ethical guidelines of Loughborough University and has been approved by the university's ethics committee. After reading this document, if you have any additional questions please ask the main investigator.

**Main investigator:**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Nicky Clarke | School of Sport, Exercise and Health Sciences<br>Loughborough University<br>Loughborough<br>Leicestershire, LE11 3TU<br>Email: N.J.Clarke@lboro.ac.uk | Tel: 07961 502202 |

**Research team:**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Dr Chris Harwood<br>Dr Chris Cushion | School of Sport, Exercise and Health Sciences<br>Loughborough University<br>Loughborough<br>Leicestershire, LE11 3TU<br>Email: C.G.Harwood@lboro.ac.uk<br>Email: C.Cushion@lboro.ac.uk | <br><br><br><br>Tel: 01509 226342<br>Tel: 01509 223273 |


**Research Project Questions**

***What is the purpose of the study?***

Loughborough University, in partnership with the FA, is carrying out a research study which aims to explore coaches' experiences of working with parents in football. We would like to interview football coaches to listen to your positive and negative experiences of working with parents and your views on how parents influence youth player development.

***Who is doing this research and why?***

This research project is being led by Nicky Clarke (a PhD research student), Dr Chris Harwood and Dr Chris Cushion (Academic Staff) from Loughborough University. The research is part of a three year project investigating how parents can help their sons develop psychological skills in football, supported by Loughborough University and the FA.

***Once I take part, can I change my mind?***

Yes! After you have read this information and asked any questions you may have we will ask you to complete an Informed Consent Form. However if at any time, before, during or after the session you wish to withdraw from the study please just contact a member of the research team. You can withdraw at any time, for any reason and you will not be asked to explain your reasons for withdrawing.

***Will I be required to attend any sessions and where will these be?***

We would like to arrange individual interviews with coaches, which can be arranged at a time and place that is convenient to you.

***How long will it take?***

Interviews will last between 60 and 90 minutes.

***What will I be asked to do?***

During the interview Nicky Clarke will ask you to describe your best and worst experiences of working with parents and ask you some questions about what you think parents can do to help players develop. You are encouraged to express your thoughts freely, in your own words, as there are no right or wrong answers.

There is no expectation for you to answer any question you do not wish to talk about and you can finish the interview at any time. In order to ensure what you say is captured accurately interviews will be recorded on a digital voice recorder.

***Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?***

Yes. All conversations will be fully confidential. Coach identities will be kept anonymous and no individuals or organisations mentioned by name in an interview will be identifiable.

Audio recordings and transcriptions of conversations will be encoded to maintain anonymity. Data will be stored safely and securely and held for ten years, after which it will be destroyed, in line with the Data Protection Act 1998. The data will be owned by Loughborough University and will only be used for the purpose of this study as outlined above.

***What will happen to the results of the study?***

Information from interviews with a number of coaches from different clubs will be analysed, collated and written up for a research publication. Summary findings will be reported to the FA's research committee to inform policy on how new coaches could be better supported to work effectively with parents. All coaches who take part in the interviews will receive a summary of the research findings and recommendations.

***I have some more questions, who should I contact?***

Nicky Clarke on email: N.J.Clarke@lboro.ac.uk or mobile: 07961 502202.

***What if I am not happy with how the research was conducted?***

The University has a policy relating to Research Misconduct and Whistle Blowing which is available online at: http://www.lboro.ac.uk/admin/committees/ethical/Whistleblowing(2).htm

Thank you for reading this information sheet. If you are happy to take part in the study, please complete the **Coach Informed Consent Form** and return it to Nicky Clarke.

