The coach-parent-athlete triangle: an investigation in age-group swimming

by

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Abstract

This thesis analyses the relationships that exist between the coach, the parent and the athlete within the context of age-group swimming. The interest in this area grew from the researcher's own experiences as a swimmer, a parent of swimmers and a swimming coach together with the underlying belief that the three members or what Byrne (1993) terms the 'sporting triangle' approach swimming experiences with different needs and wants. If other members of this sporting triangle fail to recognise or understand these needs then conflict may arise which could detract from the positive sporting experiences of the young swimmer. Because of the dearth of literature concerning relationships between all three members of this triad the literature review provides an overview of literature concerning the coach's, parent's and swimmers' roles and their relationships with one or more members of the sporting triangle. The importance of the context in which swimming takes place is also recognised and the age-group swimming structure within the United Kingdom is discussed. The research was carried out within two swimming clubs which were at participation level of competition. Within each club the field work involved observations followed by in-depth interviews with three swimmers and their parents together with the Chief Coach. The selection of the families was based around Hellstedt's (1987) model of the coach-parent-athlete triangle. Data were analysed using a grounded theory approach and Goffman's (1984) dramaturgical approach, alongside role theory and the notion of 'positioning' (Giddens, 1984; David and Harré, 1990) provided the basis for the reflexive pluralist methodology employed.

The findings confirmed the complexity of the relationships within the triad together with the importance of the context in which social interaction takes place. The continual tension that exists between structure and agency was highlighted and seen as something that must be both understood (theoretically) and addressed (empirically) in any attempt to understand social interaction. The resulting data also confirmed that members of the 'sporting triangle' do not come to a swimming situation value free but bring with them a

variety of expectations, needs and wants. As a result the need for strong lines of communication between all three members of the triad is recognised.

Finally recommendations are made for policy and practice which it is hoped will ensure that young athletes' sporting experiences are positive.

Acknowledgements

The completion of this thesis would not have been possible without the help and support of several people. Of these special thanks must go to my supervisor, Tess Kay, who has guided and supported me throughout this project and to Trish Gorely for finding time to proof read. Thanks also to the other members of the pedagogy group who have encouraged, advised and supported me along the way. Immeasurable thanks also must go to the members of the clubs who participated in this study, not just for their invaluable contribution, but for making me feel so welcome during my visits. Finally, thank you to my daughters, Corinne and Gemma, for their continued support and encouragement, and for the very occasional proof reading!

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1   Introduction to the research topic

This thesis investigates the complex relationships that make up the coach-parent-athlete triad, or what Scanlan and Lewthwaite (1988) term the 'primary family of sport' (p.41). The aim of the study is to deconstruct this 'triangle' in order both to understand the relationships within it, and to analyse how these inter-relationships both shape and are, in turn, shaped by the context in which the development of the young athlete takes place. The investigation is conducted within the context of age group swimming.

My interest in this topic stems from my involvement in swimming over many years, as a swimmer, a coach and a parent. Understandably, in these three roles my expectations and aspirations have been different as I viewed swimming from different perspectives. It was, however, in my role as a coach that I began to be interested in the dynamics of the relationships between the coach, parent and athlete. From informal discussions it was clear that each member of this triad had separate expectations with regards to swimming and sometimes different reasons for being in the sport at all. All parties in the triad, then, did not come to the coaching session in isolation but brought with them a certain set of beliefs, expectations and needs. Conflict arose when these were not shared and/or not understood by other members of the triad.

In addition to the roles listed above, I am an academic and as such have been very aware of the array of literature on the coaching process and coaching effectiveness. However, as Lyle (2002) notes, the vast majority of this coaching literature attempts to fit these concepts into tidy compartments whereby both are viewed or defined in terms of individual episodes or behaviours that should be copied in order to be effective. Similarly Potrac, Jones, Armour and Brewer (2002) have noted the failure of authors to recognise that coaches are social beings and, as a result such literature has, instead, addressed solely 'the psychological, physiological, tactical and

technical developments of an athlete' (p.183). Indeed a much needed analysis of coaching science research carried out by Gilbert and Trudel (2004) noted that over half of the 610 articles reviewed included a focus on coach behaviour. In addition to this, quantitative methodology had been used in eighty percent of this research, although there was an increasing use of qualitative research in the more recent articles. However, even when qualitative methods had been used, the focus of the research tended to be on the head coach resulting in a 'one-dimensional portrait of coaching and the coaching process' (Gilbert and Trudel, 2004 p. 396). Yet, as Gilbert and Trudel and others (Cushion, 2001 and Lyle, 2002) note, effective coaching results from effective communication and interaction between several significant others, within a particular social and cultural context (Jones, Armour and Potrac, 2002). Coaching, then, is much more than what could be termed 'craft pedagogy' (see Cassidy, Jones and Potrac, 2004 p.17) and should be recognised as not just multi-layered but also as a dynamic, changing process.

Perhaps fundamental to an understanding of the social processes taking place is an analysis of the interaction of the three main parties, the coach, the parents and the athlete; an interaction that can be very complex, as illustrated by work done by Wylleman, De Knop, Vanden Auweele and Sloore (1997). In their study of 265 young athletes they discovered that there were in fact two types of interactions between members of the triad: one where both athletes and parents interacted with the coach directly, and one in which the parents and athletes interacted only with each other. In the second part of their study Wylleman et al found that subjects perceived the bi-directional interactions of their relationships in the athletic triangle to be positive, supportive and constructive and, on the whole, free from major conflicts, although there was some evidence of possible friction between athletes and their mothers and between parents and coaches.

To try to understand the complexity of these relationships it is necessary to appreciate the different role or indeed roles that individuals play within the context of coaching. Roles, even within a single relationship, can be

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complex and diverse and where one individual has several roles there is scope for role conflict and role ambiguity. The role of the coach is, perhaps, the most varied within this triangular relationship and, as already noted, goes far beyond that of a purely technical nature (Day, 1996). One common task within many coach education programmes is to list these various roles and to attempt to establish what it is that constitutes excellence in coaching. Indeed the literature abounds with discussions of the qualities that a good coach should possess (see Douge and Hastie, 1993). Typical coaching roles identified by such an exercise include teacher, father, friend, disciplinarian, confidante, advisor, facilitator... the list is almost endless. This multitude of roles has been recognised by Côté, Young, North and Duffy (2007) who note that because of the evolvement of coaching as a process that is more pedagogical, technical and complex and, which requires 'multi-tasking competencies...the understanding of what constitutes excellence in coaching also must change' (p.4). They note that the development of coaching excellence is context driven and a coach who has spent time learning his skills within a particular context, will find it hard to display the same excellence within another context.

Within the context of age-group swimming an understanding of the role of the coach is vital as competition starts at an early age and it is common for youngsters to be training most days of the week and often twice a day. In this context coaches can become significant figures in the lives of the young athletes and could even be said to carry a 'surrogate parent role' (Fuoss and Troppman, 1981, p.29). To add to this complexity, the interpretation of the role and even the role itself may vary depending on the coach's philosophy and what type of coaching style or strategy he or she adopts. In turn, the coaching strategy employed may be affected significantly by the context in which the coaching takes place. In addition, the coach may be related to the athlete, for example, he or she may be a parent of the athlete (see Jowett, Timson-Kachis and Adams, 2007). In this context another dimension is added and the roles played and the interactions that result become even more complex.

Parents and athletes too will perform many roles and these roles will change as the young swimmer moves through his or her sporting career (Côté, 1999; Côte and Hay, 2002)[1]. For example, the parent's role may move from that of leader in the early stages of the young athlete's sporting career where the athlete is happy to be directed by his or her parents, to that of supporter as the athlete's career develops and the athlete seeks a greater independence and perhaps a heavier reliance on the coach.

As in many sports that still rely on a volunteer base, parents are needed to perform certain roles in swimming clubs if these clubs are to run successfully. Whilst adopting these various roles within the sporting environment the parent and swimmer also have a unique inter-relationship – that of parent and child and within this relationship many additional and varied roles may be performed. Parents too, then, may be cast into the role of a friend, disciplinarian, confidante, advisor, facilitator; sharing many similar roles with the coach, although these may be performed within slightly different contexts. Parents may, as noted above, actually adopt the role of the coach, either formally as part of the coaching team or informally advising the child on technical and other matters, sometimes but not always in agreement with the coach. In certain cases, parents may be seen to be undermining the basic goals of the sports programme (Smoll and Cumming, 2006) and power struggles may develop (Hellstedt, 1987). Certainly in much coaching literature the parent is often portrayed as a nuisance (Duncan, 1997) in spite of the reliance placed on them in many amateur sporting environments.

The way in which roles are acted out within this triangle, then, is very complex. There are opportunities for consensus and agreement within an

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[1] Côté (1999) and Côté and Hay (2002) adopt a developmental approach to sports socialisation. Côté and Hay (2002) identify various stages that a young athlete goes through in his or her sporting career. These stages are sampling, where the emphasis is on fun and where the child may try several different sports as they begin to develop an awareness of available sporting opportunities; through to specialising, where they may start to concentrate on fewer activities, and finally the investment years where commitment is to one or two sports. At each of these stages the roles of the influential others, primarily the parents and the coach will change. The parent's role will progress from being that of leader in the sampling stage to that of supporter and follower in the investment stage. Similarly the role of the coach will change and the relationship become more intense in the later stages.

open, giving relationship, as noted by Jowett (2001) when investigating athlete-coach relationships, but there is also potential for conflict between the various players and, because of the various roles each of these players undertakes, there is potential for role ambiguity for each in turn.

Although McPherson (1978) referred to

> an urgent need for greater understanding of the interpersonal dynamics within the 'Little League Triangle'[2] – namely the coach-parent-child triad (p.243).

studies investigating these relationships have been carried out by very few researchers (Hellstedt, 1995; Jowett et al., 2007; Wylleman et al., 1997). Having said this, there has been a relatively large amount of research in recent years focusing on the coach-athlete relationship, often from a psychological perspective (see Harwood and Swain, 2001, 2002; Jowett, 2001, 2003; Jowett and Cockerill, 2002, 2003; Jowett and Meek, 2000).

Although some texts (see Kay, 2000) have investigated the stresses placed on families of elite young performers much of the research on the coach-athlete and parent-athlete relationships deals with the degree of stress put on the athlete by both the two other members of the triad (Donnelly, 1983; Engh, 1999; Hardy, 1986; Lee and MacLean, 1997; Martens, 1982; Tierney, 1988). Other research with regards to parents tends to centre around their role as 'influential' others in the socialisation of their child into sport (Greendorfer, 1992; Jambor, 1999). However, Vanden Auweelle (1999) has investigated parent-coach relationships and notes the limitation of previous research in this area. He states that much of the research that has been carried out tends to focus simply on the conflict that might exist within such a relationship.

In view of the above, my research project aimed to fill a gap in the research literature and lead to a deeper understanding of the relationships within this 'sporting triangle' (Byrne, 1993). It aimed to do this by providing an insight,

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[2] Little league is the name given to junior competition in baseball

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not just into what each individual member might bring to the triangle, but also into how the interactions between the members of the triangle might play out. Added to this, at the commencement of the study the Amateur Swimming Association (ASA) had recently restructured its age-group swimming programme, with respect to both competition and training, in an attempt to make it more child-centred and encourage young swimmers to stay in the sport. Bearing these factors in mind, it seemed a particularly appropriate time to investigate further the coach-parent-swimmer relationship.

However, before outlining the focus of this research it is necessary to define briefly what is meant by the term the coaching process.

1.2   The coaching process

According to Lyle (2002) the coaching process is a contract or agreement between athlete and coach, which is 'operationalised' through the various actions and interactions that are designed to improve competition performance. Lyle points out that perhaps the most obvious manifestation of this is normally the competition programme, which has to be planned, co-ordinated and integrated if it is to lead to competition success. Within such a definition both the coach and, to some extent, the athlete are privileged. Although accepting the importance of the coaching process *per se* it should be noted that this particular investigation will look beyond this simple definition and will acknowledge the importance of all members of the 'sporting triangle', including the parents. By doing so, it will aim to investigate what all three members bring to the coaching environment and how they interact within the context of age group swimming. However, because of the centrality of the coaching process to the overall coaching environment, and because of the recent debates concerning what exactly is meant by 'the coaching process', this section will attempt to clarify recent thinking on this topic. In order to do this we first need to establish what is meant by the term 'coach'.

As Campbell (1992) notes the term coach may in itself be used to denote a number of people involved in a wide range of tasks. Coaches may be working at a variety of levels from participation to elite high performance coaching but as Lyle (2002) suggests it would be wrong to think of these levels of coaching as being on a continuum because the best coaches are not necessarily those working at the top level. Each type of coaching requires different behaviours, skills and expertise. However, too many studies have concentrated solely on identifying a single aspect that is believed by the authors to be critical to the coaching process (Cushion, Armour and Jones, 2006) and, as Cushion et al (2006) note, this 'competition' (p.85) for which is the most important aspect has led to confusion and an underestimation of the complexity of the coaching process.

Coaching models such as Fairs (1987); Côté, Salmela, Trudel, Baria and Russell (1995) and Lintuenen (1997) have tried to conceptualise this complex phenomenon but as Lyle notes, on the whole, these have been largely unsatisfactory[3]. One of the main reasons for the shortfall in these models is the extremely complex nature of the process and the failure of many of these models to take all the variables into account. Côté et al.'s (1995) model goes someway towards this by including the contextual factors that are relevant within the coaching process. The three components of organisation, training and competition are central to this model, along with the recognition that other peripheral factors, such as the coach's and the athlete's personal characteristics, the athlete's level of development will impact on the coaching process. Authors such as Woodman (1993): Sauray and Durand (1998): Pocwardowski, Barott and Henschen (2002) and Lyle (2002) have stressed the importance of the social influences within the coaching process. Indeed Lyle (2002), in his own model, notes the need to include 'personal and social meaning' (p.99) as one of the building blocks of the coaching process. He also acknowledges that it is likely that it is not just the coach who will interact with the athlete but that there will be a coaching

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[3] For a detailed account of the problems around modelling the coaching process, and an attempt at devising a satisfactory model see Lyle (2002), and Cushion (2006)

'team' who must also have the required knowledge and skills to develop the young athlete.

The failure of research to take into account the social dimension of the coaching process has led Cushion et al (2006) to conclude that there is much to be learned about the coaching process and, in order to fill the gaps in our knowledge, interpretative research approaches should be adopted in order to 'capture its essence *in situ*' (p.96) and to broaden our understanding of a process that is complex and ultimately context driven.

As noted, much of the recent research looking at relationships within the coaching process has tended to concentrate on that of the coach and athlete. Without doubt this is a very significant factor, yet it is impossible to isolate the coaching process or the competition process from the overall socialisation process (Scanlan, 1982), where the roles of all significant others, such as parents, administrators, officials, spectators, other coaches and professionals, as well as the social context in which this process occurs must be taken into account. Therefore, in this study I will attempt to deconstruct the coach-parent-athlete relationships in order to understand the complexities involved and to discover what impact they have on the overall process of talent development.

1.3 Objectives and focus of the Research
Several authors accept the importance of the coach-parent-athlete relationship. Indeed Smoll and Cumming (2006) see it as a 'natural aspect' (p.47) of youth sports, but according to Wylleman, De Knop, Vanden Auweele and Sloore (1997) research relating to the coach-parent-athlete relationship has been limited in a number of ways, including

- neglecting to investigate the young athletes' perspectives on the influence of these relationships;

- not investigating simultaneously all three relationships in the athletic triangle, but rather tending to pay attention to the coach-toward-athlete relationship;
- tending to use a uni-directional rather than a bi-directional perspective in their research of relationships.

In addition, according to Armour, Jones and Kerry (2000), in the past, research within sport sociology has been criticised for not being grounded sufficiently in social theory and although Armour et al (2000) note that sport sociology has progressed since these criticisms were voiced by Rees and Miracle (1986), they stress the importance of the social nature of sport. As Armour et al (2000) maintain

> ... the purpose of sport sociology is clear: it must study the sports/exercise person (at whatever level) as a social being in a particular social context; it must study social structures, which endure and, which have influence... It is, fundamentally, a complex, person-centred venture located within the multifarious facets and levels of sport, including elite sport and performance coaching, health/exercise, social sport, and sport/physical education in schools' (p.1).

Bearing this in mind, this study aims to understand the roles and relationships between athletes, their parents and coaches who are also members within two swimming clubs. By doing this, it is hoped that an understanding will also be reached of the meaning that these members attach to swimming and what they see as their role within the context of age-group swimming in a skill development club. To do this the study aims to:

- investigate the philosophy/attitudes of the coach, swimmer and parent with respect to their involvement in swimming,

- identify the role and role expectations of the coach, swimmer, and parent as viewed by themselves and the other members of the triad,

and, as a result of the above,

- examine the role these inter-relationships play in shaping the coaching environment and process and how, in turn, these roles are shaped by the context in which they are played out.

1.4   Thesis structure

The structure of this thesis is as follows. Chapter 2 discusses the literature review, which commenced at the start of this project and, which has been on-going throughout the research process. Chapter 3 outlines and discusses the theoretical concepts that have helped to interpret the resulting data. The methodology used is discussed in Chapter 4 and the findings of the study are described in Chapter 5. In this chapter the data from the two participating swimming clubs are described separately under the themed headings that arose from the data analysis. These findings are brought together and then discussed in Chapter 6. Finally Chapter 7 draws on Chapter 6 and gives some final thoughts with regards to the study and proposes areas for future research. Limitations of the research are also discussed and some recommendations for policy and practice made.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1   Introduction

This review aims to investigate current literature relevant to this study. It will also highlight some of the gaps in the existing research on the topic of the coach-parent-athlete triad.

Much of the literature concerning coach-athlete and parent-athlete relationships tends to deal with the stresses placed on the young performer. The competitive stress for young swimmers can start early in life and parents and coaches can, through their interactions with each other and with the child either relieve or exacerbate these levels of anxiety. Scanlan (1982), following on the work of Martens (1975), notes that social evaluation is of vital importance in the competition process. Martens (1975) divides the competition process into four inter-related stages – objective competitive situation, subjective competitive situation, response and consequences. The objective competitive situation is one in which a person's performance is compared with some standard in the presence of at least one other individual. This standard may be a past performance or an attainment target or another person's performance. The subjective competitive situation is how the person perceives and accepts the objective competitive situation. The response will result from this perception and can be physiological, psychological or behavioural and the consequences arising from the comparison process can be positive, negative or neutral.

Because children have few past experiences to draw on they actively seek out information from others, often from social sources. Children will, therefore, take cues from the reactions of others in order to assess such attributes as talent and success. Indeed, Csikszentmihalyi, Whalen, Wong and Rathunde (1993) note that unless talent is valued by society and encouraged to grow by coaches and parents it cannot develop. Coaches and parents must, therefore, be aware of the messages, verbal and non-verbal, intentional and non-intentional, that they convey to the young athlete. Yet, as Tierney (1988) found in his investigations, the pressure to perform

well within a highly competitive environment will often come from the swimmers themselves. However, even where children receive negative comparative appraisal, guidance and support from both coaches and parents can help children accept their limitations and look for new goals. Problems may arise if young athletes are subjected to a 'winning is everything' philosophy as this may lead to a fear of failure, which could subject the athlete to considerable stress. Such stress, according to Martens (1982), may be equivalent in some cases to that shown by soldiers in combat.

It is clear then that the relationships within, and the roles adopted by members of this triad will impact on the ultimate performance and enjoyment of the young athlete. This literature review will, therefore, consider these relationships. Because the roles and relationships of members of this 'sporting triangle' (Byrne, 1993) will impact on the other members it has been problematic trying to organise this literature review so as to avoid any overlap and repetition. The difficulties have also been exacerbated because of the dearth of literature that deals with the triangular relationship of coach-parent-athlete, although there is an abundance of anecdotal advice about how to coach young athletes and how to be a sport parent. In fact there is a website dedicated to the topic (see www.sportsparenting.org.). Because of this gap in the literature, the relationships between each member of the triad will be looked at in turn rather than focusing solely on literature concerning the relationship between all three members.

First, Hellstedt's (1987) model of the coach-parent-athlete relationship is discussed as this was an early attempt to deconstruct the triad in order to understand the various discourses that can occur. Following this the literature concerning the coach's role and his or her relationships with, First athletes and then parents is reviewed. The next section deals with the roles and relationships of both parents and athletes.

Finally, because of the importance of the context in which coaching takes place, the age-group swimming structure within the United Kingdom will be discussed in the final section.

2.2 Roles and Relationships

2.2.1 Hellstedt's Model

As mentioned earlier, in spite of authors such as McPherson (1978) expressing the need for research looking at the triangular relationship of coach-parent-athlete, little such research has been undertaken. Even research carried out by De Martelaer, De Knop, Theeboom and Harthoorn (1999), which investigated an age-group swimming programme in Flemish Swimming Clubs, and included data collected from all three members of the triad, thus enabling the voices of the swimmers to be heard, concentrated more on the organisational aspects of age-group swimming. Although some data relates to the coach-athlete and parent-athlete relationship, there is little insight into the in-depth relationships between the swimmers, their coaches and their parents. Similarly, Wylleman et al (1997) sought the voice of the athlete and sent three types of questionnaires to 265 athletes aged between 12 and 29 years. The three questionnaires assessed the athletes' perceptions of the relationship-oriented behaviours of both partners in the athlete-coach dyad, the athlete-parent and the parent-coach dyads. Although all three members were studied it was purely from the athlete's perceptions, which, although insightful, again failed to truly deconstruct this triangular relationship and give an insight with regards to all members. More recently studies by Gould and Lauer (2004) sought the views of junior tennis coaches in order to identify effective and ineffective tennis parenting. Again in only seeking the views of one member of the triad (the coach), the study fails to really provide an understanding of the complex social relationships and interactions taking place.

In order to conceptualise this triangular relationship and to assist coaches in working with both athletes and their parents, Hellstedt (1987) devised a model of this sporting triangle. Two theoretical concepts taken from family systems theory formed the basis of the model, namely the concepts of

boundaries (Minuchin, 1994) and triangulation (Bowen, 1978). The concept of boundaries relates to the degree of psychological separation between two individuals and falls on a continuum from enmeshment (when two individuals think and act as one person) to disengagement (when both the psychological separation and emotional distance are large) (Hellstedt, 1987). The concept of 'triangulation' is based on the principle that if the relationship between two people is unstable (e.g. they are in disagreement about something) then a third individual will be brought in to stabilise the relationship i.e. try and resolve the argument. Similarly, if two people are very close to each other, they may have an argument with a third person who can be viewed as the 'common enemy' in order to stabilise the initial relationship (Hellstedt, 1987). Based on these ideas Hellstedt evolved three descriptive categories for labelling parents with regard to their involvement in their child's athletic success: over-involved, moderately involved, and under-involved and these categories are illustrated in Figure1.

Having identified these relationships and the problems that can arise for the coach, Hellstedt suggests goals and strategies for dealing with each of these categories of parents. According to Hellstedt, the role of the coach in dealing with parents is vital as this can help to improve the parent-athlete relationship, which may impact on the athlete's performance and long-term development. The coach's role within a sporting organisation goes far beyond that of just coaching an individual athlete; as Hellstedt points out they are involved in a whole family process. The next section looks at the literature associated with the role of the coach and his or her relationships with other members of the triad.
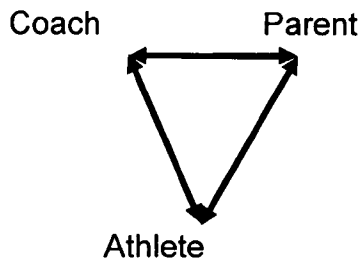
Coach, parent, athlete relationship with moderately involved parents.
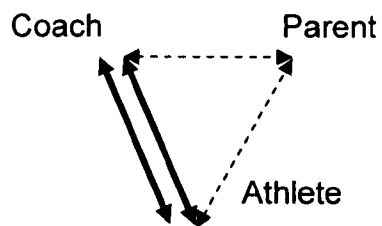
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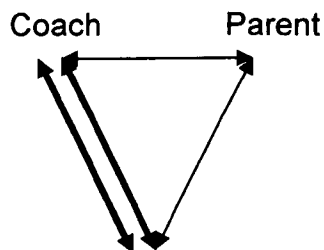
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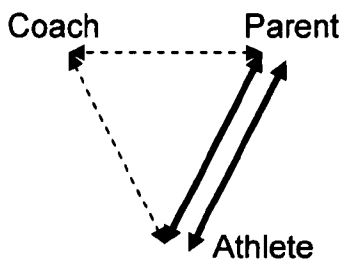
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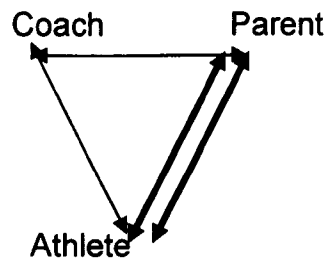
The under-involved coach

NB: Broken line = conflict; straight line = under-involvement; thick line = moderate involvement; double thick line = over-involvement

Figure 1: Coach's relationship with athlete and parent

(Adapted from Hellstedt, 1987)

2.2.2 Roles and relationships – The coach

> The accumulation of the specific roles and events a person
> experiences across the life span ... alters each person's
> developmental trajectory in a manner that would not have occurred
> had another set of roles and events been experienced (Lerner, 1998
> p.16).

2.2.2.1 The coach's role

With respect to the coach's role, Lyle (2002) emphasises particularly the problems that exist and questions whether this is the result of 'historical development, lack of occupational development or simply the vast array of situations within which athletes wish to improve their performances that causes the confusion' (p.62). Often the literature portrays the roles of the coach in terms of what athletes look for in their coaches. For example, although noting that coaches in different situations will require different qualities, Daly (1980) goes on to state that 'there are some characteristics of the coaching role that will appeal to all' (p.8) and lists a number of attributes necessary in a respected coach. Lyle (2002) suggests that looking at the functional roles and the relationship between the various activities that a coach performs within the coaching process may be a better analytical tool. He argues that the amount of control that the coach has over the many variables that influence the development of performance will depend on his or her 'level' of coaching. The role of a participation coach is, therefore, different from that of an elite coach although some of the functions will be the same. Furthermore, at elite level some of the roles performed by the coach may be either supported or totally delivered by other personnel such as physiologists, psychologists, and strength and conditioning trainers (Lyle 2002).

However, as Jones (2004) notes, coaching, in spite of being different within different contexts, is still part of a social structure where similar attitudes, beliefs and cultural traditions prevail. Indeed, according to Armour (2004), coaching can be defined as a 'pedagogic setting' (p.107) in which coaches learn the 'culture of practice' (p.107) important to their sport. Certainly, research has tended to show that many coaches learn their art through

observation of more experienced coaches and Jones (2004), drawing on social learning theory of Bandura (1977), notes that it would seem that people 'would rather adopt an old role than risk creating a new one, as the latter requires both mastery of the social situation and abundant self-belief' (Jones 2004, p.120). Jones goes on to point out that in a study of coaches from a variety of sports (see Jones et al., 2004) not all those interviewed admitted to having a role model, yet most 'when pushed' (Jones, 2004 p.120) could name a coach who had had an influence on their career. It would, therefore, appear that through modelling and observation of experienced coaches 'collective understandings begin to develop, and the shared meanings about the occupational culture of coaching start to take shape' (Cushion, Armour and Jones, 2003 p.217).

Through such processes coaches, then, will have a self concept of how they should behave. Whether it is accurate or not, such a self concept may well determine his or her behaviour and motivation (Fuoss and Troppman, 1981). However, this self-concept may be distorted and a coach may see him or herself quite differently from how he or she is viewed by others (see Luiukkonen, 1999) resulting in conflict. Furthermore, failing to live up to one's own self concept as well as to the expectations of others can lead to role strain and role conflict, and job insecurity for the coach who typically relies on success in order to maintain his or her professional status and position.