## Appendix O: Academy Coach Informed Consent Form

**Football Coaches' Experiences of Working with Parents**

# Coach Informed Consent Form

(to be completed after the Information Sheet for Coaches has been read)

**Please read the following statements. If you are happy and agree with each of the statements, please sign in the space indicated at the bottom of this form and return it to the investigator.**

- The purpose and details of this study have been explained to me. I understand that this study is designed to further scientific knowledge and that all procedures have been approved by the Loughborough University Ethical Advisory Committee.
- I have read and understood the information sheet and this consent form.
- I have had an opportunity to ask questions about my participation.
- I understand that I am under no obligation to take part in the study.
- I understand that I have the right to withdraw from this study at any stage for any reason, and that I will not be required to explain my reasons for withdrawing.
- I understand that all the information I provide will be treated in strict confidence and will be kept anonymous and confidential to the researchers unless (under the statutory obligations of the agencies which the researchers are working with), it is judged that confidentiality will have to be breached for the safety of the participant or others.
- I agree to participate in this study.

Your name _____

Your signature _____

Signature of investigator _____

Date _____

# Appendix P: Academy Parent Participant Demographic Information

| Participant | Gender | Family structure | Child age (years) | Parent ethnicity | Parent age (years) | Parent sport experience | Youth football experience (years) | Academy experience (years) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Helen | Female | One-parent family, 2 children | 9 | White British | 45 | Club level | 3 | 2 |
| Peter | Male | Two-parent family, 3 children | 9 | White British | 44 | Semi-professional* | 4 | 2 |
| James | Male | Two-parent family, 3 children | 8 | Black British | 46 | Professional* | 3 | 2 |
| Hannah | Female | One-parent family, 2 children | 11 | Spanish Bengali | 41 | Not discussed | 5 | 3 |
| Sarah | Female | One-parent family, 2 children | 11 | White British | 39 | Club level | 6 | 4 |
| Tom | Male | Two-parent family, 1 child | 11 | White British | 56 | Not discussed | 4 | 2 |
| Louise | Female | Two-parent family, 2 children | 10 | White British | 38 | County level | 3 | 2 |
| Phil | Male | Two-parent family, 3 children | 9 | White British | 39 | Recreational* | 3 | 2 |
| Andy | Male | Two-parent family, 2 children | 10 | White British | 47 | Semi-professional* | 6 | 4 |
| Jane | Female | Two-parent family, 2 children | 9 | White British | 43 | Recreational | 4 | 3 |

* Includes experience of coaching youth football

# Appendix Q: Example Descriptive Phenomenological Analysis Matrix

| Transcript | Meaning unit description | Transformation | Essence notes |
|---|---|---|---|
| (46) P3: If I can, if I see him veering off fundamentally on the wrong path then I, I will step in because I do know the journey he's going on so if he's going somewhere and straying off, I'll put him back on it. That's my, my role.<br><br>Nicky: How do you mean veering off the path, for example? | P3 sees it as his role to keep his son on the path towards becoming a footballer, as he has knowledge of football development. | P3's own experience and knowledge of football means he feels a responsibility to facilitate and guide his son's development. | Parent responsibility *(facilitating development, providing informational support)* |
| P3: Umm if I watch, he was playing a game and in his position at the moment he's playing centre-forward. There are certain things that a centre-forward must do. Or he can't be a centre-forward. If he can do other things he can be a good centre-forward, if he can do other things he can be a great one. But to be one of them he has to do these things and if he stops doing them things, I'd better put him back on, and make him understand that you can't be anything else unless you do these things. | P3 will reinforce the key technical skills if he feels his son has stopped performing them. | P3 will provide informational feedback if he perceives his son is not meeting the performance standards he judges to be essential. | Parent knowledge *(of football development pathways, performance standards required)* |
| Each position has fundamentals that are, you must do. Now, if the coaches don't reinforce that, I can see why because they've got 11 other people, but me I can see him as an individual. To be a centre-forward you must do this. So keep doing that. So that's how I pull him back up. | P3 feels that the coaches don't reinforce these basic skills, because they do not see his son as an individual. | P3 perceives that coaches are unable to provide individualised feedback to his son, and sees this instead as his role. | Relationship with coaches *(unable to provide individualised technical feedback)* |
| (47) Nicky: That makes sense. Umm what would you say, we've talked a little bit about this before but what would you say are the most important things that a parent can do to help their son in football? | P3 thinks that a parent should be realistic with their child in football, listen to them and understand their goals. | P3 feels a responsibility to ensure his son sets realistic goals. | Relationship with child *(understanding child goals)* |
| P3: Be realistic with them. In this environment. Be realistic. Listen to them, you know, get the sense of what they want, where they're at, you know. And if, if you've got that then you might | P3 perceives that parents can feel obliged for their son to stay with a club once they have | P3 perceives that signing contracts can reduce parents' sense of control and choice | Parent responsibility *(being realistic)* |

| Transcript | Meaning unit description | Transformation | Essence notes |
|---|---|---|---|
| think, because I, I just think people once they sign a contract think they're obliged. You know they have to- No you don't! You have a choice you can always walk out.<br><br>Nicky: You do have a choice yeah.<br><br>P3: Now one parent this year who walked out, they want compensation for him. So they try and make it difficult for you. But, if I'm going, we can go at any time we want, Southfield can't stand in my way. Because the power is with us. They make you believe they've got the power. They don't! We can just say we stop, we don't want to do it no more. | signed a playing contract.<br><br>P3 feels that he has a choice about whether his son stays at the academy, although he acknowledges that the academy has processes which stop players leaving easily. He believes that parents have the power to make this decision, at any time, and not coaches. | over their child's future in football.<br><br>P3 resists the power that coaches have to decide if his son will leave the academy. | Academy culture *(role of contracts)*<br><br>Relationship with coaches *(negotiating power, choice)* |
| (48) Nicky: How do you umm, you said, to be realistic. How are you realistic with your son, what kinds of things do you say or talk about to, what does it mean to be realistic I guess?<br><br>P3: To be realistic means, take the whole picture in. So, when you say where is my son in them 12, I can watch the games and it tells me where he is. What number he is in my view. If he slips to there *(gestures lower)* I have to be realistic and talk to him and say "son, maybe we should do something else". That would be realism. (Ok yep). Now at the moment he's ok. The picture changes next year, and it's gonna change every year (Yep). So the realism is saying ok, you know, over time he's gone that way *(gestures downwards)* so what else do we have to look at ,do you know what I mean? But do it with him you know because he'll, he'll know it as well. They, kids know it. | From watching matches P3 can assess what standard his son is playing at. To fulfil his responsibility to be realistic, P3 would suggest his son stop playing football if he was not performing at the same level of the other players in his team.<br><br>P3 expects that his son would also be aware of his level in comparison to others and would therefore include him in the decision. | P3 uses comparisons to other players to assess how well his son is performing. To be realistic, he would encourage his son to leave the academy before he was released.<br><br>P3 perceives that children understand how they compare to others in football. | Parent responsibility *(being realistic)*<br><br>Parent knowledge *(assessing son's performance in matches)*<br><br>Relationship with child *(comparison to others, decision making)*<br><br>Academy culture *(standards judged by social comparison, will leave before being released)* |

# Appendix R: Example Phenomenological Lifeworld Analysis Table

## Embodiment – Performing Bodies

| Data Extract | Phenomenological Description | Phenomenological Interpretation |
|---|---|---|
| **Alex:** Well (0.3) there's two different times like (0.4) I like to know how I've done after a match (0.5) nn I like my dad to watch me but (0.2) somet:imes the pressure's off ya (0.5) and ya free like, >coz if I do well< me dad does tell me if I do bad (0.2) my dad does tell me [w- off]<br>**Nicky:** [Hehehe]<br>**Alex:** And if I do good h-he praises me a little bit (0.5) and then (0.5) but when he's not watching ya like we when when we went to a futsal tournament (0.4) I just (0.4) I did some things that I wouldn't normally be able to do (0.5) >when I'm with me dad< coz me dad likes to be really strong ↓and (0.5) but I tried a couple a tricks and stuff and I played really well and (0.4) just the pressure's off ya when your parents aren't watching sometimes: | Likes Dad to watch him because he likes feedback on how he has played. If he plays good Dad praises him a little bit, but when he plays bad Dad tells him off. Feels under pressure. | Performing while being watched by parent – feedback, pressure |
| | Dad likes him to be really strong. | Parent expectation for way of playing – to look strong on the pitch |
| | Felt free to try tricks and played well in a tournament when his Dad wasn't watching. | Performing while being watched by parent<br><br>Freedom to perform different skills when parent was absent |
| **Alex:** [Coz he told] me off so:: bad (0.3) that I didn't want to speak to him and (0.4) so then when I went to the futsal game the week after I just felt that right I can do ↑anything now me dad's not watching | Once his Dad told him off so badly that he didn't want to speak to him afterwards. Now feels that he can do anything when he isn't watching. | Performing while being watched by parent<br><br>Playing unrestricted when parent is absent – fear of negative consequences following poor performance |
| **Nicky:** [So how do you ( ) erm ] you said it put you off. How is- why is it that it puts you off<br>**Noah:** It ↑makes you think li:ke oh if I mess up, if I make a mistake then he's gonna say something<br>**Nicky:** Mmm<br>**Noah:** So it makes ya put your head down, (0.6) it makes ya make more mistakes | When Dad makes bad comments it puts him off playing because he anticipates negative feedback if he messes up or makes a mistake. His head goes down and he makes more mistakes. | Performing while being watched by parent<br><br>Anticipating negative feedback on performance from parent – inhibits performance and leads to mistakes |