If the expectations by others of a particular role do not conform to the role-player's own definition, then the role player may present a 'front' (see Goffman, 1984) and act in a way that he or she feels the 'audience' will expect of him or her in that role. By doing this, the role player can 'maintain established power relationships' (Jones et al., 2002 p. 40) and, in the case of the coach, act in ways that he or she believes will ensure that he or she can get the best out of the athlete. Any deviance from this 'front' would undermine the coach and the coaching situation. Jones et al. conclude that this may explain the various styles and strategies used by the coach in an attempt to portray an ideal image of him or herself to their audience. More

recently Jones (2006) clearly demonstrates this in his auto-ethnographical account of a coach 'confronting' his players in a pre-game talk. However, by portraying particular fronts, coaches can adjust and create a role in order to present a particular impression and although in Jones et al.'s (2004) study many of the coaches felt pressured to fulfil their perceived roles, they were, at the same time, in the privileged position of the coach and this gave each coach a degree of power, which enabled them to use that role to access resources such as status. Coaches in their study were not averse to using their role to assert their authority when they felt strong leadership was required. For example, Jones (2004) cites Bob Dwyer, a rugby union coach who states 'you've always got to be the boss' (p.129).

If the members of the coach-athlete triad are to avoid conflict each must understand the role of the other. Jowett and Cockerill (2002) looked at both typical (unrelated athlete and coach) and atypical (married or family connection) relationships. The roles and behaviours of the coaches and athletes were seen by both parties as being complementary with the coach leading and the athlete executing. Moreover, most of the coaches and athletes interviewed looked on each other as friends with the athletes looking on their coach as someone who would provide support and training where needed. This, again, is echoed in Jones et al.'s (2004) study of coaches where they found that, in many cases, the coaches undertook a caring role. Jones (2004) states:

> Through such drive, desire and care they (the coaches) invested much of themselves in their coaching personas, hence they appeared able to transcend the limits of their coaching role through a realisation of the self in attempts to gain the respect and affection of their charges, which they considered necessary to push the latter to ever improving performances (p.131).

In Jowett and Cockerill's (2002) study of the breakdown in a coach-athlete relationship, conflict arose and complementarity[4] was absent where athlete

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[4] According to Jowett and Cockerill (2002), *Closeness* refers to the 'emotional tone' (p.19) of the coach-athlete relationship. It denotes the depth of the relationship and is expressed in terms such as like, dislike, trust and respect. *Co-orientation* concerns the common ground established by the coaches and athletes during their time together. An important aspect of this is good communication so that athletes and coaches can share knowledge, thoughts and concerns. *Complementarity* refers to the interaction between the coach and athlete that is seen as cooperative and complementary.

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and coach were not working towards the same goals and were uncertain of each other's motives and needs. They conclude that if goals, needs and motives were discussed and clearly understood then both athlete and coach would be satisfied in this role set and the quality of their athletic relationship would be preserved. Again, this is reflected in Jones et al.'s (2004) study where Jones (2004) notes that the coaches strove for consensus so that coach and athlete were pulling together.

To understand the role of the coach, it is vital to understand the context in which this coaching takes place. As coaching becomes more professional and coaches have access to greater resources in terms of personnel and money, then the importance of the management role becomes greater although this may be less so with the participation coach. However, in all contexts the coach will be working in a role set where he or she is accountable to the athletes and the application of his philosophy and leadership style will have a determining effect on the coach's inter-personal relationships with parents and athletes alike (Fuoss and Troppman, 1981).

In summary then, clearly the role of the coach goes beyond that of a purely technical nature (Armour et al., 2000; Lyle, 1999). According to Lyle (2002) there are then a number of factors that will impact on the coach's role. These are:
- The sport sub-system
- The structuring of roles
- The intensity and scale of the coaching process
- The characteristics of the organisation
- And the availability of an extended role-set

All these factors relate to the context in which the coaching takes place and cannot be ignored when considering the coaching role or the effectiveness of the coach in that role. Further, Lyle (2002) notes the role of the coach is to both co-ordinate and manage the contributions of others within the coaching process, as well as manipulating and controlling as many as possible of the variables that ultimately influence performance. Perhaps

Lyle hits the nail on the head when he states that it is not the individual coach that is unique but the coaching process itself.

2.2.3   Coach-athlete relationship

At the core of any examination concerning effective coaching practice lies the complex inter-relationship between the coach, athlete and the sport, and paramount within this structure is the interaction that exists between the three variables (Jones, 1997 p.27)

The relationship of the coach with both the athlete and parent will vary depending on the role the coach is adopting at the time of interaction. The quality of this interaction is of great importance as the positive or negative experiences encountered by the young people in their care during their sports participation may well be a deciding factor in whether these young people continue in the sport or drop out at an early age (Mugno, 1983). Indeed Weiss and Chaumenton (1992) found that one reason for older athletes dropping out of sport was dislike of the coach. The relationship between these two prime actors is, therefore, of vital importance if we are to begin to understand the complexities of the coaching process. Indeed Jowett (2005) claims that the coach-athlete relationship is at the 'foundation of coaching' (p. 412) and Jowett and Cockerill (2002) recognise that the coach-athlete relationship 'becomes the principal process vehicle from which needs are expressed and fulfilled' (p.16). Several researchers would support the view that the coach-athlete relationship is a contributory factor in sports performance (Seiler, Kevesligeti and Valley, 1999) and the athlete's development (Jowett and Cockerill, 2002). Certainly, Wylleman et al (1997) in their study of 265 young athletes found that there was a strong association between athletes' enjoyment, their perceived level of performance and their satisfaction with regards to their relationship with their coach. It is hardly surprising, then, that the social interaction between coach and athlete has been extensively investigated in recent years. McQuade (2001) goes as far as to say that this relationship is central to the coaching process and points out that '"Athlete centred – coach delivered" is the often-heard mantra of the new lottery support programmes' (p.18) in the UK

Much of the earlier research on coach-athlete relationships focused on the leadership role of the coach (Chelladurai, Haggerty and Baxter, 1989) and thus tended to be one-sided focusing mostly on the coach. More recently investigators (Jowett 2001, 2003; Jowett and Cockerill, 2002, 2003; Jowett and Meek, 2000) have looked at this coach-athlete dyad from both the perspective of the coach and the perspective of the athlete. But what constitutes 'good relationships' and what factors can affect this relationship? There is evidence in the literature to support the fact that successful relationships are likely to include such qualities as trust, respect, commitment and understanding (Greenleaf, Gould and Dieffenback, 2001) but relationships will change and develop depending on the context in which the coaching process takes place. In his coaching model, Lashuk (1992) outlines the different stages in an athlete's career and the different skills, characteristics and behaviours that the coach should adopt according to the needs of the athletes at each stage. This too has been echoed by Hogg (1995) who outlines how coaching practice should develop from that of the authoritarian whilst the athlete is young, to a more humanistic approach as the athlete matures and sees opportunities for personal growth and development. See Figure 2.

Authoritarian ——→ Power sharing ——→ Humanistic approach

COACH CONTROL	COACH/ATHLETE CONTROL	ATHLETE CONTROL

12 years and under   13-15 years 16-17 years   18 years and over

Early experiencing   Developing and   Empowerment

Coach dependence   collaborating   Athlete independence

  teaching skills   Athlete/coach dependence   (+accountability)

safety and security

procedures and   Opportunities for: Personal AUTONOMY in:

  routines   self management   self-responsibility

guidance in learning   self determination   training/competitive

                            Shared decision making   performance

                          and   routines

                          Sense of control   strategies

              Partnership ————→ between coach and athlete

Figure 2: Illustration of a shift in coaching paradigms.

Source: Hogg 1995

There is certainly evidence in the literature to support this. Chelladurai,
Haggerty and Baxter (1989) found that novice athletes had greater
expectations concerning training and instruction and less need of social
support from the coach than did elite athletes. Other studies (Chelladurai,
Haggerty and Baxter, 1989; Côté, 1999; Côté and Hay, 2002; Jowett, 2003;
Stambulova, 1999; Vorontsov, 1997; Wylleman et al., 1997) tend to support
the idea that as athletes progress through their sporting careers and
become more experienced and seek greater independence, the dynamics of
the relationship will change. If this independence is not forthcoming then
the athlete may feel pressured and controlled and a 'power struggle' might
develop. In order to maintain a positive relationship, both the coach and the
athlete must communicate with each other and deal with the problem, but as
Jowett (2003) discovered both parties may be reluctant to do this. In
Jowett's investigation of a female Olympic silver medallist and her male

coach who had been working together for about four years, their relationship was initially what Jowett terms a 'progressive spiral' (p.457) but as it continued the spiral became regressive and the relationship moved out of what Jowett terms the 'Honeymoon phase'. Citing Braiker and Kelley (1979), she suggests that the more interdependence and self-disclosure there is in a relationship the riskier that relationship becomes and the more potential there is for conflict, particularly in the absence of trust. Jowett emphasises the need for common goals and a willingness, by both parties, to make sacrifices if positive relationships are to develop.

This conflict and the search for greater independence along with newly discovered freedom that are part of growing up may well lead female adolescents, particularly, to quit sport altogether (Johns and Lindner, 1992). Stambulova (1999) discusses research into the careers of Russian athletes carried out between 1991 and1996. The findings indicated that as the athletes progressed through their careers there was a decreasing satisfaction with their relationships with their coaches. This was particularly true with regards to female athletes who felt that the coach was too authoritarian. Research also indicated that the coach's estimation of the athlete's sporting potential had a great effect on his or her satisfaction. This was seen most clearly when the athlete felt that the coach underestimates his or her ability. Stambulova (1999) quotes an interview with a female swimmer who stated:

> You cannot make progress without belief in your coach. This is the main conclusion I came to in the course of my sports career. I was constantly trying to prove to my coach that I deserved his time and confidence but he never appreciated me. I cannot forget my disappointment (p.22).

In Stambulova's (1999) own study the sporting career of the athletes is divided into four stages namely: beginning, the first success, culmination and finish. The findings showed that the obvious dominance of the coach in the early stages of the sporting career was replaced by parity in relations at the culmination stage and by nearly equal percentages of parity and athlete's dominance at the closing stage,   In spite of the dominance of the

coach during the early stages, 'friendliness' levels were high but hostility increased as the athletes moved towards to latter stages of their career. Successful athletes in particular estimated that the final stages were 'more fraught with conflicts' (p.28). During the period just prior to the termination of their career, female athletes, together with the more successful athletes, appeared to be most sensitive to aspects such as the coach's lack of attention, under-estimation of ability and ignoring their personal problems. The female athletes also noted the suppression of their independence by the coach.

An extreme example of the influence that a coach can have over a young athlete was seen in the case of Laure Manaudou. In an article in the journal *Swimming Times*, Lord (2005) tells the story of Laure who, in Athens, was the first French woman to win an Olympic swimming title. At the age of fourteen, Laure left her small village in France to go and live with her coach. At the age of eighteen (the age at which young people legally become of age in France) she moved into her own apartment. Her mother notes:

> We never see her. Her weekends are as busy as her weeks are and she's living 500km away from us but we're getting used to it. It's been three years since she left home. Generally, we're taking the week of the French nationals off to see her but we've also got two sons, aged 14 and 19 who also swim (cited in Lord 2005, p. 27).

Later the mother defends Laure's coach stating that:

> In order to reach a high level, you have to make concessions. That's all this is about. If you are not willing to make this effort, you should stay at the regional, local level (cited in Lord, 2005 p.27).

However, the French Newspaper *Le Monde*, contacted a child psychiatrist and sports doctor who stated that Manadou had been 'robbed of her childhood' (Lord, 2005 p.27) and urged that her parents resumed a parenting role. It would appear that in some cases parents are supportive of their talented children's unconventional and, what may appear to others as socially unacceptable, behaviour.

According to Lashuk (1992), conflict may arise between coach and athlete when socialisation of the athletes into a 'win at all costs' situation is so rapid that performers are subject to high skill demands before they can really enjoy the fun of participation in what he terms the 'Romance' stage: the period when children are first introduced to a sporting activity. If, at this stage, the coach had the true interest of the athlete at heart the programmes would be organised and administered with the sole purpose of developing the athlete (Lashuk, 1992). Smith (1986) when giving an account of her own son's tennis career also emphasises the problems of the 'win at all costs' philosophy and stresses the need to consider future potential rather than pushing the young player to achieve winning results. Often though, the need to be in control and display a more autocratic style of coaching appears to be fairly common in many sporting contexts particularly when dealing with young elite athletes (see Cushions, 2003; Luiukkonen, 1999; De Martelaer et al., 1999). In fact in some contexts this is the type of coaching style that is expected by the young athlete. De Martelaer et al (1999) when investigating a swimming programme in Flemish swimming clubs found that the swimmers saw the coach as the central figure and, although the younger swimmers disliked their coaches yelling at them, they expected them to be strict but friendly. In a second study using the Sport Interpersonal Relationship Questionnaire: Athlete-Coach, De Martelaer et al (1999) found similar results with the more committed swimmers whose descriptions of their coach tended to correspond to the image of the "benevolent autocrat" (Vanden Auweele, 1999 p.87).

In contrast to this 'win at all costs' mentality, coaching courses and literature on effective coaching tend to refer to the need for a developmental philosophy towards coaching and coaches often perceive that this is, indeed, their style of coaching (Luiukkonen, 1999). However, as Luiukkonen discovered, how the coaches perceive their behaviour may well be different from how they are perceived by the athletes. In turn, the athlete's perception of the coach's behaviour may well be affected by their relationship. Kenow and Williams (1999) found that if a positive relationship

existed alongside a reduction in their cognitive anxiety then the athlete had a more positive perception of the coach's behaviour.

As well has having a perception of their own behaviour, coaches will have expectations and opinions with regard to their athletes' abilities and potential. According to Côté et al. (1995), a coach acquires a mental model of his or her athletes, the results of which may affect the coaching process. This mental model will include goals and expectations, which may or may not be the same as those of the parents or the athletes themselves. In turn, this mental model may well be affected by the coach's own philosophy or coaching style and, therefore, impact on the coaching process and ultimately on the coach-athlete relationship. Certainly, there is some evidence in the literature to support the idea that the more favourably athletes are perceived in terms of ability and potential by their coach the more encouragement they receive or perceive that they receive (Curtner-Smith, Wallace and Wang, 1999; Solomon, DiMarco, Ohlson and Reece, 1998; Solomon, Golden, Ciapponi and Martin, 1998; Solomon, Striegel, Elio, Heon and Maas 1996) and the greater respect they have for the coach (De Martelaer et al., 1999). How athletes are viewed by their coach may well then have an effect on the relationship that is established and ultimately perhaps on the success of that athlete.

A great deal of the research in coach-athlete relationships tends to centre around the creation of the right motivational climate for effective coaching based on the ideas posited by achievement goal theory (Serpa, 1999). This theory suggests that individuals will take part in achievement contexts for the main purpose of demonstrating competence or ability. This competence is construed in accordance with the goal orientations of either task or ego, which the individual has adopted (Carr and Weigand, 2001). Task oriented athletes focus on personal achievement, improvement and mastery of the task as indicators of their competence whilst ego oriented individuals use the concept of ability in terms of other people's achievements (Nicholls, 1992). As a result of their specific orientation individuals will react differently to different sporting events. Task orientation, tends to foster higher levels of

intrinsic motivation and enjoyment whilst ego orientation has been associated with higher levels of anxiety[5] (Carr and Weigand, 2001). As Walling and Duda (Undated) state, individuals that are high in task orientation will feel most successful when 'they exert effort and observe personal improvement in their skills' (p.2). They can lose a match but still feel good about what they have achieved in the performance itself, whereas ego-oriented individuals are likely to judge their success using normative standards. Highly ego-oriented individuals define their sporting experience through the outcome without regard for the quality of their play. Success is seen in terms of winning whilst a loss 'ensures feelings of failure' (p.2). However, as Walling and Duda point out, it would be wrong to assume that first, athletes are either task or ego-oriented, they are at some level both of these and secondly, that task-oriented athletes do not care about winning. They have invested a great deal of time and effort in their sport but they will use feedback about their performance to judge their improvement or lack of it. The difference between the two orientations is not about winning *per se* but about why they wish to win. In his study of fourteen year old male soccer players, Luiukkonen (1999) found that on the whole the players seemed to enjoy the game play practices especially, but the type of climate provided by the coaching context had an effect as did the players' own perception of competence. Enjoyment was found to be above average for both ego and task oriented players if perceived competence was high. However, if the mastery climate dominated then enjoyment was above average for both low and high perceived competence groups. These findings tend to be supported by Walling and Duda (undated) who contend that research has shown that those high in task orientation are more likely to have fun when they play sport, enjoy hard work and to seek greater challenges whilst taking part. They are also more likely to participate for reasons such as skill development and interaction with others, rather than any desire for social recognition

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[5] It is believed that between the ages of 6 – 11 years, the ability to distinguish the concepts of ability, effort, luck and task difficulty becomes greater. Young children or those less cognitively developed may well equate ability with effort but as they get older they begin to distinguish between these concepts as reasons for their achievement outcomes (Harwood and Swain, 2001).

Evidence from research in physical education (PE) carried out by Carr and Weigand (2001) suggests that influential others can have an effect on the goal orientation of young people. Children who experience high levels of task orientation for PE also perceive a greater learning-oriented climate from significant others – parents, teachers and peers. According to Carr and Weigand, it is unclear whether this is because young athletes' goal orientations influence the socialisation process or whether social variables themselves are instrumental in shaping the goal orientations. However, they contend that significant others, such as coaches, may influence the development of a young person's goal orientation and that research might benefit from interventions designed to manipulate the motivational climate. This view is similarly held by Walling and Duda (undated) who state that both parents and coaches can play a role in creating the right climate by assessing such factors as how they define success. They point out that sometimes there may be a more ego-oriented climate at home causing stress on the athlete. Although unable to change the home climate, the coach can support the athlete and educate both parent and athlete that there is more than one way to view sport and gain satisfaction from athletic participation. Parents too should support the coach and try to help children focus on the process rather than the outcome.

Closely related to the work on goal orientations is the research carried out by S. Biddle (1999) looking at, what he terms, sport emotion. How an athlete attributes his or her success or failure will have an effect on the emotional response to that success or failure. In order to have a positive relationship with the athlete, the coach needs to understand these attributions and, if possible, change them so as to create a more positive psychological response to failure. For example, if the athlete sees failure as the result of a lack of ability, then there is a belief that it is unlikely that success can be achieved in the near future. If this attribution of lack of ability was changed to wrong strategy then motivation will increase and there will be more positive emotion over the lack of success. Although underdeveloped in terms of research, Biddle (1999) suggests that it would aid understanding of the coach-athlete relationship if their interactions were

viewed from an attributional perspective. Like Carr and Weigand (2001), Biddle (1999) suggests that there is scope for coach intervention and the modification of excessively high ego goals in order to create an environment where task orientation is developed and encouraged. Coaches must also be sure not to put too much pressure on their athletes, particularly when emphasising the importance of a particular event. Such pressure and stress coming from coaches and others may well have a negative effect on both task and ego involvement (Harwood and Swain, 2001).

For positive relationships to develop, the coach has to understand the goals and needs of the athletes, what is important to them, what they want to achieve. Athletes will come to a sporting environment with many different and varied goals and if these goals and needs are not met then stress may occur (Passer, 1982). Similarly factors like the position played, the reactions of others (the coach, other athletes and spectators) may all be potentially stressful. Even the sport itself may have an effect with individual sports tending to be more stressful than team sports (Passer, 1982). The coach must be aware of these factors in order to try to alleviate the stress that the young athlete might be experiencing.

In Côté et al.'s (1995) model, amongst the peripheral factors that impact on the overall coaching process and ultimately on the coach-athlete relationships are the coach's characteristics such as experience, knowledge, gender and coaching style. These will now be discussed.

2.2.3.1 Knowledge and experience of coach
As one would expect, coaching texts stress the need for coaches to be knowledgeable about all areas of their sport: tactical, technical, physiological, psychological and biomechanical, *inter alia*, in order for them to plan, manage and evaluate the coaching process (Galvin and Ledger, 1998). Although there are numerous opportunities for coaches to obtain qualifications and knowledge through courses run by both the National

Governing Bodies and Sportscoach UK[6], Hardy (1986) believes that an area of coach education that is often lacking is that of how children learn. This lack of knowledge leads to children receiving too much information and feedback. They are unable to cope with this information overload, and experience additional and often unacceptable levels of stress as a result. Yet in swimming as in other sports, coaches come to the coaching process with a great deal of variation in terms of experience and qualifications. Swimming is an 'amateur' sport and as such many of the coaches at club level are not paid, nor, it would seem, are many qualified (De Martelaer et al., 1999).

2.2.3.2 Gender of coach

The gender of the coach is another area that research has found to impact on the coaching process. The number of male sport coaches significantly outweighs that of female coaches in most sports (De Martelaer et al., 1999). Some studies with regard to the athlete-coach relationship have looked at athletes' feelings towards male and female coaches and often the traditional view of a coach appears to be a male benevolent autocrat (see Vanden Auweele, 1999, p.87). Fasting and Pfister (2000) note how many people assume that the top-level coaches are men, how women coaches are not taken seriously and how this view is often 'mirrored in the literature' (p.92). Drawing on the work of Willmann and Zipprich (1995), they quote E. Hahn who states that 'the picture of a good coach is like that of a father. He is strict, powerful, masculine and demands respect' (Willmann and Zipprich, 1985 p. 108). Certainly research carried out in the 1980s and 1990s tends to indicate that athletes prefer to be coached by a male as opposed to a female (George, 1989; LeDrew and Zimmerman, 1994; Parkhouse and Williams, 1986; Patriksson and Eriksson, 1990; Sabcock and Kleinfelter, 1987). More recently Fasting and Pfister (2000) interviewed elite female soccer players in four different countries. They found that there were no doubts by the players in all four countries about the coaching competence of both male and female coaches. However, female players felt that male

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[6] SportscoachUK is a charitable organisation and the lead agency for the development of the UK coaching system.

coaches were more aggressive, whereas the female coaches were seen as having more empathy in relation to both the team and individual communication. Also, some of these players felt that they were not being taken seriously by male coaches. These results may be due to the fact that soccer is a very male dominated game and the male coaches had only previously had experience in coaching male players.

2.2.3.3 Coaching style of coach

As we have seen, young athletes and parents have certain expectations about a coach's behaviour. If this behaviour does not correspond to these expectations then conflict is likely to occur (Lyle, 1999). However, a coach's behaviour or coaching style may well be affected by a number of factors including the coach's philosophy together with his or her personality and the context in which the coaching takes place.

Much of the literature on coaching styles is based upon work done in the education setting. Both within the teaching and coaching literature, style and strategy are two terms that are often treated synonymously but not all authors believe that these terms apply to the same thing. According to Mawer (1995), personality is not part of the teaching 'style' as defined by Mosston and Ashworth (1986). These two authors devised an atonomy of styles, which varied according to the degree of the athletes' control of and responsibility in the coaching process. At one end of the spectrum is the autocratic 'command style' where the teacher makes all the decisions through to the more democratic styles where the pupil has almost total control over his or her own programme and the coach's role is very much that of a mentor. However, in contrast, Siedentop (1991) does not consider that a style can be separated from a teacher's personality. For him, teaching 'style' refers to the instructional and managerial climate for teaching and is clearly obvious from the teacher's interactions. He goes on to state that students

> experience a teacher's 'style' through the interactions the teacher has with the class as a whole, with groups and with individuals. The blending of these many interactional features produces each teacher's distinctive style. Terms such as 'warm', 'caring',

'businesslike', 'demanding', 'aloof', and the like are used to describe teaching styles. (p. 228)

Similarly, for Lyle (1999) within a coaching context, the coach's philosophy or ethos cannot be separated from the coaching 'style'. For him a coaching style can be described as 'a descriptive categorization of the individual's aggregated coaching behaviours' (p. 27). Perhaps the simplest approach is to consider the term strategy to refer to method the teacher or coach adopts in order to achieve a particular goal and a teaching or coaching 'style' as a combination of the teaching/coaching strategy used and the personality of the teacher or coach. Within this definition, Mosston and Ashworth's (1986) teaching styles would better be referred to as teaching strategies.

Using this definition then, the context in which the coaching takes place may well mean that the coach will vary the strategy used depending on factors such as age and experience of the athlete, period within the training cycle, constraints of time and money and the overall goals to be achieved. Underpinning the strategies are the coach's philosophy and beliefs towards coaching and because of this it is unlikely that the style will totally change no matter what strategy is being employed. However, if the coach does change his style, then, it is unlikely that he or she will feel relaxed and, as a result, may experience role conflict[7]. This then is a bi-directional process whereby the coaching style adopted may affect the relationships with both the athlete and the parents but at the same time these relationship may well impact upon the coaching style used.

Coaches and athletes, then, do not enter a coaching situation in isolation; they will have certain values and these values will influence their own behaviour as well as their expectations of how others should behave. These values, through which individuals evaluate their experiences and also the behaviour of others, will be based on their life values and are more resistant to change than say opinions and beliefs. Coaching practice is then

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[7] See Camacho, A. S. and Brown, D. (2005) and (2008) for a critical examination of what they see as a 'paradigm shift' of the Spectrum's conceptual foundations in later versions of Mosston's text 'Teaching Physical Education'.

a reflection of these values held by the coach some of these will be shared with the athlete but others will not (Lyle 2002). The literature therefore suggests that the coach needs to ensure that problems and conflicts are resolved. This is particularly important if the athlete is experiencing other problems and the sum total of these conflicts and difficulties begins to outweigh the benefits of taking part in sport (Johns and Lindner, 1992) and as a consequence the athlete quits the sport (Bußmann and Alfermann, 1994).

Finally, it is impossible to discuss coach-athlete relationships without addressing the issue of child abuse. This last section on the coach-athlete relationship, therefore discusses this issue and the implications of recent child protection policies by the UK National Governing Bodies.

2.2.3.4 Child Abuse

Although child abuse may refer to mental, physical or sexual abuse, it is the latter form that hits the headlines and has been the subject of most of the research in this area. Just as coaches, particularly those who adopt a humanistic approach, can become very attached to their athletes in terms of caring for their welfare, elite athletes too can develop feelings of 'Closeness'[8] such as trust and respect for their coach (Jowett and Cockerill, 2002). As Jowett and Cockerill explain, this bond between the coach and athlete can play an important part in establishing positive and effective relationships in elite athletes. The negative side of what Jowett (2001) calls the construct of 'Closeness' is when athletes feel that the coach does not care for their well-being. Certainly elite athletes and coaches spend a large amount of time together and it may not be surprising that coaches are seen as father or mother figures. According to McQuade (2001), it is the coach's responsibility to establish the boundaries between a working professional relationship and friendship. Sadly though there are occasions when the coach-athlete relationship steps outside what is acceptable and, in extreme

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[8] According to Jowett and Cockerill (2002), 'Closeness' is a construct that 'concerns the emotional tone of the coach-athlete relationship and it reflects the extent to which coaches and athletes are connected, or the depth of their attachments' (p.19).

cases, there are incidences of child abuse, both physical and sexual. Wishnietsky and Felder (1989) report that a 1987 study revealed that 2.1% of secondary school coaches in North Carolina had been disciplined for improper relationships with students. According to Wishnietsky and Felder this percentage was in fact lower than many school administrators had expected and begs the question of whether there were unreported episodes as well as under-reporting of incidences.

Before the conviction of the Olympic swimming coach Paul Hickson in 1995 for rape, there was strong opposition to the concept of child abuse in sport (Brackenridge, 1998a). Sport was then, and still is, often seen as a source of enhancing social and personal values. Certainly, in England, in the 1990s the Conservative Government endeavoured to reconstruct and restore through the curriculum particular versions of Englishness and citizenship, appealing to an imagery of how Britain used to be (Evans and Penney, 1994). This was no more apparent than in the high emphasis placed on competitive games within the National Curriculum for PE (see DNH, Raising the Game, 1995). The emphasis continued under the Labour government, with certain forms of sport continuing to symbolise, real or imaginary, the characteristics necessary in being a 'good' citizen. However, in 1995 there was a recognition by the British Association of National Coaches that there was a need to address harassment and abuse and a draft code of ethics for coaches was presented at their annual conference (Brackenridge, 1998a).