| Data Extract | Phenomenological Description | Phenomenological Interpretation |
|---|---|---|
| **Noah:** I scored against *Rival FC* to make it two one<br>**Seb:** I scored against *Rival FC* to make it five nil<br>**James:** I could a- I scored against *Nor*(h)*th*(h)*to* h)*wn* ha<br>**Seb:** Yeah I did<br>**Alex:** I scored against *Westville* as well<br>**James:** The first first goal in about two years he<br>**Alex:** No coz you scored against *Uptown* this season gr::eat goal | Players enact and provide detailed descriptions of their favourite football memories - scoring the winner, scoring a last minute goal, scoring against the club I support, or against rivals. | Favourite football memories constructed around scoring goals against specific opponents at key moments in the game (enacted during interview) |
| **Nicky:** Hehehe I can imagine that. What's it ↑feel like when you score<br>**Alex:** Well for me (0.3) I don't score °regularly so (0.5) it's brill↑iant it's a brilliant feeling [and ]=<br>**Seb:** [Yeah] nd s-<br>**Alex:** =when >I go home and I say to my mum< mum I've sco:red today, she'll be so happy (0.7)<br>**Alex:** And it were a really good goal as well it's one (0.1) it's really one [been one of me ] best goals<br>**Seb:** [Same with my mum]°and my dad as well coz I don't score goals that much° | Doesn't score often so it's a brilliant feeling and parents are so happy. | Parents proud when players score goals |
| **James:** >Get stuck in< huh (0.8)<br>**Nicky:** What does get stuck in mean (0.2) [James]<br>**Seb:** [well ] gets li::ke- [you get]<br>**James:** [As in ] like pwrroahrr<br>**Nicky:** Heheheha<br>**James:** Don't know how to °explain it | Parents give players targets like "get stuck in". Described as "grrr" – can't explain further. | Parent expectation for way of playing – to get stuck in (extra-discursive experience) |

# Appendix S: Example Phenomenological Dyadic Analysis Table

| Data Extract | Parent-Child Relationship | Experience | Interpretation |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Nicky:** Who comes to watch you?<br>**Harry:** My dad, my mum has started coming, my granddad and grandma always go as well because they always take me training, so they always come to watch me, so that is good support yes.<br>**Nicky:** Is it nice having people there to watch you?<br>**Harry:** Sometimes, but the more people there the more pressure I feel. But like say it is an away game and no one comes, I don't feel that I need to work hard kind of thing, but with people there you want to look good in front of people, so it makes me play better.<br>**Nicky:** But sometimes you feel a bit of a pressure to (.) I don't know<br>**Harry:** Yeah to play better really when your parents are there because then they'll say something if you make a mistake, they pick up on it, but if they are not watching and then you make a mistake it doesn't, they don't really see it and you don't feel under pressure as much. | More people watching the more pressure he feels because parents will pick up on mistakes, but it makes him work harder | Dad and grandparents always watch, mum started coming too – good support<br>Playing while being watched by parents | Embodied experience of playing while watched by parents |
| **Nicky**: So what kind of things do you like about playing at Newtown Academy?<br>**Harry**: It is a lot more, like if you watch park side they are really lazy in the training and stuff like that, but I like playing when people are better than me because it helps you improve and most people at Newtown are like quick, fast, strong, and they play better. So it makes me like learn more and improve better, it is good.<br>**Nicky**: Anything else that is good about being there?<br>**Harry**: I like playing for Newtown because it is home's club really and everyone supports it in my family, so it is nice to play with your home club. | Likes playing for home club that family supports | Academy players are fast and strong compared to local players. Likes playing with players who are better, makes him learn and improve | Meaning of football in family<br><br>Development of body – strength, learning |

| Data Extract | Parent-Child Relationship | Experience | Interpretation |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Nicky**: Are you good at picking out what you did well in matches as well?<br>**Harry**: Yeah and also like my granddad and family, they'll pick out what I should have done or what I did well, so yeah that is always good. And they have videos now because they video our games. So you go in on your spare time and the coaches pick out things that you could have done well or you did well, so that is good as well.<br>**Nicky**: Do you watch that individually with the coaches or as a team?<br>**Harry**: Sometimes as a team, but then if you want extra you can go in on your own with a coach and then just pick it out and also we get them sent to an email, so we watch them here and then you just think about what you have got to do. | Granddad and family will pick out what he did well and mistakes. Watch match videos together. | Evaluating performances with coaches and family | Experience of evaluating performance and of being evaluated |
| **Nicky**: So if that is the things that you sort of enjoy about it, what things do you sometimes find hard?<br>**Harry**: Like sometimes training is like draining, going every day, Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, drains a lot out of you, sometimes you are not at your best and then sometimes you are, so that can be a big factor. Also playing like, when you go in all day on Tuesday you mainly train with the year above. So because they are getting paid a lot, like they are getting paid, it is their job. So they take it a lot more seriously than we do. So say we make a mistake, they will make sure you know that you have made a mistake and you will get punished for it and stuff like that. Sometimes I don't really like that, sometimes I do.<br>**Nicky**: How do you mean get punished for it?<br>**Harry**: So like if you're in a match and your team loses, you have to do a forfeit and with the scholars and everyone that is quite a hard forfeit, like for us. And sometimes when I train with the scholars I don't enjoy it that much because they take it really seriously. So you have to get used it because if you get a scholarship then it would be exactly the same. But I suppose when you are getting paid for it, it is a lot different because then it is your job, you have to just stick with it and get on with it. | | Training frequently is draining sometimes – means does not always play at best<br>Scholars take training a lot more seriously because they are being paid<br>Punished for mistakes when playing with scholars<br>Sometimes does not enjoy training but has to get used to<br>Anticipates accepting training culture more if it is a job | Embodied experience of playing while tired<br><br>Pressure to perform, punished for mistakes<br><br>Preparing for potential scholarship – accepting training culture<br><br>Temporal closeness of scholarship<br><br>Football as work |

| Data Extract | Parent-Child Relationship | Experience | Interpretation |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Nicky**: How are you feeling about this year being where they'll be giving decisions about scholarships and things?<br>**Harry**: Well they are giving it in three weeks apparently for me so I'm quite nervous really but I know that if I don't get one here then I'll have to look somewhere else. And I'm not really that bothered about looking for another club really but hopefully I'll get one at Newtown because I really want one at Newtown.<br>**Nicky**: What is it that makes you want one at Newtown?<br>**Harry**: Well because I know everyone, so I know all the players, know the coaches, know all the staff, it is a lot easier if I just stay at Newtown and if you go to another club then you have to get settled in, you have to know everyone again and also on the pitch I know people's strengths and what they are good at. Then if you move to another club you don't know their strengths and you have to get used to it again and that takes quite a long time to get to know the players.<br>**Nicky:** So when you said you are not too bothered about looking for another club, do you mean at the moment or if you didn't have a scholarship at Newtown?<br>**Harry**: Yes if I didn't have a scholarship at Newtown I wouldn't be too bothered about trying to find another club because I want to play football so it wouldn't bother me if I went to a lowest league side, played for them, it wouldn't bother me, I just want to play football really. | Reported talk from father regarding scholarship decisions | Quite nervous about scholarship decision<br><br>Wants a scholarship at Newtown because he knows everyone and it will be easier, but not bothered about looking for another academy because just wants to play football | Temporal significance of scholarship decision<br><br>Nervous but not concerned about being released – sense of assurance that he could play at a lower league academy<br><br>Goal to play football full-time |