As a result of this and the work of the then National Coaching Foundation[9], the various national governing bodies of sport have adopted Child Protection Policies. Nevertheless, cases of abuse are still emerging. The results of an investigation of more than ninety sets of parents of elite athletes (Brackenridge, 1998b) tended to indicate that in many cases female athletes were coached by men. Brackenridge also noted that it is children of those parents who Hellstedt (1987) labelled 'under-involved' that appeared

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[9] Now SportscoachUK

to be most at risk. Whilst the parents demonstrated high levels of interest, few watched training sessions. They knew that other adults or coaches were around when their child was being coached but were relatively ignorant of what went on at these times. Brackenridge confirms that those most vulnerable to the process of grooming were those athletes who felt distant from parents or who had little supervision at home. Such young people, therefore, looked to the coach as a parent substitute and, because sport was so important to them, the dependence on the coach tended to increase. At the same time, the perpetrators of abuse might threaten to end the sports relationship if the athlete did not cooperate (Cense and Brackenridge, 2001).

Brackenridge's (1998b) study also revealed different perspectives from mothers and fathers. Fathers were more concerned about their daughters having lifts with the coach and although it was often the father who was more likely to introduce the child to sport, the mother was ultimately more likely to become more involved. As Brackenridge notes, there may be limits to the 1998 study but the results do seem to indicate that the potential for abuse would appear to be present where there is such a high dependence on another person. This, as we have seen, may certainly be the case in swimming. Research dating back to 1974 by Eva Balaza, cited in Fuoss and Troppman (1981) showed that female athletes who competed in the 1972 Olympic Games expressed emotional involvement and enthusiasm, devotion, and gratitude towards their coaches who they viewed as father figures, teachers and friends. Each athlete who expressed these feelings had a very close relationship with their father and this seemed to be transferred to the coach. All of the female athletes, except two, had male coaches but most athletes agreed that such feelings might be felt towards a female coach if a girl and her mother had a close relationship, then the coach would present a 'mother figure' to the athlete and this would help their relationship.

In recent years several swimming coaches have been found guilty of sexual abuse of their swimmers but according to Hart (2002) the Amateur

Swimming Association (ASA) has been committed to solving the problem and opened its case files to the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC). Seventy-eight actual cases of abuse from the ASA case files were examined by the NSPCC and, in October 2002, they published a report entitled 'In at the Deep End'. In this Report some patterns of abusive behaviour were reported:

- Sex abuse is carried out almost exclusively by men.
- Physical abuse is carried out normally by someone known to have a violent temper.
- Emotional bullying is often tolerated by parents and clubs if it brings about success in competition.

The Report also notes that sexual abuse in swimming is no more extensive than in other sports where there are a large percentage of young participants and points to the fact that the reason several swimming coaches have been prosecuted is a direct result of the child protection measures undertaken by the ASA (cited in Hart, 2002).

Although much of the publicity surrounding child abuse deals with sexual abuse there is also evidence of physical, psychological and emotional abuse. Hart (2002) quotes David Sparkes, the ASA Chief Executive, who notes that by far the most common allegations investigated by the ASA concern physical, verbal and emotional bullying. Sparkes adds that in some respects the sexual allegations are easier to deal with as they are passed on to the police, whereas what he terms 'the grey areas' (p.21) are more difficult.

Abusive behaviour is not limited to the coach but, within swimming, parents too have been accused of physically assaulting and verbally abusing their children. Indeed several swimming clubs now have a code of conduct, which includes advice on parental behaviour. This would seem to be a clear indication of the intensity of feeling and emotion that can surround age-

group swimming. However, before looking further into the parent-athlete relationship, the coach-parent relationship will be discussed.

2.2.4 Coach-parent relationship

Ask many coaches to identify their main irritation and they will often tell you that 'The kids are fine, it's just their parents that are the problem' (Gervis and Brierley, 1999, p.142).

Just as the coach has a variety of roles to play within the coaching process so does the parent. Sometimes, particularly within the context of amateur sport where both parent and coach can identify similar roles, conflict may occur. Evidence suggests that conflicts occur when parents feel it is their responsibility to ensure that their child works hard and do their best. An example of this is given by Cook and Cole (2001) who note incidences where parents and coaches alike take the game too seriously and become involved in verbal and physical fights over calls made on the field or court. As a result of such behaviour, parents are often portrayed as being troublesome in the sporting context (Engh, 1999; Ryan, 1995).

Few would argue with Vanden Auweele (1999) and Smoll and Cumming (2006) who stress the importance of good coach-parents interpersonal relationships if the quality of the athlete's sporting experience is to be improved. If there is conflict then the energy required to deal with it is diverted from the athlete leading to his or her lack of motivation and positive involvement in competitive sport. As with other researchers (Stambulova, 1999; Luiukkonen, 1999), the coaches in Vanden Auweele's (1999) study tended to adopt an autocratic style of coaching and the higher the athletes competence the more authoritatively the coach behaved and the more negatively he perceived the parents. This could sometimes be a problem for mothers who preferred a democratic open style of coaching. Data from Vanden Auweele's research also revealed that the coach who was working with high level athletes felt most comfortable in his or her interpersonal relationships with parents who were male, middle aged, experienced, committed to his training and had the attitude that winning was the only thing. Whilst the parents feeling the most comfortable in their interpersonal

relationships with the coach, were those who were not active in sport, had frequent contact with the coach and had children who had good relationships with their coach. Interestingly, the more contact parents had with the coach the better the co-operative behaviour. This was somewhat in contrast with the rather negative but often common view of some parents as interfering and threatening (see Engh, 1999).

An example of this rather negative view of parents can be seen in the research carried out by Strean (1995). Strean contends that the 'social networks involving children, coaches and parents can be seen as embedded within the larger perspective of community, society and culture (p.24). He argues that changing the environment in which youth sport takes place may be effective in changing individual behaviours. According to Strean, comprehending the role of parent-coach interactions is crucial to understanding the tensions that may exist in youth sport. In his paper, he identifies four factors to demonstrate how aspects of the developmental context of youth sport are significant and can be changed to promote desired outcome. The factors are parents, spectator location, rules and time and Strean concludes that of these four factors, it is the parents who may be the most significant. Strean cites an age-group swimming coach in his study who felt that 90 per cent of parents were solid and supportive, but the 'balcony crew' (p.28) at the swimming club often sought to affect various parts of the programme. Eventually a 'coup' by such a group of parents led to the dismissal of the Chief Coach. Strean concludes that separating parents and coaches could be effective in improving relationships, but he also emphasises the concept that good communications with parents is vital in order to have a positive relationship. Although some texts on coach-parent relationships (see Byrne, 1993) advocate the need for regular meetings with parents to keep them informed and to aid their understanding of the coaching process, Strean found evidence to suggest that the less parents knew about the sport their child participates in the less they were inclined to intervene.

Much of what has been learnt in coaching comes from educational research and Hargreaves (1999), in addressing some of the issues around the relationship between parents and teachers, discusses very similar debates to those found in the coaching context. The same uneasy existence is often in evidence and Hargreaves puts forward a number of reasons for this that could equally apply to the coaching situation. This parent-teacher conflict may be more evident now as teachers become more accountable and parents become more aware of their educational rights, together with the pressures and competitive nature of league tables. Teachers, like coaches, are being judged on results. Also, as parents too are under more time pressures in our society today, teachers are taking on more of the responsibilities of the parents, and pupils at the same time are assuming less personal responsibility. It seems also that parents are less likely to be involved in school and it maybe that coaching research can again learn from the educational setting to understand some of the reasons for conflict that may arise in coaches' relationships with both athletes and their parents.

The importance of the coach's relationships with the other members of the sporting triangle cannot be underestimated. However, also within the coaching process and specifically within the sporting triangle are other relationships that, as has been noted, will have a significant impact upon the coaching process; not least of these is the inter-relationship between the athletes and their parents. However, in order to understand the relationships, we must first establish the role that parent's play within the sporting career of their young athletes.

2.2.5 Roles and relationships – Parents and athletes

2.2.5.1 Parental Roles

> The subject of the parent's role is particularly pertinent to contemporary youth sport, since the child's involvement in, and enjoyment of, his or her sporting activity goes beyond the responsibility of the coach. In many cases the support and interest of one or both parents is crucial to the child's participation (Rowley, 1986 p. 92).

The above quote taken from a chapter in Gleeson's (1986) book 'The Growing Child in Competitive Sport' sums up the importance of the parent's role, yet Rowley (1986) goes on to explain that there is perhaps a need to educate parents into this role. The reasons he gives for this are twofold. First, to prevent the negative stereotypes of parental behaviour and secondly, to maintain the parent's support for their child, which would be lost if they were alienated from the sporting environment in order to protect the child.

Both athletes and their parents will adopt a variety of roles as they progress through a competitive sporting career. How athletes see their role may well depend on the predominant coaching style of their coach, the sporting ethos of both the parents and the coach, the coaching organisation of which they are part, and the social interaction with other members of their sporting group. Although having an important role to play in the coaching process, parents are sometimes uncertain of the exact nature of their role (Rowley, 1986). According to Rowley (1986) there are two primary parental roles. The first being socialisation into the ethos associated with sports participation, and the second being to support the young athlete.

These two important roles are also noted by Côté (1999) who investigated the influence of the family on talented athletes throughout their development. Following on from the work done by Bloom (1985), he identifies three phases of participation from early childhood to late adolescence and names them: the sampling years, the specializing years and the investment years. During each of these phases, family roles change. The role of the parent progresses from that of leadership in the sampling years, when they initiate the interest in sport and allow their child to sample a wide range of activities. The importance of the role of the family at this stage can be summed up by Hellstedt (1995) who states that the family is 'the most important influence in an athlete's life' (p.117). During the early stages of his or her athletic career, the athlete is happy to adopt the role of follower and be led by his or her parents (Hogg, 1995) as he or she is socialised into the mores of competitive sport by both the parent and the

coach (Coakley, 1987). As the athlete progresses through his or her career into the 'Specialising' years (see Côté, 1999; Côté and Hay, 2002), the parents' role may change to that of committed supporters as the child begins to limit the number of sports in which he or she is involved. Finally, parents and sometimes other members of the family also make sacrifices as they adopt the role of follower/supporter in the 'Investment' years to allow the child to train under optimal conditions (Kay, 2000). In turn, as the athlete develops, his or her role evolves and later on in their careers they may seek greater independence and strive to take a larger role in deciding their sporting destiny (Jowett, 2003; Stambulova, 1999).

In his own research, Rowley (1986) interviewed forty parents with children participating in several different sports at an elite level. He found that parents were very important in initiating their child's involvement in sport although not necessarily for the same reasons. He divided these reasons into four categories namely:

- Comments by others – other people noting a particular skill or attribute and suggesting that the child should take part in sport.
- Parent-motivated – no skill factor obviously present in the child.
- Parent-motivated – skill factor present
- Child self-motivated – usually the adolescent athlete, who had actually initiated their own involvement but who, subsequently, has a great deal of support from their parent. The child may also been self-motivated because other members of the family play sport.

Research tends to support the notion that parents are the main influential others in introducing children to sporting activities, particularly in early and middle childhood (Jambor, 1999; Jowett and Cockerill, 2002; Lewko and Greendorfer, 1988; Wold and Anderssen, 1992; Woolgar and Power, 1993). However, the bi-directional nature of the parent/athlete relationship has also been noted in terms of socialisation into sport. Studies carried out by Snyder and Purdy (1982) and the Australian Sports Commission (1991), both cited in Kirk, O'Connor, Carlson, Burke, Davis and Glover (1997)

provide evidence of reverse socialisation. In a more recent study Barber, Sukhi and White (1999) also found that, in several youth sports, parents were involved because of their children's involvement rather than the other way round, yet they note that this bi-directional nature of sport socialisation is seldom recognised.

Although most authors would agree that parents are prime movers in the socialising process, there is some contradiction when it comes to looking at the effect of the parents' own sporting background. In Rowley's (1986) study, parents had often been involved in some kind of sporting activity, However, Jambor (1999) found that there was no evidence to suggest that parental support in a particular sport (soccer) differed in respect to parental participation in that sport. Similarly, Purdy (1982) found parents of competitive swimmers were no more active in sports themselves than parents of recreational swimmers, but these parents expected more of their children. Contradicting earlier research by Wold and Anderssen (1992), both Purdy et al.'s and Jambor's study suggest that parents although supportive may not necessarily be role models in terms of sport participation, rather socialisation of children into sport is more complex. Jambor's (1999) research suggests that it has to do with the perceived benefits of the activity, with parents of participating children perceiving the benefits more than those of non-participating parents. Although this research may be affected by the fact that soccer is a relatively new sport in the USA, Jambor concludes that not all parents of children in soccer programmes are alike and increased understanding of parents as role models and socialisers may help providers of youth sport devise programmes that will meet the needs of parents and child.

Whether parents actively encourage sporting participation in their children will relate to their views about the role of sport and leisure activities within the context of the family. Work done by Harrington (2003) indicates that lower income families in the Australia view family leisure activities as a means of keeping the family together and for some there was a resentment if the child's sport meant that a member was away from the family during

their leisure time. For the majority of children from these families, sports participation took place at the school. Although middle income families also felt that participation in sport was a constraint on family leisure time, they valued sport and leisure activities for the benefits they perceived that it brought such as success and values associated with good citizenship. Children from these families were more likely to attend clubs and be supported by their parents. This data may be particularly pertinent when looking at parental over and under involvement as highlighted by Hellstedt's (1987) model of coach-athlete-parent relationships. The reasons for under-involvement may be complex and not always through lack of interest but financial and time constraints may also play a role.

A study by Rosenthal (1991) found that there were parental differences with regards to how much time and money should be invested in a young athlete's training. These contrasting views were not just between families but also within families and could lead to disagreement and conflict, something which could ultimately affect the young person's sporting performance (cited in Kirk et al., 1997). Kirk et al.'s (1997) own study in Australia, looking at the time commitment of parents found that not only did parents give up a large amount of time supporting their children physically in terms of transporting, waiting and spectating, they also provided emotional support and encouragement. Kirk et al. (1997) also note that parents made a substantial contribution to youth sport by taking on administrative, coaching and other voluntary roles.

In terms of sports policy and provision, Kay (2003) notes that it is important to appreciate the changes that are happening within the family structure. It is common now for both parents to be employed and also higher income families, traditionally those who have had the resources to support their talented young offspring, now tend to work longer hours. These factors may well put constraints on the time that such families can contribute to the support of their talented young off-spring. Other influences of the changing role of the family have been noted by Coakley (2006) who states that in today's society, at least in the USA, children's success in sport is often

directly attributed to parents, especially fathers, and parents of top level athletes are often questioned with a view to establishing what they have done in order to create their athletic protégées. In an attempt to explain this Coakley uses Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* and points to the changes both within society's view of sport, particularly youth sport and the changing nature of the family. Within society generally, but more especially within the upper and middle class families, parents are expected to be accountable for their children's whereabouts. Sport, therefore, provides a safe predictable environment where accomplishments can be assessed. At the same time, it provides a vehicle through which fathers can fulfil the growing pressures within society to take a more active role within the family. Similarly, Harrington (2006) within an Australian context found that fathers felt that sharing sport with their children, even if only as a spectator, provided a means of bonding, communicating and supporting their children. Most fathers in this study also felt that, through sport, their children learned 'life lessons and prepared them for adulthood' (p.179). Harrington also notes the desire of the fathers in her study to be part of their children's sporting experiences showed their 'emotional connection' (p. 181) with their children. Indeed she states that the fathers are thus 'invested in their children's lives' (p.181).

Finally, within this context of competitive sport it must also be remembered that the athlete and the parent have a unique relationship. It is impossible to totally isolate their roles within the coaching process from their role or roles within the family, and the culture, needs and expectations that these young people bring to the sporting environment must be recognised. This is perhaps particularly pertinent when the parent is also the coach and such relationships will be discussed in the next section.

2.2.6 Parent-athlete relationship

Playing to win has dangerously eclipsed playing for fun at the youngest levels of organized sports thanks to parents who failed to fulfil their own dreams of grandeur on the playing field. (Katherine Bryn, 1974, writing in Science Digest, cited in Martens, 1982 p. 204).

The parent-athlete relationship is very important in the talent development process. Indeed Wylleman et al (1997) found that 'the role of the parents was found to be strongly associated with athletes' level of enjoyment, perceived level of performance, and satisfaction with athlete-coach relationship (p.762). Other studies support this and have shown that parents have a great influence upon their children's sporting involvement (Lewko and Greendorfer, 1988; Weiss and Hayashi, 1995) especially fathers who have themselves been actively involved in sport (Duncan, 1997; Lewko and Ewing, 1980). In addition a study by Bloom (1995) indicated that successful young tennis players and swimmers had parents who exhibited a high degree of involvement in their child's activities and Wylleman et al.'s (1997) data revealed the importance attached by talented young athletes to the emotional support provided by adults, especially their parents.

However, one is only too aware of reports in the media of parents being banned from sporting events because of their unruly behaviour. Negative parental behaviours may lead to poor sport performance, competitive stress and ultimately drop out of sport (Petlichkoff, 1994), and literature abounds with tales of stress placed upon young athletes as they begin to feel the pressures of their parent's expectations and goals (Donnelly, 1983; Ryan, 1995; Scanlan, 1982). According to Kidman and Hanrahan (1997) this stress may take a variety of forms:

- guilt pressure when goals are not achieved;
- financial/investment pressure and sacrifice pressure where the parents claim to have invested large amounts of time or money into their child's sport;
- tension pressure when parents assume that pressure is good for the child;
- 'living through their child' pressure where failure of the parent's sporting goals result in their wanting the child to do it for them;
- family identity pressure, which comes from having a family of high performing athletes;

- self-worth pressure where the child only feels they are loved or have self-worth if they succeed in sport.

Smoll and Cumming (2006) note that all parents, to some extent, want the best for their children, but there are times when parents 'begin to define their own self-worth in terms of their son's and daughter's successes or failures' (p.195). Through this process, which is labelled the 'reversed-dependency trap' the parents themselves become the 'winners' or the 'losers' and the pressure on the child to achieve can be immense. Such pressure put on young people to succeed may lead to competitive trait anxiety, which is a personality disposition that reflects the tendency to perceive competitive sport situations as threatening, resulting in poorer performances and ultimately a less enjoyable sporting experience (Scanlan and Lewthwaite, 1988).

Lee and MacLean (1997) found that the strongest source of pressure for children was in parents' behaviour that directs and controls their sporting experience. Taken to extremes this stress can be devastating as was the case with Dominique Moceanu, a young American gymnast, who sought to divorce her parents claiming that they had stolen her childhood by subjecting her to extreme pressure (Gervis and Brierley, 1999). Comments made by parents whilst watching their children participate in sporting activities can also cause stress. Kidman, McKenzie and Mckenzie (1999) observed approximately 250 parents during 147 games/matches from seven different team sports. Whilst they found that most of the parental comments were positive, 34.5 per cent were negative with the majority of these being of a corrective nature. Results indicated that how children perceived these comments seemed to be the factor that most likely affected their motivation and stress levels, as well as their fun and enjoyment in the game. Similarly, Scanlan and Lewthwaite (1988) when looking at young wrestlers found that those boys who perceived that their parents and their coaches were more satisfied with their season's performance experienced more enjoyment than those with less positive perceptions.

By contrast to these rather negative views of parental involvement, research evidence also suggests that parents support is vital to youngsters continued participation in sport where not only parents but also other family members are prepared to make sacrifices (Coakley, 2001; Duncan 1997; Hemery, 1986; Kay, 2000). In addition, rather than causing stress parental support can help to moderate the effects of the stress on the psychological health of the athlete (Van Yperen, 1995; Wylleman et al., 1997). When looking at young soccer players in a prestigious soccer school, Van Yperen (1995) found that a high estimated chance of dismissal was accompanied by poor performance when there was no perceived availability of parental support.

Lee and MacLean (1997) suggest that the contradiction in the literature with regards to supportive and pushy parents may be explained by the fact that many of the studies investigating parental involvement deal with athletes who have made it to the top of their career. Often, in this situation, the parent is very supportive and prepared to make sacrifices, but perhaps this would not be the case if those athletes investigated had either dropped out at an early age or not successfully transferred from junior to senior ranks. This point is supported somewhat by research looking at how children perceive their parents' behaviour and how much they want their parents to support their sporting involvement (Wood and Abernethy, 1991). This study of elite Australian and US swimmers and non-elite Australian swimmers revealed that although non-elite swimmers reported fewer parental actions capable of inducing pressure, they perceived less supportive behaviours from their parents. It may be that parents of non-elite young athletes are less inclined to become involved and, therefore, are less supportive, but also less likely to cause stress.

The coaches of young elite tennis players in Gould and Lauer's (2004) study stated that amongst the most demanding parents tended to be those who expected a return for the vast amount of money that had been spent. Similarly those who became involved in coaching their own child were problematic. There was some disagreement, however, between the focus groups in this study with respect to those parents who had themselves

played tennis. One focus group felt that those who did not play tennis were more of a problem because they were not educated in the game whereas another group felt that parents who had played to a relatively low level, 'the Mickey Mouse level, they're the worst' (cited in Gould and Lauer, 2004 p. 35).

It would appear that certain parental behaviours may cause more stress than others. The goal orientations of the parents and the stress placed by them on either process goals or outcome goals may have an effect on the child's own goal orientation. Around the time of competition, parents are the ones most likely to be with the athlete and the messages conveyed by them to the child, either directly or indirectly, can result in shaping a range of adaptive and less adaptive motivational climates (Harwood and Swain, 2001, 2002). In Wood and Abernethy's (1991) study, parental actions reported by all the swimmers to be most pressure-inducing were those that resulted in a judgement being put on the swimmer's self worth. In line with this the most supportive types of parental behaviours outlined by the coaches in Gould and Lauer's study were those of unconditional love, emphasis on their child's total development and being unselfish and non demanding. Both Wood and Abernethy and Gould and Lauer's studies tend to suggest that the majority of elite swimmers and tennis players in their respective studies had very supportive parents who placed minimal pressure on their offspring. However, there were a few exceptions and Wood and Abernethy purport that there were enough exceptions reported to consider the 'over-involved parent' to be a 'problem worthy of addressing' (p.22) for that calibre of swimmer.

Like other amateur sports, swimming relies heavily on a volunteer base and it is not unusual for parents to become coaches themselves. Barber et al. (1999) investigated the effect of parent-coaches on participation motivation and anxiety state at competitions in a variety of youth sports. In contrast to what might be expected, results indicated that there were no significant differences in competitive state anxiety between the group coached by their parents and those who were not, with both groups reporting low cognitive

and somatic anxiety along with moderately high self-confidence scores. In agreement with other studies, they found that children participate in sport for a variety of reasons, with fun being the most important for both groups. In addition, results did not confirm that children's motives to compete were influenced by their parents. However, although both groups had similar ratings for the importance of participation motives, there was variation in the rankings. Parent-coached children rated challenge, chance to improve skills and teamwork in their top ten reasons whilst non-parent coached children rated learn new skills, get exercise and be physically fit as more important reasons. As Barber et al. (1999) observe, the difference between the two groups with regards to skill acquisition is interesting and may indicate that children coached by their parents perceive that they have the necessary skills but want to participate in an activity in order to improve and refine these skills. Finally, Barber et al. note that the fact that there was no significant difference between the participation motives of both groups in their study may be because many of these coaches were coaching because of their children's participation and thus their reasons for doing so were more influenced by their children than the other way round.

Other researchers have also examined the parent-athlete relationship when the parent was also the coach of the athlete. Jowett, Timson-Katchis and Adams' (2007) research on the dual role relationship of parent/coach-child/athlete stressed the importance of an understanding and negotiating of roles, so that the expectations and needs of each party were clear. They also noted that such relationships were more successful when there was a mutual dependency and an absence of perceived power and control.

In an earlier investigation of a 15 year old female athlete coached by her father, Jowett and Meek (2000) using the constructs of Closeness, Co-orientation and Complementarity found that, although overall the relationship was positive, a small proportion of data indicated relational conflict in all three of the constructs mentioned above. In agreement with other research looking at coach-athlete relationships in general, most of the conflict arose from the need of the athlete for independence. As Jowett and

Meek point out it may be the added dimension of the coach also being the father that led to higher expectations along with more control. However, it was clear from the interview that the 15 year old athlete was in sport (as perhaps she was in life generally) seeking more autonomy. Growing up and gaining independence is important in young people's lives and although fun and winning are important to young elite athletes, research done by Duncan (1997) indicated that one of the most compelling features of sport for the elite youngsters in his study was the opportunity to go away on trips without parents.

Finally, it does not appear to be just the amount of parental involvement, which puts stress on the young person: the style of that parental interaction will also affect the coping ability of the athlete (Gribble, Cowen, Whyman, Work, Wannon and Raoof, 1993; Lee and MacLean, 1997). Parents who interfere in the coaching process are often resented (Gould and Lauer, 2004). De Martelaer et al. (1999) when investigating whether a programme organised and guided by adults is problematic for the young swimmer found that swimmers resented parents who were either over-concerned and thus taking the fun out of sport or tended to interfere with training sessions. Lee and MacLean (1997) found that even when parents gave a large amount of praise and support, children felt stressed if it was accompanied by efforts to take control to an unacceptable level. It must be remembered though that different children can tolerate different degrees of direction from parents and some children in their study actually liked pressure and the feeling of being stretched. For example, the swimmers in De Martelaer et al.'s (1999) study would often compare their performances against others in their age-group in order to situate themselves within that group and for some of these swimmers competition was stressful whilst for others this was a desirable pressure.

This present study focuses on swimming where the interpersonal relationships within the coach-parent-athlete triangle are very complex and will depend on a number of variables. To help understand more clearly

these relationships within the swimming context it is necessary to understand the structure of age-group swimming in the UK.

2.3   The context of age-group swimming

> For some years I had been aware of an unusually high proportion of unhappy children in our sport, both at the top end of the scale and at club level. These swimmers were able to highlight the hours of tedious, routinised work, the anti-social training hours, which isolated them from normal friendships and the strenuous commitments demanded of today's swimmer... some, including seasoned, established internationals, worn down by years of on-going effort required to maintain a high degree of success, opted out in order to seek a more normal type of life. Their actions were mirrored at a lower level by dozens less successful swimmers, youngsters burnt out by the extreme requirements of contemporary competitive swimming. (Juba, 1986 p. 173)

The above quotation from Nick Juba, himself a swimming coach, echoes many of the concerns that surrounded swimming in the UK in the 1980s. Age-group swimming actually started in the UK in 1966. Initially the competition programme imitated the full Olympic programme but this was seen by many as being unsuitable for the young swimmer and, according to Juba (1986) lacking any real 'fun element', unlike the age-group programme in the United States. Gould, Horn and Weiss (1982, cited in Busby, 1997) studied the reasons for dropping out given by 50 swimmers aged 10 – 18 years and found that 'not much fun' was one of the most frequently cited motives. Traditionally swimming has required a large amount of training hours. A study of age-group swimming carried out by Watson (1984) found that one-quarter of the study trained 25-33 hours a week. Age was significantly associated with hours of training, whilst performance was marginally associated. As early as 1972, a Swimming Technique[10] survey revealed that nearly 50 per cent of the nationally ranked age group swimmers in the United States quit swimming within four years and one of the main reasons for quitting was external pressure (Tierney, 1988). However, results from several studies in the 1970s (Elms and Collins, 1974;

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[10] Swimming Technique survey (Porter 1972; cited by McAfferty 1973) in Swimming Technique 10 (2), 1, 1973

Schiltz and Rabe, 1979) have shown that there was no adverse physiological or psychological effects from this heavy swimming training and Meleski (1979) noted that there are certain physiological benefits such as lung volume, cardiac output and heart volume. Others, however, were writing of their concern for the young swimmer, some even referring to it as an accepted form of child abuse (Tutko and Bruns, 1976) whilst Weiner (1980) felt that swimming demands a commitment before most children know what that really means.

In the 1990s, the structure of age-group swimming and the subsequent pressures put on the young swimmer became major concerns of the Amateur Swimming Association (ASA) and in 1997 an ASA Competition Continuum Working group was set up to take a look at the programme from learn to swim to elite performance (ASA, 1998)

The recommendations of the Working Party focused on the need to look at the development of the young swimmer and to ensure that appropriate training was being done at the correct times. It was felt that the current programme did not conform to the natural stages of child development with excessive pressures on the young swimmer to win rather than develop. The emphasis on winning and early specialisation was felt to be exploitative and resulted in young children being coerced into heavy training by coaches and parents in order to achieve what was regarded as success at an early age (ASA, 1998). As already noted, this drive for success and concentration on winning, whether actual or perceived, can add extra stress to the young swimmer, which may lead to swimmers quitting the sport.

The new age-group programme sought to rectify some of these problems. By altering the competition structure, it aimed to ensure that the training of young swimmers took into consideration their various developmental stages. In addition, by ensuring that young 'champions' competed in a number of different events in a variety of distances, it hoped to encourage competition over longer distances and to reduce the emphasis on early specialisation,

thought by many to be one of the major causes of dropout (Maglischo, 1993; Wilke and Madsen, 1986).

The new age-group competitive programme was introduced in 2001 and subsequently amended by the National Coaching Director of the Youth Programme, John Atkinson with the new structure coming into effect a year later. The main areas that changed were the number of events children had to swim in, so that specialisation did not occur too early in a swimmer's career, and the distances that children were expected to swim. In some competitions other changes, such as age on the day criteria were introduced[11], resulting in children swimming against different competitors in different meets. Also it was advised that the number of competitions that young swimmers competed in should be reduced as many were involved in galas most Saturdays throughout much of the year.

In 2003, the ASA in partnership with Sport England produced a publication called *The Swimmer Pathway: Long Term Athlete Development,* which was stated to be model for swimming based on the principles of growth and development. This document based on the work of Dr Istvan Balyi, which, although not empirically based, echoed many of the principles outlined earlier by Wilke and Madsen (1986) and Vorontsov (1997). The overall aims of this plan were:

- To outline a clear swimmer pathway;

- To provide a common swimming development framework for all organisations that provide or facilitate swimming programmes in order that young people can achieve the best swimming experience possible;

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[11] Prior to this all competitions had been as age on 31st December in the year of competition. This meant that swimmers would often swim against the same opposition, especially at county and regional meets.

- To provide guidelines that will give our swimmers the technical, tactical, physical and mental skills and abilities necessary for achieving excellence on the world stage. (p.2)

This plan was sent to coaches within the UK in the hope that it would lead to all swimmers reaching their full potential. The plan is divided into various stages of training based on stages of development physical, psychological and emotional development. These stages are:
- FUNdamental (5 – 8 years for females; 6 – 9 years for males)
- SwimSkills (8 – 11 years for females, 9 – 12 years for males)
- Training to Train (11 – 14 years for females; 12 – 15 years for males)
- Training to Compete (14 – 16 years for females, 15 – 18 years for males)
- Training to Win (16+ years for females, 18+ years for males)

In the plan, allowances are made for children who want to swim in order to fulfil fitness or affiliation needs and in this instance four to seven hours a week of training is advised. For those who want to compete at the highest level as they move to the 'Training to Train' stage, training should progress over one or two years from four to seven hours to sixteen to twenty hours covering around 50 km per week, plus two to three hours of land conditioning. This distance is what Bill Sweetenham, the then Performance Director of British Swimming, termed the 'breakpoint volume' and refers to the optimum volume, performed at optimum skill level' (ASA,2003 p. 21). It is the volume achieved at the end of the maturation period and will essentially be the training volume that a swimmer will continue to achieve throughout his or her career though this may alter depending on the event in which they eventually specialise. Although high levels of training are recommended, competition is reduced. For example in the 'Training to Train', through to the 'Training to Win' phases the number of competitions is twelve per year.

In parallel with these developments, swimming clubs themselves were expected to critically evaluate their resources and through the 'Swim 21' Scheme they were categorised into different levels depending upon what they can offer to swimmers in terms of training and coaching.

2.4　Summary

This chapter has reviewed the literature investigating the various aspects of the interpersonal relationships within coach, parent, athlete triangle, together with a discussion of the context surrounding age-group swimming. Limitations in the available literature have been revealed in terms of the failure of many studies to address the importance of hearing the voices of all three members of this triad.

In order to aid data collection, I began the literature review prior to undertaking any fieldwork. However, reviewing the literature has been an on-going process so as to further inform my research and discover up to date studies, which have investigated the social aspects of the coaching process. Although the importance of these social aspects is beginning to be realised much of the literature particularly concerning the role of the parent is anecdotal in nature. This study will attempt to fill these gaps by deconstructing the 'sporting triangle' in order to investigate these relationships from within.

CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 <u>Introduction</u>

This section will discuss the theoretical framework that has been adopted in an attempt to make sense of the data from this study. Although discussed more fully in the next chapter when looking at the methodology adopted, I feel that in order to understand how this framework was developed it is necessary here also to provide a brief outline of my own theoretical perspective and view of reality.

At the commencement of this study, I knew that the research would be aimed at investigating the relationships between the coach, the parent and the athlete, and that it would be a developing, unfolding process. The only certainty was that if I was to truly understand the complex relationships and social processes occurring within this sporting triad it was necessary to move away from the 'what' of competitive age-group swimming to a much more holistic approach where the focus is on the 'how and 'why'. In order to do this I was adopting an interpretivist perspective where meanings are constructed by human beings as they engage with the world they are interpreting.

If I was to undertake my research from this standpoint then it was clear that how I interpret the stories, which I would hear, would be my interpretation, my meaning. Thus, objectivity was not possible and another researcher's interpretation of the stories may be different. Indeed the stories themselves may be different. As Denzin and Lincoln (2003b) remark:

> Three interconnected, generic activities define the qualitative research process. They go by a variety of different labels, including *theory, method, analysis, ontology, epistemology and methodology.* Behind these terms stands the personal biography of the researcher, who speaks from a particular class, gender, racial, cultural, and ethnic community perspective. The gendered, multiculturally situated researcher approaches the world with a set of ideas, a framework (theory, ontology) that specifies a set of questions (epistemology) that he or she then examines in specific ways (methodology, analysis). Every researcher speaks from within a distinct interpretive community

that configures, in its special way, the multicultural, gendered components of the research act (p.23).

All meaning then is socially constructed, but to try and understand the meanings others put to objects, one has to attempt to understand that person.

3.2   Theoretical framework

This study is concerned with an in-depth understanding of the inter-relationships of the coach-parent-athlete within the coaching process, something that has tended to be ignored until recently. However, several authors (Byrne, 1993; Hellstedt, 1987; Jones, Armour and Potrac, 2002; Kirk and MacPhail, 2003; Lyle, 1999) have now recognised the importance of the social dimensions within the coaching process. Indeed Lyle (2002) states that:

> The interpersonal dimension of the coaching process is fundamental to that process and wide-ranging in its impact on effectiveness, athlete satisfaction, implementation practice, and coach and performer roles (p.152).

Because of the failure to pay sufficient attention to the social and cultural aspects of the coaching process, Jones, Armour and Potrac (2002) proposed a framework for social analysis of this process based on the three concepts of role, interaction and power. With respect to the coach's social role they argue:

> Perhaps it is here in the realms of invention, improvisation and creative independence that coaching research should focus as we search for an understanding of good and effective practice. Certainly, the coexistence of self and socially determined social roles appears to be a rich area of inquiry for coaching (p.37).

This framework provides a useful starting point from which to analyse the coach-parent-athlete relationship and each of the concepts of role, interaction and power are discussed below. However, it should be noted that, although I lean more towards a sociological discipline, the multi-disciplinarian nature of coaching has led me to draw on theoretical perspectives from both psychology and sociology in order to discuss these

three concepts. I therefore draw on a range of theoretical perspectives such as role theory, symbolic interactionism, and positioning to try to deconstruct and begin to understand the complexity of the coaching process and the resulting relationships within it.

3.2.1 Role

As noted above, if I was to deconstruct the 'sporting triangle' then I needed to understand the nature of the relationships within this triangle and to understand how each member defined his or her position within it. I, therefore, turned to role theory, in order to aid this understanding. However, as Breese (1997), drawing on the work of Callero (1994) and Jackson (1972), has noted there is confusion within the literature surrounding role theory because,

> while all role traditions start from the assumption that roles are variable and tied to social characteristics, beyond this core premise one finds common words and ideas used in rather disparate, confusing, and arbitrary ways (p. 113).

However, amongst the numerous strands of thought related to role theory two main traditions have emerged, namely the structural functionalism tradition first proposed by authors such as Linton (1936) and Parsons (1951) and the interactionist tradition, which has grown out of the work of Mead (1934) (see Breese, 1997). Essentially, structuralists emphasise the nature of the organisation or structure in which the individual operates. Within these structures, people will act in certain ways depending on the rules and social norms, which regulate both how people behave and how social roles are developed. However, not everyone in a particular role acts in exactly the same way and differences of behaviour within a given role are explained by authors such as Biddle and Thomas (1966) who in a similar vein to Goffman (1984 – see later) liken people to actors on a 'stage'. They state that each person's performance within a certain role may have similarities because that role is guided by external factors, such as the script and the director's instructions, as well as others' performances. However, each actor's interpretation of that role may be different. Although this definition

takes into account individual differences, the structure in which the performance takes place is still central to that performance.

The actors in my triangle were members of a swimming club as well as being part of other social institutions, such as a family. Within these 'role sets' they were guided by the social norms rules and regulations of these institutions as well as by the reaction of others to their performances. In turn their behaviour may also have been guided by the behaviour of others acting within **their** own roles. As Biddle and Thomas (1966) note,

> Individuals in society occupy positions, and their role performance in these positions is determined by social norms, demands, and rules...The social "script" may be as constraining as that of a play, but it frequently allows more options; the "director" is often present in real life as a supervisor, parent, teacher, or coach; the "audience " in life consists of all those who observe the position member's behaviour; the position member's "performance" in life, as in the play, is attributable to his familiarity with the "part", his personality and personal history in general, and more significantly, to the "script", which others define in so many ways. In essence, the role perspective assumes, as does the theatre, that performance results from the social prescriptions and behaviour of others, and that individual variations in performance to the extent that they do occur, are expressed within the framework created by these factors (p.4).

A person may hold many roles, often at the same time and this may lead to role conflict when the roles are incompatible. Conflict may also occur when different parties have different role conceptions. The traditional model of role theory, then, sees individuals as essentially passive agents responding to the expectations of both themselves and others, yet because of this expectation and the numerous roles individuals may undertake there is scope for stress and conflict. Thus, within a sporting context a coach's behaviour, for example, is guided by his or her own and others' expectations of how he or she should behave in given situations. When discussing the role of the coach, Jones (2004) draws on the work of Hellison and Templin (1991), Danzinger (1982), Gensemer (1980) and Potrac, Jones and Armour (2002) and argues that through a combination of

- society's emphasis on winning and product values,
- the constraints of the coaching environment, and

- the need for coaches to operate within a 'comfort zone' where there is no ambiguity about how to behave,

coaches have frequently been led to behave in a traditional role, which is often prescriptive and authoritarian in manner. Similarly, it would appear that athletes are often quite content and may expect their coaches to behave in this way.

Taking an interpretive view of reality it is easy to criticise the main assumptions of the structural model. As Breese (1997) notes, social norms are not always shared, social systems are not truly static and roles are not always associated with social positions. Piliavin, Grube and Callero (2002) also note that role theory has been criticised for omitting to give credence to the 'individual agency of role incumbents' (p. 471). An alternative view to this model and one which closely relates to my view of reality is that of the interactionist approach, which argues that although individuals may meet demands of their positions by 'playing out the role' dictated by it, they are not just passive agents fulfilling that role, rather they have some autonomy to be part of the role-making process (Jones et al. 2002). With this concept comes the notion of the importance of 'self' in the role making process. For example from a psychological viewpoint, Horrocks and Jackson (1972) emphasise the concept of 'self' when they state that

> ...the study of self as a process of integrative, interpretive-evaluative concept formation places the emphasis upon the individual and his internal dynamic processes, which can produce observable behaviors. This theoretical position focuses on an active individual capable of selectively seeking opportunities for self-definition, self enhancement, and social adaptation. Thus, self-process is a causal factor in the manifestations of certain role behaviors. Roles can become the means through which an individual exemplifies and assesses his self-process constructions (p.106).

Analysis of self has also been central to interactionist sociology (Sandstrom, Martin and Fine, 2001) and, as within society generally, it has been theorised that the concept of role and social interaction within the sporting context are important in shaping a person's identity (O. Weiss, 2001). Referring to the social sub-system of sport, Weiss writes:

...in modern societies there is no other social subsystem that gives so many people, regardless of their religion, gender, age or social or educational level, access to a system of social validation and acknowledgement by others (p.393).

Citing Popitz (1987) who outlined five types of 'social subjectivity'[12] (namely: recognition as Member of a Group; recognition in an Assigned Role; recognition in an Acquired Role; recognition in a Public Role and finally, recognition of Personal Identity), Weiss draws on the symbolic interactionist perspective (see Mead, 1934) to show how Identity Theory is built on the assumptions, definitions and propositions of symbolic interactionism and emphasises the relationships between self, society (social structure) and role performance' (p.396).

Weiss (2001) explains that the basic premise of symbolic interactionism is that people make sense of the world through significant symbols[13] that label and classify the world and thus enable cooperative behaviour to take place. In essence, people act in response to stimuli by giving it meaning based on their experience. People, therefore, do not behave simply in response to such stimuli but rather behaviour is constructed according to which objects are taken into account and how these objects are defined. Furthermore, these definitions arise out of people's interactions and as definitions of a situation are established, goals to pursue within that situation are determined (Sandstrom et al., 2001). Indeed, it is through such social interaction that identities can be developed and verified (Weiss, 2001). As Sandstrom et al. (2001) point out Social Interactionists believe that

> the self emerges, develops and is sustained through processes of social interaction. It is not present at birth nor is it an inevitable consequence of a person's biological development. Rather, an individual must learn who he or she is through interaction with others (219).

Weiss also notes how identity can change with time, context, and interaction with others and thus is continually being '(re)created' (p. 396) and that 'role enactments are best understood not by linking them to specific physiological

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[12] According to Weiss (2001), Popitz demonstrates the linking of 'subjective' with the 'social', i.e. self-recognition with social recognition.
[13] A *significant* symbol is one that has shared meaning between members of a group.

and psychological elements, but as products of our *social interaction* with others' (p.397- my emphasis). As Piliavin et al. (2002) note:

> Thus, within identity theory, the self is conceptualized as a multi-dimensional structure that mirrors the multiple positions of one's unique interaction network. When organizations change structures and normative expectations; when families move into new neighborhoods; when divorce, births and deaths occur, identities shift and the structure of the self is altered (p. 472).

Jones (2004) supports the argument that coaches[14] are not only constrained by the social structure of their role, but they can also act as they choose. He states that,

> (r)ole theory in order to produce a more comprehensive understanding of role behaviour, should focus on the impact of (and the relationship between) structure and agency on the formation and development of social roles' (p.118).

Thus, by acting in a certain way people do not simply reproduce the social structure but they also influence and create it.

Both structure and agency would appear to be important within role theory and as Jones et al (2002) drawing on the work of Callero (1994) note, if we are to really understand role theory and behaviour, then there is a need to combine both approaches. Thus, within this concept it is argued that individuals themselves are not passive agents but are actively involved in the process of role making and, although these individuals may, to some extent, be socialised into that role, there is also an element of choice surrounding their behaviour (Jones et al., 2002, Jones, 2004). In pursuing this argument, Cushion (2003) and Jones (2004) draw on the work of Bourdieu and the concept of *habitus*. Jones argues, that Bourdieu's work could be seen as the link 'between structure and agency' (p.119). Citing Ritzer (1996), Jones explains that embedded in the concept of *habitus* is the idea that people are endowed with 'a series of internalised schemes and it is through these schemes that they produce practice' (Jones, 2004 p.119). By this process certain customs and actions are absorbed and become so

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[14] Although in their article, Jones et al privilege the coach when discussing social interaction within the coaching process, the issues they raise and the points they make can similarly apply to other members of the coach/parent/athlete triad.

much part of behaviour that they happen unconsciously (Jarvie and Maguire, 1994 cited in Jones, 2004). Thus, it would seem that even if a person can have choice in how they behave there is, to some extent, an element of 'role taking'. Thus, members of the coach-parent-athlete triad have certain expectations placed upon them in terms of how they should behave within the coaching process, yet have freedom to 'interpret' that role and make sense of it according to their own beliefs and thus they both create and take on the various roles that they occupy both within and without the coaching process.

The link between structure and agency is also seen in the work of Goffman (1984), who, with his dramaturgical approach, analyses how people will carry out certain roles within a setting that may demand certain behaviours yet, at the same time, the person will manipulate their performance in order to portray a particular image. Goffman's work will be discussed in more detail in the next section.

3.2.2 Social interaction

Within Jones et al.'s (2002) framework, the second concept of 'interaction' relates primarily to how a coach interacts with athletes and others in order to maintain a desirable coaching identity. This too is very closely related to the concept of role, as Jones et al. drawing on the work of Goffman (1984) state that the coach within this social context acts in a way to present,

> ...a compelling front is forced to both fill the duties of the social role and communicate the activities and characteristics of the role to other people in a consistent manner...A coach, therefore, appears obliged to behave consistently like a coach in the eyes of the athletes within the sporting environment (the setting), because to maintain established power relationships he/she must uphold the standards of conduct and appearance as expected... (p.40).

According to Goffman (1984), the concept of 'front' is 'that part of the individual's performance, which regularly functions in a general and fixed fashion to define the situation for those who observe the performance' (p. 32) as opposed to a 'performance' that will change depending on the context in which it takes place. Goffman notes, that rather than adjusting his

or her 'pattern of expectation and responsive treatment for each slightly different performer and performance' (p.36) the observer can place the performance in a wider category from which it is relatively easy 'to mobilize his past experience and stereotypical thinking' (p. 36). This then aids the interpretation of a performance because the observer only needs to be familiar with a limited number of 'fronts'. In a similar way the actor can have a repertoire of 'fronts'. Thus, if an actor takes on a task that is familiar then the appropriate 'front', which has already been established for that role will be adopted. If, however, the task is new, then the actor may well find that there are established fronts from which to choose, so that even though the task is new, the 'front' may not be. For Goffman then, 'fronts' are usually not 'created' but 'selected' (p.38).

As noted when discussing role, individuals (in this case the coach, parent and athlete) are likely to hold a number of roles. Within Goffman's dramaturgy there may be role conflict in a number of situations, for example when the expectations of actor's behaviour in a particular role by the audience is different from the behaviour given, or when the actor's different roles demand different and often incompatible behaviours. When conflict does occur, an individual may 'distance' himself from a social role in order to avoid the stress of conflict. Goffman (1984) also points out that when people perform there may be conflicting standards with regards to the social grouping in which that performance takes place. These different 'regions' Goffman refers to as a 'front' region and a 'back' region. The 'front' region refers to the place where the performance is given, whereas the 'back' region or

> backstage may be defined as a place relative to a given performance, where the impression fostered by the performance is knowingly contradicted as a matter of course… It is here that the capacity of a performance to express something beyond itself may be painstakingly fabricated; it is here that illusions and impressions are openly constructed. Here stage props and items of personal front can be stored in a kind of compact collapsing of whole repertoires of actions and characters. Here grades of ceremonial equipment, such as different types of liquor or clothes, can be hidden so that the audience will not be able to see the treatment accorded to them in

comparison with the treatment that could have been accorded them... (p. 114).

An individual, then, will adopt different masks in order to manage the impression he or she gives to others. Therefore, not only do individuals act out a 'role', but they do so in a way that will influence the 'audiences' perception of the actor and, by so doing, may in turn be able to influence the behaviour of their audience (see Goffman, 1984).

Thus, Goffman's (1984) dramaturgical theory posits that interactions could be better understood if people were thought of as actors adopting various roles, manipulating situations and 'tailoring their performances' (Sandstrom et al., 2001 p. 220) in order to manipulate how they are viewed by others. By so doing they can lead others to behave in ways that will fulfil their goals. The perspective then used by Goffman (1984) is that of a complex theatrical performance. He states:

> I shall consider the way in which the individual in ordinary work situations presents himself and his activity to others, the ways in which he guides and controls the impression they form of him, and the kinds of things he may and may not do while sustaining his performance before them...the state presents things that are make-believe; presumably life presents things that are real and sometimes not well rehearsed...on the stage one player presents himself in the guise of a character to characters projected by other players; the audience constitutes a third party to the interaction – one that is essential and yet, if the stage performance were real, one that would not be there. In real life, the three parties are compressed into two; the part one individual plays is tailored to the parts played by the others present, and yet these others also constitute the audience (Preface).

People will perform differently within different settings and thus, for Goffman, there is no real truth or reality or indeed real 'self' just individual interpretations of these concepts, as the 'actor' guides and controls the impression others form of him. For, as Goffman notes, if one is to uncover the true nature of a situation it would be necessary for that individual to know all the facts and social data about the others including his or her innermost feelings. Such information is rarely available. According to Sandstrom et al. (2001), the way in which actors tailor their performances to

different audiences is 'fundamental to social interaction' (p. 221) and is what Goffman (1984) termed 'impression management'.

The 'performance' then requires the audience to believe that the actor is that which he appears to be and that he possesses the attributes he displays, even if the actor is not taken in by his own performance. In this situation the actor 'may be moved to guide the conviction of his audience only as a means to other ends, having no ultimate concern in the conception that they have of him or of the situation' (Goffman, 1984 p. 28).

According to Goffman, then, members of the sporting triangle within this present study are, in fact, *actors*, *performing* certain *roles* in order to present an image or a *front* to the audience so that they can *position* themselves within the context or *setting* in which that *performance* takes place and that similarly, the audience, which is also 'acting out a role', will help interpret the meanings behind the discourse that takes place. Whether the image presented is, in fact, reality or not is a question that must be asked.

However, there are shortfalls in Goffman's theory that need to be addressed. According to Giddens (1984), some people view Goffman's writing as somewhat superficial or lightweight because he may be viewed as a 'raconteur' or a 'sociological gossip' who fails to fully outline the implications of his standpoint (see Giddens, 1984, p. xxiv). Also as Barnhart (undated) points out, by limiting his work to a dramaturgical study, Goffman cannot apply the activities of the 'mundane world to the larger social world' (p.10) and thus, according to Sandstrom et al (2001), selves are seen as being

> lodged in and shaped by organisations and institutions in which they are embedded – including the family, school and workplace. Goffman (1961) recognized this point in his analysis of 'total institutions', but it has not been adequately incorporated into self theory. Like the rest of symbolic interaction, self theory will move away from being a purely social psychological perspective as it addresses the domains of macro-sociology (p. 221).

Many of the criticisms of Goffman stem from his unsystematic approach to not just theory but also his method and data (see Scheff, 2001), yet his strengths lie in his ability to study the individual, not just as an individual but as part of a social process and his ability to deconstruct assumptions within social science that are taken for granted. As Scheff (2001) argues, few would disagree that Goffman was 'an incredibly perceptive observer of the microworld of social interaction (Abstract) ' and as Friedman (1983) explains in his paper read out at a memorial session for Erving Goffman in 1983:

> And this brings me to my last point. When all is said and done, I believe that Goffman's work lives and will live not as a contribution to the development of systematic sociological theory but rather as a contribution to human consciousness. Though his work creates and plays with sociological concepts rather than character, plot, mood, or consciousness, it is as concrete and revelatory as fiction. To take Goffman as a source for abstract and systematic theory is false to the substance and spirit of his work. On the matter of what some might now call dramaturgical theory, for example, let us remember the next-to-last page of The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life , where he somewhat playfully reveals that the conceptual framework of the book, using the language of stagecraft, is "in part rhetoric and maneuver. The claim that all the world's a stage . . . is not to be taken too seriously." "The language and mask of the stage" is a mere intellectual scaffold, and "scaffolds, after all, are to build other things with, and should be erected with an eye to taking them down." Concepts, yes, but not theories, and even in the case of concepts, let them be provisional, to be discarded when their immediate purpose is served. Let us not puff them up too self-importantly (p. 3).

Certainly, one of the strengths of Goffman's analysis lies in his close observation of human interaction, which can provide a framework for beginning to understand the behaviour of the actors within the 'sporting triangle' under study. Having said this, during my research there was limited opportunity to examine first hand the interaction between the three parties, However, Goffman has helped me to both interpret the data from the interviews and also to understand the impressions that the interviewees tried to convey to me during our discussions, and to others during my observations of club sessions.

Further criticism of Goffman's dramaturgical approach, and role theory generally, has also come from authors such as Giddens (1984), Davies and

Harré (1990) and Harré and van Langenhove (1999) because of the emphasis on 'the "given" character of roles ... The script is written, the stage set, and actors do the best they can with the parts prepared for them' (Giddens, 1984 p.84). Giddens proposed Structuration Theory as a way to examine and understand social phenomena. Structuration Theory has at its centre the idea of 'duality of structure', i.e. social structure both enables and constrains human action. People may act routinely because of the structure in which they perform that action, but they have free will and could act differently. However, free will is not and could never be independent of structure. Similarly by acting in certain ways a person (the agent) will both produce and reproduce social structure and thus social structure could not exist without human interaction. Such a concept is far more dynamic than the rather static traditional concept of role in which, as Harré (2004) also notes, even concepts like 'role distance' and 'role strain' assume the stability of the roles to which they are related.

For Giddens (2004), positioning of the body in social encounters in which 'the body is positioned in the immediate circumstances of co-presence in relation to others' (p.xxiv) is fundamental to social life. It should be noted that when Giddens refers to positioning he refers to more than just the social interactions in day to day life. He states:

> Positioning is ... also to be understood in relation to the seriality of encounters across time-space. Every individual is at once positioned in the flow of day-to-day life; in the life-span, which is the duration of his or her existence; and in the duration of 'institutional time', the 'supra-individual' structuration of social institutions. Finally, each person is positioned, in a 'multiple' way, within social relations conferred by specific social identities; this is the main sphere of application of the concept of social role (p.xxiv-xxv).

Also, for Giddens *positions* are situated in time and space. He states:

> Positioning' gets at what I shall call the contextualities of interaction and allows us to spell out, in a direct way, the relevance of Goffman's work for structuration theory. All social interaction is *situated* interaction – situated in space and time. It can be understood as a fitful yet routinized occurrence of encounters, fading away in time and space, yet constantly reconstituted within different areas of time-space' (p.86)

By contrast, Davies and Harré's (1990) concept of social positioning moves away from the 'structuring property of society' (Kirk and MacPhail, 2003, p. 25). Instead, these authors stress the importance of context and how one social position can in fact be played out in a variety of ways. Drawing on language analysis and the relationships between language and thought and language and action, these authors suggest 'positioning theory' as a way to better understand the roles individuals act out during their lives. However, as Kirk and MacPhail note:

> Discursive practices such as conversations have embedded in them social conventions and protocols that enable interlocutors to position themselves and to be positioned. The ability of interacting individuals to understand the conventions and protocols that are attached to positions is essential to meaningful social interaction (p. 25).

As has been previously noted, throughout their lives people will occupy a number of roles or what might be thought of as a multiplicity of 'self' (Kirk and MacPhail, 2003 p.25) and as Kirk and MacPhail observe, although the notion of positioning is perhaps most relevant to discursive practices, much of social interaction is indeed facilitated by conversation and thus the notion of positioning needs not be confined to discursive practices but to all forms of social practice.

According to Kirk and MacPhail (2003), the benefit of considering positioning theory especially if it is extended beyond discursive practices to include routine social interaction is that,

> it brings together individual and structuring properties of society in specific episodes of social practice. It allows us to explore individuals' particular interpretations of categories of self that have shared or common features within and across social groups (p. 25-26).

In their study of a youth athletics club, Kirk and MacPhail (2003) note that clubs cannot be understood simply as places where children go to acquire sports skills but as a complex social entity where many positions are occupied by members of that club, be it parents, athletes, coaches or officials. Often one person will occupy several positions, but few of these members fully understand the multiple positions of which the club is

composed. This lack of understanding may lead to conflict and tensions within this complex dynamic structure that needs to be managed.

Kirk and MacPhail found that the athletes' positions within the club they researched were those of Samplers and Beginning Specialisers[15], whilst the parents were those of Committed Members, Helpers, Spectators and Non-attenders. The coach position was that of Committed Volunteer. Although these positions had certain expectations, practices and values attached to them by others, they were interdependent and 'always being negotiated' (p. 41).