# Appendix T: Academy Coach Participant Demographic Information

| Participant | Academy | Age (years) | Ethnicity | Coaching experience (years) | Academy experience (years) | Current coaching role | Full-time or part time |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| C1 | Newtown | 50 | White British | 30 | 15 | Development coach 14s - 16s | Full-time |
| C2 | Newtown | 42 | White British | 25 | 5 | Development coach 12s - 14s | Full-time |
| C3 | Southfield | 40 | White British | 22 | 9 | Coach non-academy football | Part-time |
| C4 | Westville | 30 | Black British | 12 | 4 | Lead coach 12s - 16s | Full-time |
| C5 | Westville | 37 | White British | 12 | 5 | Lead coach 5s - 11s | Full-time |
| C6 | Westville | 54 | White British | 20 | 2 | Development coach 15s - 21s | Full-time |
| C7 | Westville | 30 | Black British African | 12 | 3 | Development coach 12s - 16s | Full-time |
| C8 | Southfield | 22 | White British | 3 | 1 | Development coach U9s - 11s | Part-time |
| C9 | Southfield | 46 | White British | 16 | 14 | Lead coach 12s - 16s | Full-time |
| C10 | Southfield | 44 | White British | 20 | 9 | Lead coach 5s - 11s | Part-time |

# Appendix U: Example Foucauldian Discourse Analysis Table

| Data Extract | Discursive Construction | Interpretation |
|---|---|---|
| Nicky: And so what experience do you have generally of working with parents in the academy setting<br>C5: Yep umm so (.) obviously pre- sort of season meetings so I host quite a lot of pre-season meetings, uh and end of season meetings. Uh and that tends to be in more of a group setting, kind of setting the boundaries and umm expectations for the year ahead or reflecting and reviewing on the year that's just gone by. | Pre-season meetings with groups of parents to set boundaries and expectations for what is appropriate and not appropriate, and review the previous year. | Pre-season meetings to set boundaries and expectations |
| Umm but also with our (.) umm we have half yearly reports so we've just conducted those now (.) across the 9's, 10's and 11's, so we'll sit down with each player and their parents or guardians, umm to discuss how their son is doing, umm we follow a four corner format for that. Umm and also end of year retain or release meetings. | Half yearly reports with players and parents to discuss how players are doing | Reports – school language<br>Parents in meetings to discuss player progress |
| But on top of that its regular communication, phone calls, ad hoc coffees, little chat, everything okay, umm I think it's always important to ensure that the parent feels they can pick up the phone to you at any time (.) and vice versa. So that's- in that early meeting so that pre-season meeting it's always 'please you know-' and what it also allows you to do is kind of (.) set the boundaries as you know what's deemed to be appropriate and what's not appropriate | Regular communication – ad hoc coffees, little chats – informal, friendly<br>Parents should feel they can pick up the phone | Regular communication is informal, friendly and accessible to parents |
| so like we talked earlier around you know I- I refer to (.) as busy parents. So some parents are overtly <u>bu</u>sy and want to know anything and everything and you have to keep them at arm's length cos too much information can be dangerous sometimes, umm but also you need to be:: brave enough to be able to deal with some quite difficult and challenging situations cos (.) what that will do long term will allow you to get the best out of the parent player relationship. | Busy parents – want to know everything. Keep them at arm's length because too much information can be dangerous. Have to be brave to deal with difficult and challenging situations –will get the best out of the parent-player relationship | 'Busy' parents<br>Distance – keeping parents at arm's length - too much information a danger to coaches<br>Courage required to deal with parents |