As individuals adopt different 'positions' within the sporting triangle, power relationships will also change. Indeed, the final concept suggested by Jones et al (2002) in their paper is that of 'power', which is closely allied to the concepts of role, interaction and positioning because it is impossible to state that someone is powerful without discussing the other parties within that relationship. Someone "has power" because he or she has control over the desires and needs of another party that exists within any social relationship. For example, within Goffman's dramaturgical approach, power relationships can be viewed in terms of the ability of the *actor* to manipulate his or her *performance* and the behaviour of others in order to achieve his or her goals.

3.2.3 Power

Within their suggested framework for analysing the coaching process Jones et al. (2002) argue that power should be viewed as something that permeates all aspects of social life and needs to be examined in terms of ways in which 'it remains hidden and mobilized in apparently apolitical structures (p.41)'.

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[15] The various positions of the athletes referred to in Kirk and MacPhail's study has grown out of work the work of Côté (1999) and Côté and Hay (2002) (see earlier).

Drawing on the work of Locke (1985) and Jones (2000) they note how important it is to view power as, not just imposed from above, but as something that involves acquiescence from the subordinate group over, which that power is being wielded. Indeed, as they note, a person can only be truly powerful if there is consent to that person's use of power (Tauber, 1985) and that resistance to power can, in itself, be powerful. With regards to the coach-athlete relationship, Mageau and Vallerand (2003), when proposing a motivational model of the coach-athlete relationship, make the point that it is the perceived locus of control that is important within relationships. If athletes perceive that the coach has total control (power) then they may at first obey that coach but are likely to ultimately become demotivated. However, if athletes perceive that they have some control and autonomy, the coach-athlete relationships are likely to be better and the athletes will invest more in the sport.

Drawing on the work of French and Raven (1959), Potrac (2004) examined how coaches in Jones et al.'s (2004) study displayed *legitimate, expert, informational, reward, coercive* and *referent* power. *Legitimate power* comes from simply being in a certain position within an organisation. As such the coach was in a powerful position. Potrac notes how these coaches tried to maintain *legitimate power* through displaying expert knowledge and appearing credible and knowledgeable to their athletes even to the extent of one coach stating that he would not demonstrate skills because he was aware of his limited ability to do so. *Expert power,* which results from a coach's demonstration of his or her special knowledge and skills, can help to reinforce *legitimate power.* Closely allied to expert power is *informational power* where athletes recognise that the coach's way of doing things is the right way. They 'buy into' (p.156) the coaching programme. *Reward power* includes both tangible and intangible incentives and can be seen as coercive if not handled carefully. This closely allies to Mageau and Vallerand's (2003) work on power (see above). The final type of power outlined by Potrac (2004) is that of *referent power*, where the athlete respects the coach in such a way that there is a desire to be like him or her. Potrac concludes that:

Some of the lessons that resonate from the coaches' stories are that, for a coach to obtain and retain power, he or she must (among other things) understand athletes, care for them inside and outside of the sporting environment, and possess a set of technical and tactical ideals that they can clearly understand and implement in competition (p. 161).

From the above it is also clear that,

social power influences the dynamics of the interpersonal interactions that take place between coach and athlete within the context of top-level sport' (p. 51)

For a more complete discussion of the role of power see Jones et al. (2002) and Potrac (2004). For my purposes, the notion of power is important because of how it relates to coach, parents and athletes' roles and relationships. Within this context, it is important to examine how members of this triad position themselves within the context of the club, the family and the sporting triangle, where the locus of power sits within each of these institutions, and also how that power balance may change over time as the athlete moves through his or her career. Clearly the notion of power is explicit in the work of Goffman in terms of the power of the individual to manipulate the performance, to manage the impression that he or she gives and to create 'fronts' that will force the audience to act in a certain way. It should also be remembered that relationships are two way – at the same time the audience is behaving in a manner to create a certain impression and to ensure that the actor behaves in a way to achieve their goals.

3.2.4 Roles, relationships and power

So far in this chapter, I have looked at the three concepts that Jones et al (2002) have suggested as a means for researching the coaching process. As Jones et al have noted, although each of these have been discussed separately, both here and in their paper, 'it is in their intersection' (p.45) that is the key to investigating and further understanding the coaching process.

This present study builds upon this framework in order to deconstruct the sporting triangle. For example, when looking at a role, it is important to establish how this role is realised. How much is built on others' expectations

of that role and how much from what each individual believes his or her behaviour in a particular role to be. At different times and within different contexts, coaches, parents and athletes will adopt certain roles that will 'position' them within the organisation. These positions are dynamic and may change as the contexts and circumstances change. By understanding these positions one can establish how an organisation such as a sports club is 'socially constructed and how the people whose practices constitute the club make sense of their own and others' discursive practices' (Kirk and MacPhail, 2003 p. 24).

Goffman's dramaturgical approach alongside role theory and the notion of 'positioning' provides the basis for the reflexive pluralist methodology employed. The next chapter examines the methodology underlying and implicit in this framework, and details the methods that have been used in this investigation.

CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY

4.1   Introduction

This study aimed to deconstruct the sporting triangle in order to understand more clearly the various roles and relationships between the triad of coach, parent and athlete. It was proposed that this would be done by

- investigating the philosophy/attitudes of the coach, swimmer and parent with respect to their involvement in swimming

- identifying the role and expectations of the coach, swimmer, and parent as viewed by themselves and the other members of the triad.

and, as a result of the above,

- identify the role these inter-relationships play in shaping the coaching environment and process and how, in turn, these roles are shaped by the context in which they are played out.

Building on the literature review in Chapter 2 and the development of the theoretical framework discussed in the previous chapter, this chapter initially discusses the research issues involved in carrying out this investigation. The research design and the procedures undertaken in an attempt to deconstruct the sporting triangle and to understand more clearly the roles and relationships existing within it, are then outlined.

4.2   Research Process

As I began to read more and more of the literature discussing the philosophy underpinning research I felt very much what Crotty (1998) describes as a sense of 'bewilderment at the array of methodologies and methods' (p.1). A bewilderment, which, as Crotty also rightly notes, is exacerbated because

> ... methodologies and methods are not usually laid out in a highly organised fashion and may appear more as a maze than as

pathways to orderly research. There is much talk of their philosophical underpinnings, but how the methodologies and methods relate to more theoretical elements is often left unclear. To add to the confusion, the terminology is far from consistent in research literature and social science texts. One frequently finds the same term used in a number of different, sometimes even contradictory, ways (p. 1).

In order to add clarity to the process Crotty suggests that the researcher asks four questions, which are fundamental to the research process, namely:

- What *methods* do we propose to use?
- What *methodology* governs our choice and use of methods?
- What *theoretical perspective* lies behind the methodology in question?
- What *epistemology* informs this theoretical perspective? (p. 2).

The methods then are the research techniques (observation and semi-structured interviews) used in my research. The methodology was the research design, which was essentially qualitative and took the form of a grounded theory approach. This methodology was in turn informed by an interpretive theoretical perspective and a constructionist epistemology, which underpinned the above framework and was my view of reality and the construction of knowledge. The resulting framework containing the four elements: epistemology, theoretical perspective, methodology and methods are, therefore, used to discuss my research process.

4.2.1 Epistemology and inherent theoretical perspective

What is reality?

As Such (2002) points out, when undertaking any research project it is important to consider the underlying philosophy as to the nature of reality itself, as well as the technical aspects of the research. The debate about the nature of reality has, according to Sparkes (1992),

> led to major upheavals in how we conceptualize the research process, ourselves as researchers, and how we come to understand the world around us (p. 9).

Indeed Sparkes relates how during the 1980s and early 1990s, there existed what some have referred to as a 'revolution' or even a 'war' concerning the nature of research. Yet as Sparkes (1992) notes, what was important was that a debate was actually happening and that if there had not been the debate then one might well be inclined to believe that research was facing a crisis. To understand this debate, we need to look closely at what people understand by the term 'knowledge'. As Sparkes (1992) notes any research act does not take place in isolation,

> but in a social context 'of invisible colleges', that is a community of scholars who share similar conceptions of proper questions, methods, techniques and forms of explanation (p. 11).

The term most commonly used to describe such communities and the beliefs they share with regards to research and how they view the world is 'paradigm', a term most associated with Kuhn and his book '*The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*' (1962) (see Sparkes 1992, p. 11). More recently, Guba and Lincoln (1989, cited in Sparkes 1992) put forward the argument that paradigms are essentially belief systems, that represent 'the most fundamental positions we are willing to take and, which cannot be proven or disproven' (Sparkes 1992, p. 12). These beliefs, then, are a product of a researcher's life history, and are obtained through socialisation into a particular culture. Thus, to be accepted within a particular school of belief or research community, it is vital to see the world in the same way as other members of that community (Sparkes 1992). As Denzin and Lincoln (2003b) note, it is these beliefs that shape 'how the qualitative researcher sees the world and acts within it' (p. 22). Citing Bateson (1972) they state that the researcher is 'bound within a net of epistemological and ontological[16] premises, which – regardless of ultimate truth or falsity – become partially self-validating (Bateson 1972, p. 314)' (p. 26).

The importance then of epistemology is that it provides a type of philosophical grounding for deciding possible types of knowledge (Crotty,

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[16] Crotty (1998) states that it is extremely difficult to conceptually separate 'ontology' and 'epistemology' for it is impossible to discuss 'what is' (ontology) from ' what it means to know' (epistemology) and therefore doesn't include ontology in his schema. See Crotty (1998 p.10-12) for further discussion on this.

1998). Crotty outlines three essential epistemologies: objectivisim, constructionism and subjectivism. However, like Webb (2002), I find it difficult to accept Crotty's arguments for separating subjectivism from constructionism, and would better describe it as a subjective-constructionism (for a more detailed argument see Webb, 2002). Therefore, the following discussion concentrates on the epistemologies of subjective-constructionism and objectivism and their theoretical perspectives in an attempt to give a background to my own view of reality.

Objectivism holds that reality is separate from any conscious thought. An object exists because it is there. When it is recognised the meaning attached to it is essentially the meaning that has always existed for that object. Truth and meaning reside in the object itself and careful research can discover that truth. There is no room for emotions or feelings, or human consciousness. Essentially, therefore, an objectivist epistemological stance informs a postitivist theoretical perspective (see Crotty, 1998).

Positivism, primarily emanates from the work of Augustus Compte, in the early part of the nineteenth century. Compte strongly supported the notion that the study of human nature could employ the same research methods as the study of science (Sparkes, 1992). Positivism, then, stems from the scientific view, which is based upon the premise that the main purpose of science is the pursuit of universal laws or general truths and that knowledge 'claims justified from one experiment need to be generalised, to justify that they are universally true' (Metcalfe, 2005 p. 2). To apply this to the study of human behaviour means that the researcher believes that human behaviour is in itself objective and tangible. As Gratton and Jones (2004) note, just as chemists can study the effect of combining chemical compounds to develop laws of nature so positivist researchers would support the notion that by observing human behaviour 'laws' of behaviour can be developed. Within such a doctrine, feelings and emotions that cannot be measured have no place in research and the social world is understood in terms of simple causal relationships. As Gratton and Jones (2004) state, when specifically discussing research within the sporting context:

the key argument of those rejecting the positivist approach is that sport is a social phenomenon, that is those who participate in, watch or manage sports are acted upon by a number of external social forces, but also have free will to respond to such forces in an active way, and are not inanimate objects, whose behaviour can be understood in terms of causal relationships. When examining sport we cannot predict whether X will always cause Y... (p. 19).

In contrast to objectivists, constructionists believe that rather than objects simply having meaning, the meaning comes from one's interaction with that object. Human beings attach meanings and interpret the world according to both the context in which they view that object and as a result of their own culture, and experiences. It, therefore, follows that people can attach different meanings to the same object - indeed an object can be given different meanings by the same person when viewed in a different context. Such an epistemology has within it an inherent interpretive theoretical perspective.

The interpretive paradigm, then, is underpinned by a number of epistemological assumptions that are very different to those associated with positivism (Sparkes, 1992) and an objectivist epistemology. For interpretivists there is no independently existing reality, only a reality associated to meanings attached to, or their interpretation of their own and others' behaviour. Indeed such an epistemology means that it is impossible to see the world 'outside our place in it' (Sparkes, 1992 p. 27). Within such a paradigm, the researcher will collect a wide variety of empirical materials and employ a wide range of interpretative practices in order to better understand the phenomena being researched, bearing in mind that each interpretative practice will make the 'world' seem slightly different (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003a)[17]. As a result any 'gaze is always filtered through the lenses of language, gender, social class, race and ethnicity' (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003a p. 24). Thus, objective observations do not exist, there are only observations 'socially situated in the worlds of – and between the

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[17] Denzin and Lincoln (2003) use the term constructivism as opposed to constructionism. I believe that essentially the underlying philosophy here is the same. The difference, However, is that constructivism tends to be from a psychological perspective and deals with how individuals construct meaning, whereas constructionism is concerned with social construction of meaning.

observer and the observed' (p.24). Perhaps Ribbens (1998) sums up the problems of really understanding or knowing one's true feelings when she writes

> ...who I am is clearly bound up with the culture, social structure, and associations I have experienced in my life ... And I believe that my gender, my class background, and my wider socio-historical heritage (including my maternal grandmother's Methodist affiliations), as well as my particular history of family relationships, have all led me to attend particularly closely to the voices of others, and have made it much more difficult for me to know my own feelings and wants, and bring them to a voice – albeit, that this 'feeling voice' would itself be shaped and constructed via social contexts, including the bringing to language. Until articulated and voiced (at least to myself), my feelings, as with those we research, have no shape or form, nor any socially meaningful reality even for myself ...' (p. 32).

Within the interpretive paradigm, then, the researcher, as the interpreter, becomes an active participant in the research process. With such a view of reality it is an impossible and fruitless task to attempt to eliminate any effects that the observer/researcher might have on the subjects. Similarly, I take the stance that social researchers cannot be separated from the research process itself. Indeed as I have noted elsewhere (see Bass, 1996) the researcher may be seen as the research 'instrument' and the research process itself will 'generate meaning as part of the social life it aims to describe and to analyse' (Ball, 1993 p. 45). Thus, the data inevitably becomes 'a product of the skills and imagination of the researcher and of the interface between the researcher and the researched' (Brown, 1988 cited in Ball, 1993 p. 45).

This standpoint is similar to that argued by Armour and Fernandez-Balboa (2001) when discussing professional learning and teaching. They make the point that a teacher is 'a human being with multiple dimensions and aspects, and central to the whole meaning of teaching is the way in which all those dimensions are connected and woven-in with pedagogy' (p. 108). In this way the teacher is part of the teaching process and there are connections between the teacher and the student as both 'consolidate' their 'identities jointly' (p.104). However, even here there are dilemmas particularly if the researcher is investigating an area not familiar to the 'outside world'.

Edwards and Ribbens (1998) note the problems involved when any researcher tries to position him or herself within a marginalized culture. In this situation they must 'interpret' the worlds and the understanding of this culture into a knowledge form that can be accepted and understood by the dominant framework of knowledge in wider society.

As explained in the previous chapter in rejection of the positivist standpoint, I adopted an interpretive perspective. It was to be my story and my interpretation as I engaged within the world that I was interpreting. In order to begin to appreciate my own standpoint and to place myself in a position to begin to understand and interpret others' voices, I needed to, not only initially acknowledge my own culture and background, but continually reflect upon it. Without doubt I came to this research with certain predispositions. I had been involved in competitive swimming for over fifty years and from this experience first as a swimmer, then as a coach and finally as parent of competitive swimmers, I was aware of many of the possible areas that could lead to both consensus and conflict within the triangular relationship of the coach, the parents, and the athlete. Because of my background within the swimming culture, I needed to be aware of the risk that I may take things for granted and overlook detail. In an attempt to overcome this it was important that during the research I should write down as much detail as possible and at the same time ensure that I reviewed my data and cross referenced it to other observed events (Burgess, 1984).

4.3   Methodology

As Such (2002) notes 'not only must theory, methodology and methods converge at the philosophical level, but solutions to several practical problems must be found' (p. 103) when undertaking a research project. The limited time-structure in which to complete a PhD, the underlying costs of carrying out a large-scale project, along with practicalities in terms of outside commitments: a full time job; voluntary coaching commitments and a family, meant that realistically the choice of undertaking in-depth interviews with a small non-representative sample became not purely a suitable approach for

this research but a necessity. For practical as well as theoretical reasons, therefore, the chosen methodology for my research was qualitative.

4.3.1 Qualitative methodology

Before detailing the methods employed in this study, it is necessary to clarify what is meant by qualitative methodology. Historically, there has been debate with regards to the appropriate methodology for social research. In her Ph.D. thesis, Such (2000) describes in detail the feminist movement within the social sciences. Within this discussion she makes the point that the feminist debate on methodology has been part of the extreme debate or, as she terms it, the 'false war', between qualitative and quantitative methodologies and concludes that quantitative methods are not exclusive to positivist doctrine. Indeed, for some it appears that positivist methods and qualitative methods are just different ways of telling stories about society, neither one better than the other, just different (see Denzin and Lincoln, 2000). A similar point is made by Crotty (1998) who states that 'research can be qualitative or quantitative, or both qualitative and quantitative, without this being problematic in any way (p. 15)'. However, Crotty also argues that because positivist research is based upon different assumptions and viewpoint to that of subjectivist or interpretivist research, it is essentially at the level of *epistemology* that these debates regarding qualitative and quantitative research should be discussed.

It must also be remembered that historically qualitative research was defined within a positivist paradigm (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003a) and, as I have noted later when discussing the data analysis, Glaser and Strauss's (1967) grounded theory approach was imbued to varying degrees with positivism. Denzin and Lincoln (2008) map the development of qualitative research through eight historical moments from the 'traditional' period to what they term the 'fractured future' moment (p. 3). They note that qualitative researchers are currently in a time of discovery and rediscovery as new ways of writing, arguing and interpreting are discussed within what is now a 'multicultural process' (p. 29). This progression within qualitative

methodology is illustrated by Juliet Corbin who, in discussion with Cesar A. Cisneros-Puebla, states:

> It is funny looking back because when I was trained as a field researcher in the mid-1970s, the emphasis was on objectivity, a distancing between the researcher and the research. Now we certainly know better and I think that the recognition of what we as persons bring to the research and our involvement in the data collection and analysis processes are some of the better ideas to have come about in qualitative research in recent years. (Cisneros-Puebla, 2004 - paragraph 3)

For Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) who advocate mixed method research, '*both* quantitative and qualitative research is important and useful' (p. 14). They argue that by undertaking such research they can maximise the strengths and minimise the weaknesses of both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. Although agreeing with Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) about the benefits of a mixed methodology, in this present research I was dealing with thoughts, feelings and emotions as I tried to deconstruct the sporting triangle. Therefore, I felt little could be gained from a survey approach.

4.3.2 Chosen methodology

As stated previously, at the commencement of this study, I viewed my research very much as an unfolding process. Also, bearing in mind both my epistomelogical and theoretical stances, the methodology that appeared to 'fit' these perspectives was that of a grounded theory approach (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), which would allow themes to be identified during and after the collection of data. Since Glaser and Strauss's publication in 1967, there has been a certain amount of controversy with regards to grounded theory, yet as Greckhamer and Koro-Ljungberg (2005) note most 'grounded theorists agree with the general goal of the method: the systematic generation of theory from data' (p. 735), and although over the years different emphasis has been placed on the importance of coding, the main objective of the methods used is 'to allow core problems and processes to emerge from the data as well as to avoid forcing data into pre-determined categories' (p.735). Indeed, Glaser (1992) himself disagreed with Strauss's

and Corbin's (1998) later interpretation of grounded theory, which he believed did not allow theory to emerge from the data but rather forced it into a pre-conceived framework (Dick, 2002). Charmaz (2003) notes that the reason for much of the disagreement stems from what researchers believe to be the basics of grounded theory, and notes that both Glaser's and, to some extent, Strauss's position was imbued with positivism 'with its assumptions of an objective, external reality, a neutral observer who discovers data, reductionist inquiry of manageable research problems, and objectivist rendering of data' (p. 250). However, she does also go on to state that over time grounded theorists themselves have modified their stance and the flexibility of this approach allows researchers to 'modify their emerging or established analyses as conditions change or further data are gathered' (p. 252). For example, contrary to Glaser's recommendations my research began with a broad literature review to establish what research had been carried out in related areas to my chosen topic. However, fairly early on in the research I commenced my fieldwork and began observations, followed by interviews at the first chosen site. As observations and informal discussions with parents, swimmers and coaches took place, questions began to be raised. Further literature searches were carried out and indeed the review of literature continued to progress throughout the entire study as ideas and questions arose and theory emerged.

4.4   Methods

In order though to obtain 'thick descriptions', the choice of in-depth interviews was paramount. Within in-depth interviews questions are relatively open to allow the interviewee to respond beyond the simple 'yes/no' answers. Such responses allow the researcher to prompt and probe and thus gain a deeper understanding of the issues at stake. However, as Fontana and Frey (2003) note, the task of asking questions and getting answers is not an easy one and no matter how much care the research takes in wording the questions and coding the answers there is always some ambiguity. Yet, in spite of this, they contend that it is still one of the best ways to try to understand others (Fontana and Frey, 2003). In order to further this understanding, it may be necessary that "the interviewer

has to prepare themselves to be able to 'think on their feet' in the interview itself" (Mason 1997 p. 43) so that relevant data can be obtained. However, even though some interviews may seem unstructured, Mason (1997) contends that all interviews are to some extent structured both by the interviewer and those being interviewed. For example, with qualitative interviews, although there are no set questions or structured lists as such, the interviewer goes into the interview setting with some predetermined range of topics, themes or issues to be covered. Thus, although the questions themselves and the sequence of questions may vary from interviewee to interviewee, and the process may have the appearance of a conversation or a discussion there is some structure. However, as Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) make clear, if the interview process is to be successful the interviewer must be an 'active listener' (p. 153). By being both an active and a reflexive listener the interviewer can assess how the information given by the interviewee 'relates to the research focus and how it may reflect the circumstances of the interview' (p. 153).

The need for the interviewer to be a careful listener is also emphasised by Devault (2004) when discussing women participants in qualitative research. Devault, speaking from a feminist perspective, claims that because everyday language is rooted in masculine values it does not truly reflect women's experiences. Devault argues because of this linguistic incompetence women tend to "translate" when they discuss experiences and that during this process part of their lives disappear from their accounts. It is, therefore, necessary for the interviewer to listen[18] carefully in order to extract the hidden meanings in the discourse. As Devault states:

> I can listen "as a woman", filling in from experience to help me understand the things that are incompletely said. As a researcher, my job is to listen for these translations, and to analyze the disjunctures that give rise to them (p.234)[19].

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[18] It should be noted that when referring to 'listening', Devault does not just mean during the interview itself, but extends this to include the hours of listening that take place when researchers play back whatever device it is that they have used to record the interview, as well as the reading and re-reading of interview transcripts.

[19] However, the researcher must also be aware that because it is likely that her experiences are different from the interviewees, even though she is a woman, she may risk 'filling in' incorrectly.

4.4.1 Methods: 'The setting and the actors'

As Mason (1996) notes, the principles and procedures concerning sampling 'can be governed by alternative underlying logics' (p.83). Mason goes on to state that the term 'sampling' is very often 'associated solely with a logic derived from general laws of statitistics and probability' (p.83), yet qualitative research often demands an alternative logic.

When discussing ethnographic work, Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) note that the small sample size is often raised as one of the limitations of qualitative research. The nature of this current research and my epistemological stance meant that there was no intention of allowing the findings 'to be generalized to a larger group' (Thomas and Nelson, 1996, p. 97). As Hitchcock and Hughes (1989) note, attempts to produce large generalisations can result in a failure to examine adequately the cultural contexts of social action' (p. 17) and thus a large scale random sample of participants would not be appropriate. Rather, the desire for a 'close-up detailed view' (Mason, 1996 p.92) from which I could begin to understand the roles and relationships within the sporting triangle would best be achieved through purposeful sampling, where deliberate selection of a small number of cases would hopefully lead to the necessary rich, in-depth data. Consideration with regards to time constraints and ease of access resulted in the initial selection of three local swimming clubs, two of which had elite young swimmers and the third with swimmers at county and district level were selected. However, when reviewing the literature in greater depth, it appeared that what research had been done on relationships within the coaching process had primarily been concerned with high performance athletes. Therefore, I decided to look more at the grass roots level, where, perhaps, the coach is less privileged. Subsequently, two clubs, both at the skill development level within the ASA Long Term Development Plan were selected.

The choice of clubs was opportunistic in that the first club was one at which I had previously coached some four years earlier but where I was still known by many of the coaches and helpers and by some of the older swimmers. The second club was one where I had previously carried out some coaching clinics and where I knew the Chief Coach. For these reasons I felt that access would be relatively easy to obtain. The fact that I was known to the participants was carefully considered. I was aware that this may influence the type of data collected but, as throughout the research, I remained reflexive. There was an expectancy that rather than being problematic this familiarity would aid data collection as trust would already have been established between both myself and the majority of the participants.

Full ethical clearance was obtained from the Loughborough University Advisory Committee prior to commencing any of the fieldwork.

The two clubs eventually chosen were:
Site 1: Longtown Swimming Club
Longtown was founded in 1897 and has approximately, 580 members. At the time of the investigation there were approximately 140 swimming members whose ages ranged from four to thirty-five years.

Site 2: Smalltown Swimming Club
Smalltown Swimming Club was founded in 1972 and at the time of the investigation had an overall membership of 230. However, in terms of swimming members it is not vastly different from Longtown with 125 swimming members aged between six years and thirty-five years.

4.4.2 Access
Site 1: Longtown Swimming Club
Contact with Longtown Swimming Club was initially established through a telephone call to the Chief Coach. A general outline of the intended research was given and a letter detailing the study was subsequently sent (See Appendices 1a and 2). This was then discussed at the next Club

Committee Meeting and agreement was obtained for my undertaking the study.

Site 2: Smalltown Swimming Club
As mentioned above, I had carried out some swim clinics at Smalltown Swimming Club and I had known the Chief Coach for a number of years. Primarily it was the Chief Coach who was the 'gate keeper'. Information about the research was given to her and she spoke to the committee members who agreed to my carrying out the study (See Appendices 1b and 2).

In both clubs, families were met at one of the club sessions and details of the research along with documentation were given to them. Once they had given their agreement to take part in the study, interviewing commenced. (See Appendices 4 and 5).

4.4.3 The observations
Once access had been granted, I started attending club sessions and carrying out initial observations (see Appendices 3a and 3b). During my observations, I did not make notes until immediately after I had left the swimming pool. By doing this it was felt that I would be able to actually note more of what was happening and also participants would be more likely to behave normally and be more willing to talk to me. However, as soon as I had left the session, rough notes were made and then these were later typed out. Both sites were visited on five occasions. The visits at Longtown were carried out during February and the beginning of March 2004 and at Smalltown between July and September 2005.

According to Gratton and Jones (2004), although observation may be the most neglected research technique in sport, it has a number of advantages and can be an extremely important method of data collection. Essentially at the swimming clubs I was undertaking non-participant observation where I was observing phenomena without actually taking part in the activities. However, I did use the opportunity to conduct some informal discussions

with parents, swimmers and coaches. Although such a method may not be completely unobtrusive, the impact on the participants was minimal and there was no intention of altering their behaviour in any way. There are several advantages to using observation. Primarily, it is possible to collect data within a natural setting and thus identify behaviours of which the subjects may not be aware or may be unwilling to disclose (Gratton and Jones, 2004). In terms of this present study, the importance of initially observing the swimming sessions at each site was to add to my understanding of the clubs both in terms of their organisation and the actors operating within that environment. This increase in understanding would also help to inform the interviews that were later to take place.

There are, however, some disadvantages associated with observation. It is possible that I could have misinterpreted the phenomena that I observed. The possibility of this was reduced by the fact that I was very familiar with the environment of the swimming club and, therefore, more likely to understand events that happened. I also had the opportunity to ask questions of parents or club officials if I did not understand or wanted further clarification on something that was taking place. Finally, I was able later at the interviews to again question events that I had observed.

4.4.4 The interviews

The sample: the 'actors'

The literature review had highlighted Hellstedt's model of family involvement, which I felt would be a useful 'sampling frame' (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1989) from which to select the interviewees. Therefore, drawing on Hellstedt's (1987) model, I had initially intended to ask the coach in each club to select one set of parents who could be labelled 'under-involved' and one set who could be labelled 'over-involved' parents. This, however, proved to be difficult as it soon became obvious that parents do not fit neatly into these categories. In addition, I wanted swimmers who were, or who had very recently, competed for the club, as it was felt that these swimmers would have had more opportunities for discourse with the coach. Generally, though, these swimmers had at least one parent who was involved in the

club to some degree. Finally, parents were selected where at least one of the parents fell into the categories of under- or over-involvement. It was also decided to include the category of moderately involved parent, so that Hellstedt's three main classifications would be covered. In terms of the age, swimmers aged 12-14 years were selected because at this age they had been competing regularly for a number of years and thus had had regular contact with the club's Chief Coach. Also, this is an age when experience had taught me that swimmers often drop out of the sport and I felt that this was an additional interesting dimension to explore. Perhaps it could be said that the final choice of interviewees fell into the category of what Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) label 'The more willing to reveal informants' (p. 137).

After discussions with the Chief Coach at Longtown, three swimmers and their families were identified. Each swimmer and his or her parents were interviewed. Because of the young age of many of the siblings involved no sibling was interviewed.

Similar discussions with the Chief Coach at Smalltown Swimming Club led to the selection of three families. Again, the criteria for the selection were that swimmers competed for the club, and had parents with different levels of involvement in the club. In two of the families one parent was by far the more committed in terms of involvement in their child's swimming. However, it was difficult to really categorise any of the parents as over-involved. Only Mother W could be said to be towards this end of the continuum, but according to the Chief Coach there were no really 'pushy' parents at the club. This reflects the different ethos within the two clubs used in this study; something that became clearer as the research progressed.

The Chief Coach at each club also agreed to be interviewed and so finally six mothers, six fathers, six swimmers and two coaches were interviewed. All were interviewed individually. Interviews took place either in the interviewee's home (Longtown families) or at the swimming pool (Smalltown families) and ranged in time from forty minutes to just over one hour. In the

case of the two coaches, the Longtown coach was interviewed at the pool and the Smalltown coach at her place of work. The choice of location for the interviews was decided upon by the families and the coaches. It was anticipated that by doing this the interviewees would feel more at ease in the interview setting. As previously noted, because I was known to the majority of the participants, it was expected that this too would aid the research, both during the observations and the interviews. Equally, this familiarity, especially at Longtown, may have made these participants more reticent to talk to me, knowing my past connection with the club. However, partly through my previous relationship with them as club coach, and partly through my openness about the research and its confidential nature, I did feel that I had developed a mutual trust between myself and the interviewees.

4.4.4.1 The families and their place along Hellstedt's continuum.
Longtown families

In Family A, the mother was closest to what could be classified as a 'disinterested parent'. She never came down to the club and seldom attended galas. Both daughters in this family swam, but the elder daughter had significantly cut back because of her school work. The younger daughter who was the 'selected swimmer' still swam regularly. Father A, could be classified as a 'moderately involved' parent. He took his children to the club sessions and sat on the poolside whilst they swam. However, he usually spent that time reading the newspaper. He did, however, help out at galas by acting as a steward and was willing to help get out or put away equipment when needed.

In Family B, the daughter had recently left the club to join the County Squad, but they still had a younger son at the club. Both father and mother were actually difficult to classify as in some situations they could be said to be towards 'over-involved' end of the continuum. However, neither took an overtly active role in the club in that they did not sit on the committee or act as officers of the club. They had, though, been highly critical of the club and swimming was very clearly a large part of their lives.

Family C had a daughter who had until relatively recently been a very active member of the club. For various reasons she now swam less often but still attended the club about once a week. They had a younger son who also swam about once a week, but whose main sports and activities were outside of swimming. Father C was a Masters Swimmer and also did some coaching at the club. At some time then, he fulfilled each of the roles of the sporting triangle. Father C was clearly towards the 'over-involved end' of the Hellstedt's continuum. Mother C was not really interested in the club. She accepted that there were good reasons for participating in swimming, but never went to the club and seldom went to galas.

Smalltown families

In Family W, the father, although very supportive of his son's swimming, played a much smaller role than the mother for a variety of reasons, but primarily because he was now separated from his wife. He, however, did collect his son from swimming on occasions and also acted as a steward at galas. He could be classified towards the 'moderately involved' point in Hellstedt's continuum. The mother, however, was further down the continuum towards 'over involvement'. There were three children in total in this family: twin girls who used to swim but were now at university and Child W who regularly swam at the club and also competed in several 'open' galas.

In Family R, the father seldom went to see his son swim and could be classed at the under-involved end of Hellstedt's continuum. By contrast Mother R was heavily involved in the club and was the Club Chairperson at the time of the research. Child R swam regularly but, although he had attended some 'open' galas, he did not do so on a regular basis. There were also two younger sons who both swam at the club.

Both parents in Family T were on the club committee and thus heavily committed to the club. However, again it was felt they would be located somewhere between 'moderately involved' and 'over-involved' on the

continuum, but probably more towards 'moderately involved' because although they were heavily committed to the club and both were club officials, their attitude to their child's swimming appeared very relaxed. Child T like Child R swam regularly at the club but did few 'open' galas.

More information on each of these families can be found in the Findings Chapter of this study.

4.4.4.2 Interview procedures

The interviews were of a semi-structured nature. In general similar questions were asked of each member of the family, in an attempt to try to understand each individual's expectations both of themselves and of other members of the triad. Although there were definite questions that I wanted to be answered, I allowed the interviewee to talk relatively freely. By doing this it meant that, although the questions were not always asked in the same order or indeed always in the same way to each interviewee, information was elicited, which may well have been absent had the interview been more structured.

Prior to the interviews, I gave each interviewee (including the two coaches) three forms to complete on which they could list the qualities that they felt an ideal swimmer, an ideal coach and an ideal parent should possess. It was thought that by giving these to the interviewees prior to the interview, it would help them to conceptualise what qualities were important to them with respect to the each of the members of the triad. It was also expected that this additional tool would draw out more completely some of the areas of consensus and conflict between each triad member. Each family member taking part in the research was asked to complete the form independently without discussing it with other members. As well as outlining in detail the interview procedures, each interviewee was given a letter explaining the process (see Appendix 8). At the same time it was requested that the forms be returned prior to the interviews. It was hoped that I could then compare and contrast the responses and also that these forms would be the basis of the subsequent interviews. In reality, though, these forms had limited

benefit. To some degree they did prove helpful in focusing the interviews and some interviewees had clearly considered carefully the qualities that they would look for in an ideal parent, coach and swimmer. However, not all gave such careful consideration and one family (Family T) failed to return their forms in spite of frequent reminders.

The majority of the interviews at Longtown took place in July 2004. However, two were delayed until later in the year because the child in Family B was ill on one occasion when an interview had been arranged. It then became difficult because of my own and her commitments to find a suitable time for the interview to take place. Commitments also delayed the interview with Mother C. The interviews at Smalltown took place during August and September 2005.

At the commencement of each interview, I once again stated the rationale behind the research and that the interview would be confidential and pseudonyms would be used in any subsequent published material. At the start of the interview, following the formal process of re-stating the purpose of the study, I asked the interviewees to tell me about themselves generally. Although information elicited in this way was not of sufficient detail or depth to provide what might be termed a 'life story', by doing this I did begin to build a more complete picture of the person I was interviewing. It was hoped that this in turn would aid my understanding of the social processes taking place within the sporting triangle. Primarily the questions aimed to elicit information about the interviewees' view of swimming and how important it was in their lives. Questions were also framed in order to try and discover what each interviewee felt about other members of the triad's views of swimming, along with their expectations. A copy of the interview schedules for each of the categories of interviewee can be found in Appendices 9, 10 and 11.

Once the interviews had been transcribed they were sent to the interviewees to confirm that they were an accurate record of what they had said. Only Jane, the Chief Coach at Longtown returned the transcript on

which she supplied information missing because of problems hearing what she had said when her original interview was replayed.

4.4.5 Data Analysis

The interviews with all participants were recorded but the microphone broke during the interviews with Family A and data was recorded by note-taking. With the other interviews, once the interviews had been recorded they were transcribed and any common issues and themes that arose from this data were noted.

Although it has been recognised that there are several ways in which themes can emerge, in order to elicit the themes in this study the texts of the interviews were read line by line, the transcripts were annotated and a process of 'open coding' (Strauss and Corbin, 1998) undertaken. The initial categories were identified and then these grouped into discrete codes reflecting commonalities amongst the codes (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). The initial categories and codes are given in tables 1 and 2. As Harry (2005) points out:

> It is important to note that, when engaging in categorizing/axial coding, these properties are being identified through the interpretive lens of the researcher, who is already beginning to abstract meaning from the data (p. 5).

Once the initial categories and codes were identified, they were further refined into the final themes, as I decided how the various code clusters related to each other and what stories they told (see Harry, 2005). As the data were read and re-read, continued reflective commentaries were made. This process is sometimes referred to as 'memoing'. The final themes, which emerged were as outlined in table 3.

As I was primarily concerned with the inter-personal relationships within these two clubs, and had been influenced by Jones et al.'s (2002) article in which they suggest the use of the concepts of roles, relationships and power to understand the coaching process, it is perhaps not surprising that these themes emerged from the data. However, it was hoped that by using these

themes, rich in-depth data would emerge that would begin to deconstruct the sporting triangle and aid my understanding of the complexities of the coaching process.

Table: 1

Initial categories and codes – Longtown Swimming Club
Family: Family structure, number of siblings, ethnicity, education, swim together; effect of swimming, *'…it's just become sort of part of my life really – routine' (Child B)*
Parents: occupation, swimmers, other sports, level of participation in sport/swimming, attitude to swimming; relationship with coach; differences father/mother; roles; coaching kids; view of coach's philosophy; view of coach's role; frustration with swimmers behaviour; view of other parents; education; unrealistic expectations; pushy parents – *'I'm only doing it to please you* (Father C talking quoting Child C)-; level of involvement; isolation; emotions; critical of coach; *'optimum pushy parent';* parent's meetings
Role conflict/ambiguity: Parent coach and swimmer. Coaching own children; parent role - feeling inadequate; *'…it's easier to listen to them than my dad' (Child C)*
Other commitments: School, other sport, work, music
Siblings: swimmers, other sports, level of participation; treated differently *'much more laid back'* (Father B);
Club: history, demographics, why membership, concerns about, concerns of; social aspects; *'different world'* (Father B); Progress through club; ethos; areas of conflict; instability – changes of coach; Swim 21; comparison with other clubs, *feeder club*, relationship with other club/s; Masters; dynamic/changing; parental involvement.
Officials: behaviour
Communication: existence of triangle; confrontation; inadvertent communication; coach problems; feedback; social; joking;
Coach: qualifications, culture, background, experience; ethos; poolside helpers; time issues; family commitments; why coach; involvement; partner involvement *'I think … getting a bit fed up, there is only so much swimming you can cope with (laughs)'…..'it's a sad life (laughs)' (Jane,)*: Goals, motivator, buzz; same coach; distance

Organisation: swimmers in lanes, number of nights, coaches; tests – T.15 etc.; communication; parents meetings

Swimming: attitude to; frequency; positives, negatives, social aspects; why swim; siblings; hard sport

LTDP: attitudes to, knowledge of, positives, negatives; overcrowded; specialising too early; link to training

Swimmers: swimming before club; behaviour, discipline, commitment; want to please parent, need for approval; success; failure; attitude – different, different sports; pressure; potential

Drop out/move: pressure; growth spurt; lack of progress; dissatisfaction club/coach; progress; progression young swimmers;

Pressure: *It was never …. I want them to swim, I want them to compete, I want them to be successful – it was just they're good at it…'* (Father B); talking swimming, watching swimming. *'the trouble is the more competitive she gets, the more competitive I get with it' (Father B);* from coach; from parent; from swimmer; from ASA; pushy parents; handling pressure;
Goal setting: Family affair? Not in a club this size; not discussed; same as swimmers; difficult to recognise; goal forms; swimmer's goals
Success/failure: what does it mean; how swimmers handle it; how parents handle it; how is it defined.

Table: 2

Initial categories and Codes – Smalltown Swimming Club

Family: Family structure, number of siblings, education, swim together; effect of swimming, *Effects on siblings 'I do consider them as well and I tend to try to balance things out...I tend to try and take quality time with them and sometimes (Child W) has to take a back seat'.(Mother W) 'I tend to live for the kids – I had a life' (Mother W).* Sacrifice – but not total – early morning training. *'We've talked about going to the County Squad but I don't think it's worth it – the travelling.'* Socialising revolved around the club – galas on Saturdays 'not much socialising for parents' (Mother W)

Parents: Marital status; occupation, swimmers, other sports, level of participation in sport/swimming, attitude to swimming; relationship with coach; differences father/mother; roles; coaching kids – tend not to think they are technically capable; view of coach's philosophy; view of coach's role; view of other parents (one seen as pushy) staying at open meets for w/e *'But I find those sort of people find it a bind to be there the whole day .'* (Mother W); education; unrealistic expectations (Father W); *'Every serious swimmer wants to swim in the Olympics and he wants to so – who knows' -* level of involvement (coach centred); *'optimum pushy parent'; 'I would hate him to feel he was under pressure' (Mother W). 'they still enjoy their swimming but I think it's more me that still keeps them going' (Mother R).* parent's meetings. Creation of ego orientation
Own childhood experiences

Role conflict/ambiguity: Parent coach an swimmer. Coaching own children; parent role - feeling inadequate; Dislike of coaching *'I hate it'* (Mother W)

Other commitments: School, other sport, work, music. *'he was weighed down with them'.* Swimming was a distraction. (Mother R); other sports

Siblings: swimmers, other sports, level of participation;

Club: history, demographics, why membership, Progress through club; ethos; parental involvement. Driving force. *'Don't think it's the club you would join if you want to be a top swimmer'* (Mother R) and *'I really don't feel pressurised to get my children to swim – to be up there, whereas I would in another club – I am quite happy...'*

Officials/selection: behaviour. County selection procedures

Communication: existence of triangle?; formal/informal. Relationship with parents – varies. Coach discipline, shout

Coach: qualifications, culture, background, experience; ethos; poolside helpers; time issues; relationship with parents. Role model philosophy. Central position. Other interests, commitments.

Organisation: swimmers in lanes, number of nights, coaches (Older swimmers help coach); communication; parents meetings.

Swimming: attitude to; frequency; positives, negatives, social aspects; why swim (not enough PE at school – (Mother R); standard of swimming at school so low doesn't swim there (Mother R); siblings; hard sport; keep fit' being yourself in the water' (Mother R) '…you are in a world of your own …' Time to think.   Because good at it. Individual sports – being in control (Child R)

LTDP: attitudes to, knowledge of, positives, negatives; overcrowded; specialising too early; link to training

Swimmers: swimming before club; 'specialising phase' other sports given up to concentrate on swimming, behaviour, discipline, commitment; success; failure; attitude – different, different sports; pressure; potential. : Expectations – view of success/failure. Unrealistic expectations – (compete in 2012 Olympics (Child W).

Drop out/move: pressure; growth spurt; lack of progress; dissatisfaction club/coach; progress; progression young swimmers; self consciousness. Bullying!

Pressure: from parent; from swimmer; from ASA; pushy parents; handling pressure; No pressure from coach

Effects of own up-bringing.

Goal setting: Family affair?

Success/failure: what does it mean; how swimmers handle it; how parents handle it; how is it defined.

Table: 3 - Themes

Demographics	Why swim	Power	Roles	Relationships	Pressure
Coach	Parents	Family	Club	Existence of	Commitment
Club	Coach	Influence		triangle	• Swimming
Families	Swimmers		Coach		• External
		Club		Communication	• From others
		Coach	Athlete		• On Family
		Parent		Positioning	
		Athlete	Parent		LTDP
				Power	Drop out
		Within			
		triangle			
		Outside			
		triangle			

4.5. The 'positioning' of the researcher.

Before concluding this chapter, I feel that it is important to discuss how I, as the 'researcher', both 'positioned' myself and was 'positioned' by the interviewees and other members of the clubs during the research process. As Toms and Kirk (2006) note, participants within any study may perceive the researcher differently and, in order for data collection and interpretation to be successful, it is important that the researcher is aware of how he or she is 'socially positioned' by the various participant groups.

During this present research it was clear that in different contexts and social encounters I was, indeed, variously positioned. With the club committees, the coaches, the parents and the swimmers themselves, I was positioned first and foremost as a 'researcher'. This was, also, how I wished to position myself. The reasons for this were that, although I had expected my familiarity with many of the participants would aid data collection, I did not want, in any way, to take advantage of this situation and for the participants to forget the real purpose of my visits to the club. Having said this, as noted earlier, when visiting the clubs and observing the sessions I did not take notes or openly appear to be someone carrying out research. Yet, I was careful to clarify my

position at the clubs when members asked my reasons for being there. Anne MacPhail, when carrying out research at Forest Athletic Club (see Kirk and MacPhail, 2003), was also careful that her 'positioning' had minimal effect on the research process. Like me, she was positioned as the 'researcher' with respect to the club coach and the 'other officials of the club' (p. 17) but, unlike me, Ann also took on more of a 'participant' role as her research progressed but, at the same time, she was careful to be as 'natural a part of the (research) situation as possible' (p. 28).

Whilst attending club sessions, I was 'positioned' as 'someone who had once coached at the club' at Longtown Swimming Club and as a 'former visiting coach' who had previously carried out some swimming clinics at Smalltown Swimming Club. As a result of this, on several occasions at Longtown I was approached by various people who were concerned about certain aspects of the club. Similarly, at Smalltown people were open and friendly and were both willing to chat and also to discuss swimming related issues. In a similar way to both 'Martin' in Toms and Kirk's (2006) study and 'Ann' in Kirk and Macphail's (2003) work, these informal chats on the poolside and in the foyer after the sessions helped towards a 'mutual understanding and a cultural expectation of the research process' (Toms and Kirk, 2006 p. 105), which I felt led to a further level of acceptance.

As the research progressed and it became known that I coached at the local university, in addition to a 'researcher' and a 'coach', parents, swimmers and coaches also positioned me as 'an expert'. One father at Smalltown Swimming Club, in particular, sought my advice with regards to his son both in terms of training and whether or not he should move to another club. In this position I had to be careful that I did not undermine the Chief Coach. However, because of my relationship with that coach I was aware of her stance on these matters and so was careful that any advice given was both honest and helpful, but also in line with her opinions.

During one of the interviews, another father, who was also a coach at Longtown Swimming Club, asked my opinion on his coaching methods and

seemed to need reassurance that I was not going to be critical of him. During the research I was careful never to position myself as someone 'in authority', but as someone that was 'interested' in the dynamics of the club and the relationships within in it. Therefore, although this particular father seemed to seek my approval, because of the fact that I positioned myself during the interviews as a 'careful, interested listener', the interview process appeared to be in no way threatening to him.

In addition to the above, one other position that I seemed to occupy was that of 'colleague'. The Chief Coach at Smalltown, was also an employee at the same university as myself and, in this 'position', I was seen as someone who could understand something of her role outside of the swimming environment and the stresses placed on her as she balanced her work, family and coaching roles.

From the above, it is clear that within social encounters people will be positioned differently (Davies and Harré, 1990). As noted above, self-awareness, by the researcher, of these positions together with an ability to impression manage (Goffman, 1984), in order to maintain positive relationships with the interviewees (see Toms and Kirk, 2006), is fundamental to effective data collection and interpretation. During the research process it is, therefore, vital for the researcher to continually reflect upon how he or she is being viewed by the participants within that research, as well as an awareness of how the participants themselves are positioned within the various inter-relationships within the coaching process.

4.6   Summary
As noted in Chapter 3, both the complexity and the multi-disciplinary nature of the coaching process have made it very difficult to establish a single conceptual framework for this study. What was paramount was that in order to try to really understand the relationships within the 'sporting triangle', a small scale in-depth study was undertaken, incorporating qualitative methodology. Essentially a grounded theory approach was used to analyse

the data and, building on this analysis, the next chapter outlines the findings of this study before these are discussed in more depth in Chapter 6.

CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS

5.1   Introduction

This chapter outlines the findings of the research carried out at the two swimming clubs, Smalltown and Longtown. As mentioned in the Methodology Chapter, it was important to adopt a holistic approach to this study to truly understand the inter-relationships within the sporting triangles. In order, therefore, to identify the 'how' and the 'why' rather than simply the 'what' it was vital to appreciate the context in which the individuals within the triangles operated. Findings from this study indicated that, although similarities did occur between the two clubs, the club environments were distinctly different. The triangles operated within these different contexts, and it was important to understand not only how these differing environments impacted upon the triangles but also how the triangles themselves helped to shape the environment. Therefore, before undertaking an in-depth study of the data, I felt it was important to tell the story of both these clubs individually. Essentially, taking a subjective-constructionist epistemology when looking at this data, I needed to understand how the 'interview participants actively create meaning' (Silverman, 2006 p.129). For, as Hammersley and Atkinson, (1983, cited in Silverman, 2006) state that 'accounts are not simply representations of the world; they are part of the world they describe (p.107)'.

Similarly, Silverman (p.131), drawing on the work of Holstein and Gubrium (1997) to illustrate this point, notes how Holstein and Gubrium state that:

> The goal is to show how interview responses are produced in the interaction between interviewer and respondent, without losing sight of the meanings produced or the circumstances that condition the meaning–making process. The analytic objective is not merely to describe the situated production of talk, but to show how what is being said relates to the experiences and lives being studied (p.127).

Because of this belief that meaning is essentially constructed and the importance of showing how 'what is being said relates to the experiences and lives being studied', the findings section then, is, somewhat descriptive. If I was to understand and get to know the actors, I needed to know their stories, but, in doing so it must be emphasised that the interpretation of this data are

my interpretation. It is my telling of the story, although of course the words of the actors are used to illustrate points made. However, as already noted, in spite of this others may interpret the story differently, for as Crotty (1998) remarks,

> what constructionism drives home unambiguously is that there is *no* true or valid interpretation…'Useful', 'liberating, 'fulfilling', 'rewarding' interpretations, yes. 'True' or 'valid' interpretations, no (p. 47).

This chapter contains an outline of the data collected from the observations in order to understand more fully the nature of each club. The interviews are then discussed under the headings of the themes arrived at through data analysis. I have chosen to discuss Smalltown first, because, although the research at this club was carried out after Longtown, the Smalltown story is a more clear cut, linear narrative and provides a good initial introduction to the relationships with the triangles. This is helpful in then illuminating the complex dynamics that emerged from the study of Longtown Swimming Club.

5.2   Smalltown Swimming Club

5.2.1 The context

At Smalltown Swimming Club, sessions are held five evenings a week and the main club night is a Thursday night. Most of the sessions are held at the pool of a local school, although on a Friday night the club also uses a 50m facility nearby. Squad swimmers attend this session on a rota basis. There are no specific criteria for selection to particular groups, which tend to be age-related. Beginners, however, must be able to swim a width on their front and their back with some good attempt at breaststroke. If accepted into the club they start at the Friday session where they swim widths. As their ability improves they are moved into the most appropriate group. However, before they can move to groups where lengths are swum they have to be able to swim three of the four competitive strokes competently as well as making a reasonable attempt at swimming the butterfly. Although at the time this present research was carried out, Smalltown Swimming Club had not formally received its Swim 21 award and classification, the feeling amongst the coach and parents was that the role of the club was primarily skill development. As one parent commented,

there is training available if people would commit and do the training but I don't think it is the club you would join if you really wanted to achieve and get to the top (Mother R).

In addition to swimming sessions, the club holds a number of social events throughout the year. These are seen as important by several of those interviewed. For example Mother R stated that she felt the current committee at the club 'is not really as good as the other' because of the lack of social events that had been organised. As revealed later, the social element of the club was seen to be of significance in terms of why people attended the club at all.

5.2.2. Observations

Prior to visiting Smalltown Swimming Club specifically in relation to the research I was undertaking, I had carried out some technique clinics with the swimmers a few weeks earlier. I, therefore, had some pre-conceived ideas about the club but I approached each visit with an open mind making detailed notes of what was happening. My visits took place in July 2005 and a total of seven and a half hours of observation took place over five visits. Fieldnotes with respect to these visits can be found at Appendix 3b.

Of the five visits, three took place on a Thursday evening, one on a Monday evening and one on a Friday evening, when a range of sessions involving swimmers from beginners to county level were observed. All sessions took place in the local school pool, which was just short of 25m in length. Because there were only four lanes at the pool the timing of the sessions was quite complex. Some sessions overlapped so that some swimmers stayed in the water for one hour and others for thirty minutes. Often different sessions were taking place in different lanes.

The sessions were generally crowded even though the observations took place during the school holidays and some families were away. About eight to ten parents watched the sessions, but there was very limited seating on the poolside so many parents did not stay. There was also a table on the poolside from which water and sweets were sold.

Prior to the Thursday sessions there were swimming lessons in the pool so there was little time before those swimmers got out and the club sessions started. There was no hesitation amongst the older swimmers present to help get out the lane ropes and this procedure took relatively little time.

Overall the atmosphere at Smalltown appeared very relaxed and friendly. This view of the club was supported by the Vice Chairman who, during an informal chat on the poolside, stated that during the seven years he had been associated with the club he had only known one occasion where there had been an argument amongst the swimmers. Similarly, a parent I was chatting to on the poolside described it as a 'happy club'. The children really appeared to enjoy their sessions and discipline was low key but effective. This seemed to be a family club catering for a mixed age group and ability, although there appeared to be relatively few swimmers of district standard and the better swimmers stood out.

Margaret, the Chief Coach took one lane. Sometimes this was the younger children and sometimes the older ones. In addition, there were several helpers, sometimes older swimmers and sometimes adult helpers/coaches. However, often during a session there would be a lane without a specified coach but the swimmers would just do the session that they had been given. There appeared to be very little 'messing about' and the swimmers seemed to work hard. Interestingly, it was not always the oldest swimmers who were without a coach.

Generally there appeared to be little stroke correction. One of the reasons for this was probably because there were often around ten swimmers in a lane and just managing the session took time. Also some of the helpers, including the older swimmers, just read out the session from a sheet prepared by Margaret, and gave little other instruction. When technique correction was done by these helpers it was not always accurate. This lack of stroke work was an issue with some of the parents watching and one mother went up to the end of the lane as if to correct her daughter and 'apologised' to the coach before instructing her daughter on a point of technique. Once the opportunity

arose I chatted to this mother who stated that she had been coming to the club for about three years and that she did not usually interfere with the session and instruct her daughter, but she felt so frustrated when there was no stroke correction she had to do something. She, herself, was not a coach but felt that she had picked up a great deal of technical knowledge whilst sitting on the poolside. Other than this incident, there were no real issues. Little pressure appeared to be put on the swimmers and there was a sense of enjoyment and fun especially in those sessions that ended with relay races.

5.2.3 The 'Ideal' Forms

These forms were intended as an initial indicative form of data collection and were completed and returned prior to the interview, in order to aid discussion. Two of the three families (Family W and Family R) returned the forms, as did the Chief Coach; in spite of several reminders Family T did not.

The forms were effective in allowing family members and the coach to identify for themselves the qualities they attributed to each role. This was particularly helpful in the case of the swimmers who found it hard during the interviews to verbalise what they felt their particular role should be. In these instances information given on the forms prompted ideas and thus allowed further exploration. Overall a great diversity of responses was recorded, and this in itself was perhaps an early indication of the variety of views that could be held by members of the triangles, and the multiple aspects of the roles that each actor might undertake. This diversity made it inappropriate to impose an overly-rigid and artificial categorisation on the findings. The tables below do not, therefore, provide an exhaustive analysis, but offer an attempt to draw out the key qualities expected of each role, by each member of the triad. Similarities between members' responses are highlighted in grey.

5.2.3.1 Ideal Coach

The forms invited the coach, parents and athletes to identify qualities that they felt to be important for an 'Ideal Coach' to possess. These are outlined in Table 4. Some of the qualities were selected by representatives of all members of the triad and *committed,* along with *knowledgeable* were characteristics selected by the majority of parents and the swimmers. However, Margaret the Head Coach felt that a coach, although *knowledgeable*, should also be *willing to learn*. She also noted the importance of *knowing the swimmers* and understanding their point of view and recognised the fact that swimmers will come to the club with different goals yet will, at the same time, be subject to various influences/pressures from many aspects of their lives. Although Parents R, did not list *knowledgeable* they added *experienced*, and the swimmer in the same family (Child R) felt that the coach *should be able to swim*. This ability to swim was something that later came out in the interviews as an important aspect with regards to Margaret's position in the club and to members viewing her as a *'good role model'*.

The ability to *communicate with parents* was highlighted by five of the seven respondents. Father W took this one step further and stated that he felt that the coach should be able to *collaborate* with the parents. This would tend to indicate the feeling that there should not just be a strong line of communication between coach and parent, but also a sense that they should work together in order to aid the swimmer to reach his or her potential. Father W also felt it was important for the coach to actually *recognise a swimmer's potential*. As well as communicating with parents, the ability of the coach to communicate with the swimmers, both in a formal sense such as ensuring that instructions were understood, and in a more informal manner was also mentioned. Father W added the importance of a coach being a *good networker* so that swimmers could get 'known' by the right people.

The other characteristics on the form tended to be selected by just one or two of the seven respondents. Father W, in particular selected a large number of qualities and it is interesting when looking at the overall list that both parents and swimmers appear to be fairly demanding of the coach in their

expectations. *Inspirational, innovative, motivational* (Father W) were also adjectives used to describe an ideal coach.

Table: 4

Ideal Swimming Coach – Smalltown Swimming Club

Coach	Parent	Athlete
Approachable	Human touch	Friendly, approachable
Communicative	Communicator, collaborates with parents, effective with rhetoric	Communicator
Professional, Knowledgeable	Professional, Knowledgeable	Knowledgeable
Fun loving		Sense of humour; fun loving
	Good role model (be able to do what they teach in swimming)	Good role model
	Give praise	Encouraging
	Committed, selfless, supportive of the club	Committed, dedicated
	Patient	Patient
Accommodating	Able to delegate	Influential
Enthusiastic	Can see potential of swimmer	
Innovative	Experienced	
Understanding	Good networker – for benefit of swimmers	
Willingness to learn	Good planner	
	Good timekeeper	
	High energy style	
	Inspirational	
	Motivational	
	Performance focused, detail focused - technique	
	Positive attitude	

Interestingly, *fun loving* and *having a sense of humour were* qualities that were highlighted as important by the two swimmers. This emphasis by the swimmers on the qualities that were concerned more with how the coach related to them was in sharp contrast to the more 'technical' aspects selected by the parents. Margaret, the Chief Coach also listed *fun loving* and again, in contrast to the parents, her selected qualities tended to be concerned primarily with being *approachable* and *understanding the swimmers*, although she also emphasised the need to be *enthusiastic* and *professional.*

5.2.3.2   Ideal Parent of Swimmer

Table 5 highlights the qualities selected by members of the triad with regards to the 'Ideal Parent'. Perhaps many of the qualities mentioned could be summed up by the one parent who just wrote *willing to give all to help their child achieve whatever they wish from their swimming* (Father R). In a similar vein, in addition to being *supportive* Father W wrote *being there now.*

The ability to plan and to organise was highlighted by three of the four parents (Parents R and Mother W). Parents W also interpreted *planning*, not just in such things as the day to day organisation of the training and competition preparation, but also as *planning ways for the child to reach their potential.* Father W wrote that parents should be *ambitious for (their) child* and should establish relationships with key players at club/county level and *(g)et known on (the) open meet circuit.* Similarly, Mother W felt that parents should also *look for licensed meets (for their child) to achieve district times, and open meets where time is less important but (there is a) strong chance of a win.* This emphasis by Parents W on seeking ways to establish their child within the swimming community beyond the club also became evident in the subsequent interviews. As will be seen, Child W was the most successful swimmer in Smalltown and his parents were clearly ambitious for him.

Child R felt that the 'Ideal Parent' would be *positive* and *encouraging* towards both the coach and their child but would *not push their child into something for which he or she was not ready.* He also felt that *parents should not get too nervous* for the swimmer before races and they should have a *sense of*

humour and be able to talk freely and confidently both with the swimmer and the coach. He did though recognise the time commitment needed and also stated that parents needed to be *flexible* so that they *could make time for the swimmer around work.*

The need for *parents to support the club* was something that Margaret, the Chief Coach, and Mother R, who was the club Chairperson, felt was important to the success of the club. Margaret noted that parents should ideally *become not just part of the club, but of the whole 'swimming experience'.* Understandably many of the qualities selected by Margaret were those that impacted on the organisation of galas and club nights as well as being related to supporting the swimmer. For example, she felt that, as well as offering help at galas, club nights and social events, parents should *understand the club as a whole.* In particular she believed that they should appreciate the importance of informing those concerned if their child was unable to swim when selected for a gala and that they should appreciate the affect such a withdrawal would have on the team. Father W also felt that parents should be involved in the club whilst Mother W stated that *parents should be willing to forfeit time and sleep to be available whenever they were needed by their child.* Such commitment shows that even at this level of swimming, parents themselves are driven in their support of their children and their lives can, and often do, totally revolve around their sporting youngsters.

Table: 5

Ideal Parent of Swimmer – Smalltown Swimming Club

Coach	Parent	Athlete
Supportive of swimmer	Supportive – be there now! 'Forfeit time and sleep Both parents collaborate to support	Willing to give all to help child achieve
Encouraging	Praise child – help with positive mental attitude	Encouraging
Supportive of club Thoughtful – towards the club, e.g. tell someone if child can't swim in gala	Active member of club	Gets involved in club
Interested in child's swimming.	Think about possible future routes to achieve potential.	
	Establish relationship with coach and collaborate to support child	Able to talk freely and openly with coach and swimmer
	Research and enter child for open meets	Dedication – prepared to take child to open meets
	Balance existing demands	Flexibility
	Committed	Sense of humour
	Personal Best oriented	Nerve control
	Networking – establish relationships with key players on the circuit	
	Transport	

Again many of these qualities in the summary above were selected by just one of the respondents (Parent W). However, it is interesting to note that the qualities highlighted by the coach do seem in many ways less demanding of the parent then those selected by both the swimmers and the parents.

5.2.3.3 Ideal Swimmer

In terms of selected qualities for the ideal swimmer, the characteristics mentioned by Smalltown (See Table 6) were, as can be seen later, similar to those of Longtown. *Technical ability* [and a *willingness to work* at it (Margaret)] was mentioned by all respondents as were physical characteristics such as *strength, power, endurance*, along with the mental qualities of *desire to succeed, dedication, competitiveness* and *ability to focus on task*.

Although, again, several of the characteristics were only mentioned by one of the respondents, the category of 'Ideal Swimmer' showed more agreement amongst the respondents than the other two forms. Interestingly though, only Margaret, the Chief Coach mentioned wanting to be at the pool and wanting to swim. However, whilst many of the respondents mentioned qualities to do with improving performance from both a technical, physical, attitudinal and psychological perspective, Child R and Mother R also felt that it was important for the swimmer to be *able to socialise* and *mix well*.

Determination and *dedication* were highlighted by Father W, Child W and Child R. Father W and Child W mentioned the *need to be goal focused*; to be *aware of times and desperate to improve* (Father W); and to *never give up or say you can't do something* (Child W). Both these respondents also emphasised the *ability to be able to recover from a bad swim* (Father W) and to *look on the bright side* (Child W).

Table: 6

Ideal Swimmer – Smalltown Swimming Club

Qualities of your ideal swimmer may fall into four categories: Please include all aspects if appropriate. Examples are given below:

1. **Physical Qualities (e.g. strength, endurance, flexibility)**
2. **Sports specific qualities (– e.g. fast turns; stroke technique; stroke length)**
3. **Attitudinal qualities (personality traits e.g. mental toughness; sense of humour)**
4. **Psychological (mental skills, e.g. concentration, anxiety control)**

Coach	Parent	Athlete
Athletic	Athletic. High power to weight ratio	Strength, endurance
Good technique	Good technique	Good technique
Competitive drive	Drive to succeed. Highly competitive. Driven.	Determination
	Anxiety control	Anxiety control
	Concentration	Concentration
	Mental toughness Ability to get over bad swim. Resilient	Mental toughness Look on the bright side
Reasonable communicator	Sociable	Communicate easily
Hard worker	Committed to training programme	
	Focused	Focused
	Confident, self belief	Positive
Enthusiastic		Enthusiastic
Sense of humour	Quick reactions	
	Motivation	
Willingness to learn	Not satisfied with mediocrity	
	Inspirational	
	Analytical of self	
	Goal oriented. Aware of times	
	Intelligence	
	Professional,	

As noted, there was some agreement with regards to the characteristics of an 'Ideal Swimmer' and parents and swimmers tended to focus on the types of qualities mentioned on the form. These had been given in order to help the respondents complete the forms but one parent just wrote on the form *all of the above* and the fact that some specific qualities were mentioned may have led the respondents to include these. However, there were also some distinct variations. Parents tended to emphasise the mental toughness and the commitment needed, and again appeared to be more demanding than the swimmers and the coach. However, it should be noted that a number of the latter attributes on the table in the parent column were again selected solely by Father W. By contrast Margaret the Chief Coach, although appreciating the benefits of physical attributes and a good technique also emphasised a *willingness to learn and enthusiasm for the sport*.

In spite of the fact that some of these answers may have been prompted by the suggestions on the form, as mentioned above, this form did prove beneficial when discussing their own role with the swimmers during the interviews and by using their forms to discuss their selected qualities, the ideas about roles and behaviour of the swimmers in the club began to emerge.

5.2.3.4

Summary

As already noted, the vast number of responses on these forms, and the limited number of responses made any sort of meaningful quantitative analysis difficult. The main benefits of these forms was to begin to gain an appreciation of what was important to each of the respondents and provide areas for continued discussion in the interviews.

5.2.4 The interviews

The aim of the interviews was to attempt to deconstruct the sporting triangle and to try to gain some insight into the goals, relationships and dialogue that took place within each separate triangle. However, in order to further understand the members of the triad it was felt necessary to understand the

community in which they operated and how their perception of that community might impact upon their relationships with each other. Indeed, one of the emerging themes was the ethos and role of the club. This will be discussed first and then the other themes of

- ❏ Demographics
- ❏ Why swim?
- ❏ Roles and relationships
- ❏ Power and positioning
- ❏ Pressure

are discussed in turn.

5.2.4.1 The ethos and role of the club

At Smalltown Swimming Club, the main emphasis of the training sessions was on skill development and it was felt by most that if swimmers wanted to progress further then they would need to join a different, perhaps more competitive club. Most of those interviewed, except perhaps Family W, appeared to be comfortable with this. For example Mother R commented:

> I don't think it is the club you would join if you really wanted to achieve and get to the top – I think there is other clubs if you wanted to travel further a field, if you wanted to train every night, every morning and expect more of a commitment. We are very laid back here - we're not 'You've got to be here ten minutes before you get in the pool to do all your warm ups' – we don't do that – a lot of kids here tonight do not really warm up – so it isn't that intense here, whereas I know for a fact other clubs are...

There was certainly a sense of community about the club and even when Margaret, the Chief Coach, was talking about the committee she described it as

> very family based....Well it's not family based but you get the feeling, that it is because it is a small club

The relatively small size of the club, did, however, clearly impact upon their success. When discussing whether or not she had made a difference to the club, Margaret commented:

> I suppose most of it is the same – they are still catering for the same type of swimmers. The standards have, I think improved, the quality of some of the swimmers, 'em – in terms of - we did go up a division in

the league ... we've actually gone down again now, but, that's partly because the size in a way – being in the first division, we've probably got two or three good swimmers in each age group that can compete – then we've got two swimmers for the relays who are one, two or three seconds slower...

Similarly, the size of the club and the overall ethos impacted on the commitment of the swimmers, which Margaret found frustrating at times, especially if she felt these swimmers had some potential and could do really well with a bit more training. This variation in attendance made both planning and taking sessions difficult at times, Margaret explained:

It's difficult to take care of all, but I have swimmers who do well in county or whatever, district and national level and then I have swimmers who just want to swim to get fit – to improve but the winning side is less of a goal for them than the others... I mean my pet hate is when they are not available for galas. It really really annoys me, especially with the diddy leagues – the younger ones. This year I had a letter go out to all the parents ... they must be available for the first two (galas) in order to swim in the last ... We've got it all in place and you come to the last round and then they can't swim because they have got a party (laughs).

For Margaret, success would be winning, but she appreciated that with the size of the club and the calibre of the swimmers this may not be realistic. She, therefore, contented herself with

...just doing the best we can in each gala. It's not so much about winning in each gala, em, because if you look at Division One where we just swum in – winning is well, you know, it's not achievable with our calibre of swimmers. So it's getting PBs getting them to swim as best they can, enjoying the gala, and yeah our realistic aim would be third or fourth out of six, something like that.

This idea of not needing to win or needing to be in the first division was again echoed by Mother R, the Chairperson of the club who explained:

They are training and I don't think it's because they're necessarily to win. I don't think it's 'Oh we've got to get into the first division and all this. I don't think it's there for that – I really don't feel pressured to get my children to swim – to be up there, whereas I would in another club. Oh I'm quite happy...

This view was supported by Father W who commented on how few swimmers regularly went to open meets. He stated:

You don't get many takers and you're not – they don't run coaches from the club there or anything, which I suspect is what they want – the parents don't really want that – they just see it as a good social thing, which it is – they don't want to take any further role, whereas (Child W) does partake in a lot of open meets and (Mother W), well (Mother W) has been the driving force behind that ... she loves taking him to open meets.

Because of this club ethos, Family W who could be described as the most competitive family of those interviewed at Smalltown, had looked to join elsewhere. Child W did also swim with the air cadets, as well as doing extra sessions outside the club. At the time of the interviews, Child W swam, on average, five times a week, covering around fifteen hundred metres, and competed in a number of open meets as well as the normal club galas. In order to try and obtain extra sessions, his mother had contacted the local County Squad to investigate the criteria needed to be able to swim with them. He had also looked at the county development squad but, although there might have been an opportunity to swim there, the parents had not 'pushed it' (Father W) mainly because of the distance they would have to travel and the time commitment involved. Distance to travel was also put as a reason for not going to other clubs. They had considered two, one of which had 'tried to poach' Child W (Father W) but according to Father W whether they went to another club depended very much on his wife's 'ability to take (Child W)' to that club.

The relatively small amount of pool time available to Smalltown Club meant that lanes on club nights were often very crowded. Although during her time at Smalltown, Margaret had obtained extra training hours, she still felt that one of the limitations with regards to swimmers' advancement was that there were often around ten swimmers in a lane at a time. This, together with the relative lack of commitment by many of the swimmers, meant that there was a limit on 'how far you can take a small club or a relatively small club'. To become more 'competitive' and 'take the next step', she felt would be a commitment that the club might not want to undertake, particularly because of the financial implications. She explained:

Finance is an issue for them, especially to keep running 'em because you could employ more people to help but they can't afford to pay more people so they need more people to volunteer but volunteering takes up more time, oh it's a problem – a constant battle. The plus side is the good team atmosphere. It's friendly; people support each other and things like that.

The overall picture then of Smalltown, was a club with a relatively relaxed atmosphere that tended to fulfil the needs of the majority of its members. At times, the nature of the club clearly frustrated Margaret, the Chief Coach, but as stated above, there appeared to be an appreciation by all, including her, of the fact that if you wanted to be a top competitive swimmer, then Smalltown was probably not the club for you.

5.2.4.2   Demographics - The 'Actors'

Margaret, the Chief Coach at Smalltown

Margaret had been Chief Coach at Smalltown Swimming Club for about 8 years. She worked at the local university and held a PhD in Maths. She became involved in coaching whilst a student at the university as one of her flat mates was also coaching. She was herself a keen swimmer and had swum at a high level. She also competed in water polo at an international level. She attended nearly all the training sessions at the club but not all the galas, but had, however, supported swimmers at open meets. During her time at the club, she had created extra sessions and although the standard of swimming had improved over the time she had been coaching, her own success had added pressures to her private life. Towards the end of my time researching at Smalltown, Margaret decided to retire from coaching because of this.

Family W

Child W, a boy aged 13, was perhaps the most committed of the swimmers interviewed at Smalltown Swimming Club. He had two sisters, twins, both used to swim but neither really liked competing. They were just starting to undertake a degree at a local university. Child W himself had moved to the local secondary school, and prior to this he had gone to a school outside of Smalltown. Child W's parents were separated but both were strong

supporters of Child W. The mother played the largest role in supporting Child W's swimming in terms of taking him to open meets.

Mother W was a part-time sales adviser. She did not swim herself, although as a child she belonged to a 'ladies' swimming club. She held an ASA Assistant Teachers qualification and used to help out with swimming lessons at a local school, on a voluntary basis. Father W was an Area Manager for a large retail chain. He had been separated from Mother W for two years, but, according to Father W it was 'an amicable separation' and both parents co-operated to support the children 'in every respect'. Although Father W's work required him to travel around the country quite frequently, he tried to limit it to be near the family. He collected Child W from the pool on occasions and had qualified as a timekeeper, so helped out at galas.

Family R
Child R was 13 years of age at the time of the interview and had been swimming for about 9 years. He went to a school in a nearby town and had two younger brothers. His mother managed a playgroup and used to help run Beaver and Cubs groups. She had recently given up doing the Beaver group and was Chairperson of Smalltown Swimming Club. Father R had 'never been a lover of sports' but did enjoy canoeing and spent a large part of his spare-time shooting. He had lived in the country all his life and liked to be outdoors. He worked as a premises officer for a local college. Although he supported his sons in swimming, he played no active role in the club.

Family T
Both parents were heavily involved in the swimming club. Mother T was Secretary and Father T was Vice Chairman, although he stated that 'it does not involve doing a lot'. He was also the child welfare officer. At the time of the interviews, he was taking his timekeeping and refereeing qualifications with the Amateur Swimming Association) ASA. Father T used to swim as a child and although he grew up in Smalltown, he swam for a club in a nearby town as it was a more established club. He finished swimming when he was quite young because his father broke his foot and was unable to take him to

the pool. He had, however, retained his love of water. His only sport at the time of the interview was bowls. His parents were farmers but as the youngest son he did not have the opportunity to have a farming career on the family farm. He was employed as a Green Keeper for a local golf course. They had a younger son who also swam and whom the father believed had the greater potential of the two brothers.

Endnote

At the time of the interviews at Smalltown Margaret had just told the club committee that she wished to resign as Chief Coach at the club. The reasons for this were the pressures of carrying on a full-time job, coaching about twelve hours a week and keeping her partner happy. It took some time to find a replacement for Margaret, although one of the parents was keen to take over. However, it seemed that several of the older swimmers would not be happy if this person was successful in getting the job and the committee were going to advertise the post. As a result, I have discovered that Margaret carried on coaching at the club for about another year before eventually both a replacement swimming teacher and, eventually, a coach were found. The new coach is a student at the local university.

Having described the ethos of the club, it is important to understand what it is about the club that attracts its members to it. The next section deals with the reasons why those interviewed came to the club.

5.2.4.3 Why swim?

The social aspects of swimming appeared to be high on the list of why swimmers attended the clubs. For example, Child T remarked

> I just enjoy the friends – the people that you meet and the new people. I like getting better at swimming… Well I like adults to talk to – as you're like grown up…

However, Child R liked swimming because 'just the simplicity of basically being yourself in the water'. He went on '…you're in a world of your own when you are in the water – you can't hear anything, just your own thoughts'.

The fact that the swimmers had a talent for swimming was also important for them to continue in the sport. Child R stated that he did not enjoy swimming at first because he 'wasn't very good', but then it just 'clicked' and a parent whose children already went to Smalltown Swimming Club contacted his school and encouraged him to join. Now that he was good at swimming, he enjoyed it especially, because like athletics another of his favourite sports, it was an individual sport and he felt in control. Child T also described a similar situation stating that initially he did not enjoy swimming 'I never used to like swimming at all. I wouldn't even do a width when I was seven, I just couldn't do that...' He was encouraged to go to club by one of his brother's girl friends and he 'started to go from there and just got better'.

Similarly Mother R discussed one of her children who hated swimming initially because he was not good at it

> In his first lesson he screamed and kicked and...he really hated it and it wasn't until he was seven that it actually clicked with him. He couldn't coordinate at all. No matter what he did...

Success and being good at swimming was also the driving force for Child W, who according to his father,

> is so keen – I mean...he came to me at the weekend, for instance, to ask me to take him...yesterday afternoon to do an hour and a half in the pool. He is very driven to the extent that he wants to do more and more training – em and so I am happy to do that. I think he has found something that he can excel at and I think that has been a kind of crutch for (Mother W) and I to support it, because the more he got into it, the more we got into it.

This notion that fun can come from the dedication and challenge of sport is supported by Child W when in response to the question 'So what parts of it are fun'? he remarked:

> Just the feeling you get when you've won. That anxiety before a race. The feeling after a training session that you've achieved something. Just I like it really.

And later:

> It's just so much fun. I enjoy it so much really – I just love the challenge and it's just good to be fit.

Fitness was another reason for swimming mentioned by several of the interviewees. Father T was a swimmer when he was young and in a similar way to Child R, he loved the feeling of just being in the water. However, he also stated,

> ...probably with me its being in the water and around the water's been second nature...fitness-wise – it does help with fitness - general all round fitness. I don't think there is any other sport you know that tones every part of you whether it be your muscles or your respiratory system – so that's good.

But again, he emphasised the social aspects. He stated:

> It's a lovely club. It's a friendly club – you've probably noticed. There doesn't seem to be any sort of like, them and us. You've got some of the newer parents of the little swimmers who have not got as much involved as probably you'd hope they would, but then you can't be pushing people and forcing people.

He went on to explain that as 'child welfare officer' for the club over the previous four years, he had only once come across a situation where he had had to speak to a child. He added,

> ...I mean even the annual gala where they all encourage each other. There is no...for want of a better word – bitchiness. So I would say the fitness side and the social side – equally important.

Father T also felt that generally the parents all 'got on' though there were one or two 'characters', but for a small club it had a good social side, which was organised by the committee. He felt that his family had made many friends through swimming.

Although, like many others interviewed, Father R felt that the social aspect was one of the areas that his children most enjoyed, he also believed that they would not continue swimming once they got involved in other activities, such as their music. He stated:

> I think they like it because they have got friends here. I think they come down to see their mates and it keeps them fit going swimming. I think as they get older they will not be so interested in it.

Margaret, the club coach also recognised the social benefits of swimming and the friendships gained through the sport, although, for her, those friendships were not always long lasting. She added,

> …not that there are many friends from my old swimming club that I am friendly with now, but at the time it was, I suppose, just camaraderie and that side of things…

Margaret had either been swimming or playing water polo from a young age. She felt that now the sport itself was part of her. She stated, 'it is probably why I am who I am today, I suppose'. She felt that the whole experience was what she enjoyed, both the challenge and the fact that as a coach she continued to be 'learning things'.

In spite of their enthusiasm for their children to swim, not all the parents enjoyed the sport. Father R felt that he was not really involved in encouraging his children to swim. As a child himself he enjoyed swimming but now 'finds the water too cold'. He felt also as a youngster he did not get the encouragement to do physical activity that children get now from their parents. He stated:

> I used to love swimming as a kid. I used to do it as a kid, although it was cold I was not bothered…we did it at school but – I had no parental encouragement like our kids get – so it was just a case of left to get on with whatever you wanted to do basically. It was 'Come back when it's tea time' sort of thing. And I lived in the countryside so I just disappeared into the fields and the woods.

As might be expected, safety was also a reason for the children being introduced to swimming, for example Mother R explained:

> Well my husband has a fascination with boats and not being a swimmer myself I was apprehensive about being around the canals and a friend has a boat down in Newlands and we always go out in it when we go down in the summer, so I used to worry about that, so as soon as he had his injections we took him down to the swimming pool.

No matter what the primary reason for swimming might be, it was clear that it did take up a large part of the lives in the families interviewed at Smalltown Swimming Club. For example as Father T described how swimming had taken over his life. He said:

Definitely, it has – yeah I mean – there's most weeks, three nights if not more through the swimming club. On a quiet week it will be three nights – galas – four or five – you know what I mean – it can be committee meetings, but is err, oh, yes I'd recommend it...but then I'm converted aren't I – you know what I mean.

This commitment to swimming and the fact that several of the children also took part in other sports such as football clearly meant that some of these children were leading very busy lives. Child T stated:

Some days when I'm really tired and I've done a gala on a Saturday night and then Sunday played football and Sunday afternoon we've gone out somewhere and then sometimes on a Monday night I really feel like I can't...but when I get in a swimming pool, I'm off, I'm all right even if I am tired.

Child T, however, felt that his parents did not pressure him to go if he did feel tired, they left that decision to him. This was in contrast to Family R where there was general agreement that the mother made the children go, on occasions. Father R stated he felt that one of his younger sons would not go swimming if Mother R did not pressure him to go.

Well I think some parents are a bit pushy – it's rather the parents want them to do it rather than the kids ...I know my middle lad he keeps going 'I'm fed up with swimming' but of course the wife is very strong willed and she says 'You're going' and that's it.

He felt that his wife made the child go because

...he wouldn't stick at anything otherwise. He has to be forced to do it, otherwise he couldn't be bothered.

And again reflecting on his own experience, he added:

I feel that's why I didn't really achieve much meself really because there was no one there pushing me – I was just left to – so it was 'I can't be bothered' sort of thing...

Mother R who, echoing her husband's comments, also felt that if she did not nag her sons to go swimming they wouldn't. She stated:

I don't think they'd do any sport at all if I didn't persevere with swimming. I don't think they'd be bothered at all. They still enjoy their swimming but I think it's more me that still keeps them going. I think if it were left to their Dad they would sit back at home – do their homework and watch tele.

One of the reasons for making her children go swimming was the fact that that they would do very little exercise otherwise, especially as she felt that they have such little time devoted to physical education in the school.

Thus, within Smalltown Swimming Club there were several reasons for swimming and several attitudes towards the sport, although all those interviewed, even if they did not swim themselves had positive things to say about the sport. Also, the time needed to train and compete, even at this relatively low level within the sport, meant that swimming started to become a very large part of the lives of the members of Smalltown Swimming Club. As Child R commented, the time taken up by swimming meant that he could not do other things he may have wanted to and, as previously noted, this was a reason why his father felt he might give it up in the future as other activities became more attractive.

The amount of time that both parents and swimmers had to commit to the sport could affect the relationship with other siblings if not handled well. Mother W admitted that she spent a great deal of time taking her son to galas, both club and open meets. She had older twin girls who used to swim and because they were older and preparing to go to university she did not feel that it affected them as much as it would have done if they were younger. She stated:

> ... Yeah, em because they are older I don't think it affected them the
> same – not that much em I tend to – I do consider them as well and I
> tend to try to balance things out – at the moment they're not doing
> school as they are going to uni so - and Fridays I don't work, so I tend
> to do girlie things like go shopping – so I tend to try and take quality
> time with them and sometimes (Child W) has to take a back seat ...
> And I think they are quite keen – they enjoy his success.

Having investigated why members belonged to Smalltown Swimming Club, the interviews sought to establish their role within the club. In fact the interviews sought not just to establish how individual members of the sporting triad of coach, parent and athlete saw their own role but how they viewed the roles of the other members as well. If conflict is to be avoided, it would seem

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that it is important that each member has an appreciation of the expectations of others in terms of how he or she should act out his or her role.

5.2.4.4   Roles and relationships

According to Jones et al (2002), it is imperative that one understands the roles within the coaching process if we are to deconstruct that process itself. The interviewees were asked about how they saw their own and other's roles and this section looks at the role expectations (both their own and that of other members) for each member of the triad.

The coach's role

Several times in the interviews with the parents and the swimmers, Margaret, the Chief Coach was talked about as a good 'role model'. Someone the swimmers could look up to and respect because she was experienced and knowledgeable: qualities that all those interviewed felt important for the coach to possess if she was to fulfil her role.

Child R felt that it was important for the coach to be able to understand the swimmers and felt that the coach should be an ex swimmer in order to be able to get 'into the mind of the swimmer – get their point of view – how they would go about it'. Margaret, herself, also supported this viewpoint because, although she felt that there was no role conflict in spite of fulfilling the two roles of coach and swimmer in the club, she did feel that she coached differently because of it. She stated:

> If I didn't swim in the past then perhaps I wouldn't know the things I do and I wouldn't be able to talk to them (the swimmers) about when they make a false start and they get disqualified – you know that feeling when you've been through and you've messed up and it's not been your day and you've been through that at some stage. I think that would help, but in terms of me swimming now – does that affect my coaching?…I don't think so, it's quite a challenge in a way.

The idea of understanding the swimmers and recognising individual abilities was echoed by Mother W. However, Mother W also felt that their were constraints on Margaret in terms of time available to fulfil her roles and again this time restraint was emphasised, to some extent, by Father W. Father W

appreciated the 'huge job' coaching a club like Smalltown was and because of this he felt that other roles that the coach might undertake in a larger club were missing. In terms of Smalltown he felt that the role of the coach in a club 'at this level' was,

> very much what we see Margaret do – its about em – all I am going on to say that I think (Child W) now needs more direct coaching because I think he has got to the point where he has almost outgrown the club now and we have got to move on to something – we are struggling a bit to know what the next step is for him. But the role that Margaret plays, and plays very well, I think, is to identify talent and nurture the talent, to stretch the swimmers and make sure they are having fun … I guess to give them feedback on how they are doing and that is something I don't think the club do particularly well …

He went on to discuss 'feedback' very much in terms of issuing the swimmers with their times and then letting them know if they had achieved personal best times (PBs). He felt that the committee would not want to take this on as they did not see it as important, unlike himself who felt that there was 'a whole piece of work to be done with coaching about that, because if they (the swimmers) go on, it (knowing your times) becomes pretty important'.

Perhaps naturally, many of those interviewed felt the coach's roles in respect of the swimmers, was to turn up on time (Mother R), be organised, be committed and improve the standard of swimming. Although many appreciated the need for the coach to be able to control the swimmers, most of those interviewed also stressed the need for a fun element in the training sessions.

In terms of her role with the regards to the parents, Margaret felt that it was '(t)o make their children happy, to answer their questions, if they have any queries or needs whatever.'
She went on:

> If they want to come and speak to me at galas or whatever and I suppose it is just to look after their child whilst they are in my care, if you like, or while I am supposed to be coaching them. Yes the swimmers – and for the swimmers – someone for them to talk to, I think, if they feel they need to. Some of them tell me things, about the school play or whatever, so I try and make them feel part of the team,

because they are not all in the squads – so just to feel like part of the whole experience.

The parent's role

Primarily at Smalltown Swimming Club, the role of the parent was seen to be that of supporting their children in their swimming career. The swimmers interviewed were in the 'Specialising Stage' of their athletic career (see Côté 1999 and Côté and Hay 2002). They had started to commit more to swimming and had, as a result, begun to give up some of their other outside activities, although all still had other hobbies. As Child W explained:

> Yeah I swim, I used to play football – I quit at the end of last year so that I could concentrate more on my swimming. I go to air cadets once a week so I do a lot of sports with them as well.

As parents of athletes at this stage five of the six interviewed were quite heavily involved in the club. The exception was Father R who, although, as has been noted above, was very supportive in terms of encouragement and facilitating his son's attendance at swimming, played little part in the club. His wife, by contrast, was Chairperson of Smalltown Swimming Club and she was someone who clearly identified her role as not just supporting her child but as,

> supporting the club as well, when I see what needs doing – I can't just think 'Oh I'll drop them off and just go' – you know, it's 'Where do you want me to go – what do you want me to do' you know I am quite happy to do - muck in, to help out.

In terms of parents helping to coach at the club, Father T talked of the problems of parents coaching their own children. He felt that, in this situation, the children 'won't listen, they won't...' and he did not think that his

> lads would take too kindly if I was at the end too as well...you've got to keep a little bit of a barrier. You know what I mean – they will feel that they are never away from you.

In fact only one of the parents interviewed, Mother W, actually helped with coaching at Smalltown. Like Mother R, she had not been a swimmer, but did it to help both the club and Margaret, the Chief Coach, even though she did not feel comfortable in the role because of her own lack of swimming ability. However, Mother W did offer advice to her son when attending open meets as often there would not be anyone else from the club there. Her son explained:

So my mum is like my coach at open meets because I am the only person in the club that does open meets, so she takes me to all them and is like a coach at them.

He felt that his mother had picked things up from watching him training and so did feel that she was in a position to offer technical advice.

The additional roles involved in helping out at the club did, however, lead to Mother R feeling that perhaps she was not supporting her son as well as she would have liked. For example, when she was undertaking other roles, such as stewarding, or recording at a gala, she found it difficult to be able to watch her children swim, she stated:

> I did enjoy it (helping) but I find now that I've missed a lot of my kids swimming – when you are recording you don't see anything, you don't have time. Stewarding you're always chasing after … It is alright doing the older ones – ooh they sit around and it's fine they check what races they are in and they are fine – the younger ones … you're chasing after them and I do feel that they are my responsibility, if they are here at the poolside and the parents are up there – I like to think there is someone watching mine and so yeah – I'm protective.

However, according to Mother R, this caused no resentment on the part of her son because his mother had 'always done it' and always got involved in whatever the children have done. Mother R felt that the reasons for her having to get so involved came from the fact that she had little support from her parents when she herself was a child, something she clearly resented. She stated:

> It's not the same if the parent is not there and sees your achievements. Why bother – no you see I didn't get none of that when I was a kid. I didn't do no activities whatsoever at school – there was no – I was a girl so it didn't matter. I didn't need praise – I didn't need anything and that's how my parents brought me up – and I thought 'I'll never do that' and eh true to my word I have not. Not because – just because it's boys – I'd have done it for the girls as well – the ballet or the tap or whatever. I'd have done it for a daughter as well – just that support.

Mother R felt that the fact that she was 'always there' made up for the fact that her husband found swimming 'boring'. However, according to Mother R, Father R would go to club galas if she encouraged him by saying such things

as 'You've got to come down and watch the boys swim – a) it's local and b) it is the club event…'.

Findings from the interviews showed that parents provide not only material support in swimming, such as finance and transport for their children but that they also gave emotional support and, if necessary, ensured that their children were treated fairly. Parents would question Margaret as to why their children had not moved up groups and Mother R also discussed a time when she felt one of her sons was being bullied by other swimmers in the club. She explained,

> … my boys call it 'pecking order' when they get in the pool – Brian was very small – very slight build and there was girls that were pushing and whenever he swam they were deliberately swimming on top of him and I watched a few times and thought 'Enough is enough' and I did go up to Margaret and said 'You know there's a bit of bullying going off … I don't know if she was aware of it or not but she did have a word with the girls and they did stop … they were a bit bigger than him – a lot bigger than him really and I did not feel – because it upset him and it wasn't just once it was twice … and I though right – get up there and say something – get it sorted and I think Margaret did act on it straight away …

The swimmer's role

Perhaps Father W summed up the view of the swimmer's role in the club by stating that they should '…turn up and…fully participate – em – it's pointless belonging to a club if you don't abide by the rules…'. However, it was clear that Margaret understood that swimmers came to the club for a variety of reasons and she recognised that the swimmers had each

> …got their own roles if you like, because their role is to swim for the reasons that they want to do swimming and then hopefully their role is then to swim well for themselves. Swim the best they can if they are doing a race or train because they want to get something out of it, so swim well if it's a race and swim well for the team. And probably secondly to know that if they swim well – the team will do well.

Other roles some of the swimmers adopted were as helpers and club captains. Clearly Father T felt that the swimmers 'should put something back into the club'. Some of the older swimmers did help to coach the younger ones and from the observations I noticed that several helped to put the lane

ropes in at the start of sessions. In addition, a male and female swimmer were also elected as boy's and girl's captains. According to Child T, their role was to 'just encourage the little ones really … just helping officials – not really the officials but the (stewards)…they have to go and fetch the kids some times. They stand on lane ends some times'.

Thus, within Smalltown there appeared to be a general consensus of what the roles of each member of the triad should be. The overall ethos of the club meant that, perhaps, the swimmers were not always as committed as the coach would have liked, but it was appreciated that although this might be difficult, this was the overall ethos of the club. Parents, particularly, seemed comfortable with their roles and the role of the club and the position of their child within in it. One sensed little pressure or tension, but rather a community, which was supported by its members with a strong social element.

Generally then, those interviewed at Smalltown seemed to be comfortable in their various roles, the parents all saw themselves as supporters of their young swimmers. Similarly most were in agreement about the role of the club and the position of their children within it. Having said this, there were some issues with respect to power and positioning within the club, and although perhaps less acute than those that will be described later in Longtown Swimming Club, they were still present.

5.2.4.5 Power and positioning
The coach
Margaret, the coach was clearly seen as someone who had the respect of both the parents and the swimmers. It would appear that some of this came from her 'legitimate power', because of her position of authority at the club, but also because of her past history of competing at a high level. Other people on the poolside were not seen by some as 'real coaches' (Child R) and Child R when talking about Mother W remarked:

> … I don't think (Mother W) really knows how to swim, so I find she doesn't really understand what she is saying when she reads out the

sheet – whereas one of the other coaches, Elizabeth has a bit more knowledge of swimming –she's been doing it for years.

Mother W, herself, actually admitted that she felt uneasy coaching because of her lack of control over the swimmers but that she did it, on occasions, to help out Margaret. She went on,

> I know when she's (Margaret) asked me to do the Friday evening at the uni – I hate it... because they are so cheeky – some of them are – it depends – sometimes, it's difficult.

Both Margaret's vast swimming experience and her university connections were also seen by Child W as the reason she was able to make opportunities available for him to progress. He stated:

> She's just dedicated and just done a lot of stuff for me. Made opportunities for me and stuff...

He went on,

> she's at training as much as she can and tries to ensure everyone does their best and fulfil their potential in swimming and she's got experience at swimming because she was in the Commonwealth Games for water polo.

Margaret sometimes swam for the club at galas, something that clearly the members appreciated. In response to the question 'How do you feel about it if she (Margaret) swims? Child R answered, 'I love it, because she tends to always win!'.

In relation to her coaching, Child W, after discussing how sometimes Margaret was very busy because of the numbers in the lane, added,

> ... but most times she's just good and helps everybody with their stroke and points stuff out if its not right or something.

Other comments from the swimmers like 'supportive' and 'encouraging', (Child R) would also tend to support this view of the coach.

In spite of her 'legitimate' position of power, Margaret was also seen as someone who was approachable. As Child R said '...it's just like talking to one of your mates really'. Margaret also felt that she was approachable and

that she had a 'pretty good' relationship but, at the same time, she realised that she needed to display her authority when necessary or when she was not happy with the swimmers performance or behaviour. In these situations she felt that her own behaviour made it quite clear how she was feeling. She explained:

> I think they would know when I'm not happy… I probably shout at them – err I don't shout at them much – like in terms of telling them off. I shout at them for attention or something like that 'em I don't usually, not shout at them but usually I'll get them out the water or stop the set. Not necessarily raise my voice but say 'I'm not happy with this'. If I do shout then they know that I am really not happy. I don't shout that much - if I do they go 'Oh my goodness, she's really not happy' err, em but I think most of them, the majority feel they could come and talk to me or ask me something…

Similarly with the parents, Margaret felt that they saw her as someone that was easy to talk to. She felt that she gave them the impression of being approachable by trying to acknowledge parents as they come on to the poolside or by having a 'general conversation with them'. However, for Margaret there was clearly 'a time and a place' for the parents to approach her. She stated:

> I like them to be enthusiastic but I don't want them bombarding me all the time – I'm happy to answer questions, a bit of understanding – understanding the things that I've got to do on the side and I will have time to see them, but for them to ask me at the most appropriate moment, not when I've got swimmers trying to get in the pool and then trying to get out and things like that.

During her time at the club, she has had little opposition from parents except in terms of one or two asking why their child only had a thirty minute session whereas some had moved up to having a full hour. However, she added:

> But I mean from the committee I haven't really had any problems. And from the parents I haven't had any real problems. If we have then I've just talked about it and explained the situation and they are probably happy with it.

The parents also seemed to accept Margaret's authority and again this appeared to be partly because of her expertise in swimming. Mother R stated that:

> We have a good coach in Margaret, she has swum before… if they can swim, then you've got more respect for somebody haven't you? What

they are teaching you to do ... it'll be a big change now – the club will miss her.

Similarly Mother W praised Margaret enthusiastically:

> I think – I think she is brilliant – I mean you can ask her anything, talk to her about anything ...

Certainly, none of the parents had had reason for confrontation with Margaret and were very supportive of her and worried about who would replace her when she left. Having said this, Mother W had grievances 'with the system' in terms of selection for county training but appreciated that this was something out of Margaret's hands.

Margaret herself felt that there was little confrontation in the club, occasionally she had had to speak to some parents but was supported by the committee. In fact, interestingly, she herself did not view the committee as a very formal entity and certainly different from her previous experiences of committees. She stated:

> There is a little committee but it's not very formal. When I think back to my old club it was kind of regimented – well you can approach them (the Smalltown committee) and bring up ideas and they are open to discussion so you don't feel like 'ooh should I ask them something ...' things like that.

She felt that the committee had expectations about how she should fulfil her role but she added,

> ... I don't really think about the committee too much, I suppose, I have a role I am supposed to do thing, but whether they (the committee) were there or not, I don't think it would affect what I do.

Margaret also talked about how, when she first came to the club, she altered the structure of the sessions, but she went to the committee with her plan, and 'there wasn't any major opposition - just going through the loop I suppose'.

Clearly Margaret felt her position within the club was central and that the club was 'coach run to be honest'. She went on:

> The committee are there but they are there to support rather than be against you – I mean things are in place ... If I want to change things I

– if it's a minor thing I can do it – if it's a major thing, then I'd ask them. Obviously with the new law – with Swim 21 scene, obviously they are, well not more involved but have a lot more to consider and that obviously means I am liaising with them and them with me.

This belief that the coach is central was certainly echoed by one of the parents who felt that,

> if you haven't got a good coach then you haven't got a good club I don't think. You can have all the help in the background but if the one who is trying to get the ideas over is not for want of a better word any use, then you're not – you might as well call it a day and get somebody else in who is. Yes definitely central to the club I mean yeah you know coaching is – well it's and integral part of a swimming club …

Margaret, therefore, positioned herself as someone who knew more about swimming than the committee because,

> new people (who come to the committee) have new ideas, which is good, you know – change things – I've nothing against that, em, but…they (the committee) don't necessarily understand how swimming clubs work, so some of the things they are suggesting are not really appropriate but you kind of have to have that to have new things so …

The lack of confrontation that appeared in Smalltown Swimming Club would seem to stem from the acceptance of the various power positions. Margaret accepted that the committee's role was to look after the administrative side of the club and to support her in terms of the 'swimming' side. This tended to be also how the committee viewed their role and their position within the club. Even parents who had some swimming experience felt that it was better for Margaret to do the coaching. When asked if he ever coached at the club Father T, an ex-swimmer, responded:

> Me no – I sort of sat back from that. I mean the kids – Margaret's great … we'll really miss her. We really will. I were talking to her tonight and the club will, but she's been a victim of her own success really, and she's done so many things that have worked and it's made the work load more and more and more – don't get me wrong – I'm not complaining but we really will miss her and I think the kids will miss her as well – I really do – em – no I mean I did wonder at looking at doing some coaching qualifications and that sort of thing, but then I went down the kind of starting to do my ASA time-keeping and refereeing.

This view seemed to be echoed in the attitude of the other parents interviewed in that they positioned themselves in such a way that they felt they had little authority or knowledge in order to challenge the power position of the coach.

The parents

The parents interviewed had children who had been members of the club for a number of years and several of the parents were now on the committee. However, this had not always been the case. Father T who, as noted when discussing roles and relationships, felt that some new parents did not get sufficiently involved in the club. He admitted that at first this was the case with him, but because he soon wanted to learn more about the 'running of the club' he became a committee member 'not long after I started'. At the time of the interview, he had been child welfare officer for the club for about four years.

The issue around new parents and how they positioned themselves within the club was appreciated by the committee. In order to encourage new parents to be more active in the club, a web site with pictures of the coaches and other officers of the club had been set up. In addition, the committee was proposing to erect a board in the pool showing photos of club officials because, as Father T explained,

> you do sit there when you come to a club and you've either got to be
> dead forward and blunt and ask or you have to sit back and wait to be
> or just pick it up – if you see what I mean, but we – any time that we
> asked a question, nobody every – you know everybody were quite
> happy to tell you, you know...

This view was echoed by Mother R who, although Club Chairperson and someone who positioned herself as a very active member of the club and one who was 'quite happy to...muck in, to help out', had, herself, felt isolated when she joined the club. She stated that she tried to ensure this did not happen any more. She explained:

> Well I do try and communicate with parents. I do introduce myself
> because of what happened to me. I came along as a new mum and I
> was sitting there and they were all chatting and I thought 'that's not
> very nice' and me and my friend were sitting there at the background
> and even after the first gala we travelled together and I did feel quite
> not involved here, but one of the other blokes – he was on the

committee and he came and introduces hisself and we got chatting and...he did explain everything.

In spite of this Mother R did find it hard to understand parents who did not get involved, particularly if they had been members of the club for a while. She stated:

> I think if you asked them right out they would probably do it, but a lot of them just sit back and don't – you know a lot of people who have been in the club a long time, I have never known them do anything or even help when asked ... they just come and they pay their dues and they think that is all they are expected to do.

Some parents then, it would seem, were happy to criticise others for not supporting the club, although there was an appreciation of the problems in entering a new group faced by less experienced parents.

Mother R also felt that, perhaps as Chairperson, her position allowed her to criticise some members of the committee. When discussing what social events had been organised she commented that,

> the actual work of the (current) committee is not really as good as the other who did paint balling, (and) we had a meal out for the committee. This one has done very little really. There was a barbecue in the summer but that's really it this time.

Similarly some of the parents of younger children seemed to feel that they could criticise the coach. As mentioned previously most of the confrontation experienced by Margaret came from parents wishing to move their child into another group, but she had 'one parent in particular go on about it quite a bit' but she added 'that has stopped now'. Margaret's own position in the club as the 'expert' meant that she could discuss with the parents why their children had not moved up and what their children needed to do to improve in order to progress. She remarked:

> It was just talking to them telling them what they needed to do, what they needed to work on, 'em and I will say if there is an issue with space...but most of the time it is because they are not doing something correctly stroke-wise, or behaviour-wise or they are just not ready to move up.

However, occasionally there had been in the club a parent who considered that they themselves were 'expert'. Margaret explained:

> I used to have a couple that used to come and try and help out on the widths thing – you know come and tell their child to do something, and that's a bit irritating.

At first she ignored it but then had 'a few words' and stated that she would rather they did not do that. She then physically took the group over to the other side of the pool, away from the parents.

Generally though the parents interviewed (and from my observations it would also appear to be many of the other parents), positioned themselves as supporters of their children, the coach and the club.

The swimmers

The three swimmers interviewed were positioned at the 'Specialising' stage in their athletic career (Côté 1999; Côté and Hay 2002). As such all three felt that they were good at swimming and this expertise was one of the reasons they enjoyed the sport.

Within the club they held various 'positions'. Child W was seen as the 'best swimmer' something that his mother felt separated him a little from the other swimmers and caused some resentment, not so much from the other swimmers but the parents. She said,

> I feel sometimes with the parents – they resent may be (Child W) because he seems to do well all the time. You know ones (swimmers) in a similar age group or those not so keen and when they do the uni training particularly, (Child W) is in there first doing the warm up and others are just sauntering onto the poolside. I think sometimes there is a bit of resentment.

However, she felt that Margaret was very supportive, she added:

> I find that she is really unbiased – she's different with all the swimmers and with (Child W) she never – it would be ridiculous if she was knocking her best swimmer but – you know – she recognises the fact that he is keen and she helps him as much as she can – it's really nice.

Parents were also in a position of power with relation to their children's swimming. Child W and Child R stated that they would go swimming when they did not always feel like it, if made to by their mothers. However, Child T's parents left attendance up to him. He said:

> Mum just says 'it's a bit of fun – if you don't want to do it then you don't have to do it'.

However, Child R was also positioned in the club in a supervisory role as he helped out with teaching the younger swimmers, although he did at times find it hard to control them.

The interview revealed that there was a general consensus amongst those interviewed at Smalltown about the role of the club and those within it and as a result there appeared to be little pressure put on the swimmers by the other members of the triad. However, it was clear that for many at Smalltown, life revolved around swimming and this could add additional pressures to family life.

5.2.4.6 Pressure

Pressure on the parents tended to stem from the commitment that they had made to Smalltown Swimming Club and to the sport generally. This pressure may not be just in terms of time but also financial. For example, when Child W went to open meets that may take place over a weekend, he stated that he and his mother often stayed in a hotel.

As already noted, all the families interviewed at Smalltown had at least one parent who was on the club committee. In the case of Family R the father very seldom attended either the club sessions or galas, but it appeared that the roles of the parents were clearly defined and little conflict existed. Father R was totally supportive of his wife. He explained:

> I support her in everything she wants to do. I encourage her you know – she says 'Oh I'm not capable of doing that' and I say 'of course you are'. Look what you've done now. I am quite happy for her to do what she wants to do. I am there to back her up.

And later he added, 'I'm so proud of her'.

The time that his wife spent at the club also meant Father R had to do many of the chores at home. He stated:

> Yeah, I spend most of my time when I'm not at work cooking for everybody – I'm on the morning shift this week – up at five and then I come home, go down to the school to pick the youngest lad up, then back home to make the dinner so they have all the dinner when they come home, then (Mother R) comes in and her dinner's waiting for her.

When discussing this, Father R again referred to his own childhood and what little time his own parents spent with him. He explained,

> ... I never had the opportunity like my kids have. My parents wouldn't spend money on me. They spent money sending me to public school (laughs) but I never had – there again – all these entertainments, all the hobbies that they get. It's just a different world ...

Similarly when talking to Mother R, there appeared to be an acceptance of each person's role within the marriage and an acceptance that each of them had different needs. For her, her social life revolved around the swimming club, and she stated that if she was not there she would be 'sitting at home'. She felt though that the fact she was out every night did not worry her husband, she went on:

> You know it doesn't affect him - you know, so long as he can carry on – you know he's gone shooting today, he's gone out with his mate and so long as he has his time...every other week he's on afternoons and he doesn't come home until ten. By then I'm back home normally – it doesn't worry him anyway – we don't live in each other's pockets.

She explained that they were both in long-term relationships before meeting and 'didn't need each other to be there all the time. I mean it's nice when we are but ...'.

It has already been noted that Mother R on occasions made her son go swimming, but this appeared to be accepted by Child R, who remarked that sometimes he did not feel like going swimming when he was,

> caught up in other things – em homework, guitar things like that, or just like playing out with my mates, whereas my mum makes me come down swimming, so I do that and by the end of the evening I think 'yes I'm glad I came swimming because I feel all rejuvenated.

Generally, comments from the swimmers tended to indicate that there seemed little pressure put on them to attend more sessions. The parents in Family's A and R, where the children had had the opportunity to attend county development sessions, all felt that it was too much for their children, who were worn out and could not function properly at school. Even Family W stated that although Child W went to extra sessions in his own time, they would be worried about him going to the County Squad because of the time taken to get him there.

This acceptance of the level of the swimmers at Smalltown and the amount of commitment expected could be summed up by Father T who stated, when questioned about setting goals and targets for his son:

> If they were in the County Squad and looking to be in the County Squad and that sort of thing then yes...but I don't think it is necessary to put pressure on them to tell you the truth. Every child swims different from day to day because there are other factors...there are enough pressure on them at that age and so I just like to see them swim. I just like to see them all swim to tell you the truth – you know – whether they are mine or not.

Certainly Margaret, the Chief Coach, as already noted, would have liked more commitment from some of the swimmers especially with respect to turning up for galas because, if they did not commit then this would put pressure on the coach and the team manager to select a full team. However, even Margaret appreciated that children had several other commitments in their lives. Margaret also felt that there was no truly 'pushy' parent in her club, although she stated that she had some 'very' keen parents. She explained the difference between 'pushy' and 'keen' by stating

> Oh – I think its keen if the child is keen – you know if the child wants to do it and they are helping then that's fine but if you see the child ' Do this ...' and the child seems very negative about it all the time and there's a parent saying – 'you must go to an open meet, you must do that', then I think I'd be a bit concerned.

Margaret then went on to explain that in her view there was never any occasion where it was right for a parent to shout at his or her child. Something she had witnessed once at an athletics match. This was because she felt that the children were 'only young, (and) they should be enjoying it

and trying their best'. For her a parent who gave an 'optimal' push (see Gould and Lauer, 2004) would be one who encouraged and understood the swimmer and something about the sport. She went on:

> You've got to be encouraging but you can't say that was good on every performance, because every performance is not good, so I think there has to be some negative comments ... but I think it is perhaps the way that you say it. It's encouraging your child to think that you can get the best out of them without pushing them out – pushing them so that they come to hate the sport'.

She then discussed a swimmer she knew when she, herself, was swimming, whose father coached her and made her do extra sessions. This girl was very good but she stopped swimming at thirteen because 'he pushed her too much'. She felt though that it was difficult to find the dividing line between encouragement and pushing she stated,

> But how you know with your child or with a swimmer what is too much, I don't know.

Family W may be an example of a family where the child was keen. Child W stated that he would like more swimming sessions and his father commented that he was 'very driven to the extent that he wants to do more training'. He added,

> so long as he is happy to do it, and there is not some demon haunting him – em I'm happy he should do that. I think he has found something he can excel in.

He went on to explain that Child W's success at swimming meant that both he and his wife had 'got into' swimming. He believed that Child W lived to compete and

> Em I think success has bred more success and a striving to do better – he – that's something about (Child W's) character – he has got to excel and he has got to beat expectations. I don't know where that comes from – but it's certainly – I think it's probably on his mother's side more than mine. She is very driven. Em, but equally now, I do share his passion for it as well

and with regards to his and his wife's view of competitive sport:

> I am competitive, I am competitive. (Mother W) is less competitive for herself but is competitive for the children. Yes – she's never been particularly competitive for herself. Exceeding and excelling doesn't

particularly bother her but she wants absolutely for the children to succeed.

Such an attitude may well have put pressure onto Child W but there appeared little evidence that it did from the interviews either with him, his parents or his coach Margaret. This was in spite of comments by Father W that his son had,

> got goals and he knows what times he wants to beat – he's got all the PBs on his wall and he knows who in the country is better than him and at what stroke and he could tell me what their times are as well and when he wants to have them by, and it is infectious and it is just wonderful to see him win.

Perhaps it is because of the overall attitude in the club that the Smalltown swimmers in this study seemed to handle 'failure' well. Father W admitted feeling 'gutted' when his son did not win, but he stated that he would not show it 'to that degree', and with respect to Child W's reaction to not doing as well as he had hoped, he stated that in spite of the fact that Child W

> ... always beats himself up about it. He always says 'I could have done better' or 'I had a poor start or a poor turn ...' (or) 'in another year I will have put on more muscle and I will be able to take him', so you know he's quite philosophical about it – he does feel down but not to the point that he is depressed about it – he just shakes it off really.

Others also demonstrated a fairly laid back attitude to not doing as well as they had hoped in galas. Child T stated that although he might be disappointed with his performance he would,

> ... just get on with it – it's life. One week you'll be faster and one week slower. You'll have an off week, one week. I just take it in my stride and on I go.

And similarly from Child R:

> I try not to think too negative. If I like get beaten by someone younger, I think 'Ah – I should have trained harder' or something like that. I don't beat myself up about it.

The parents of both Child T and Child R supported this view. Mother T stated that it depended a little on what mood Child T was in but he could be quite quiet at times if he did not do well, but he 'doesn't let it bother him'. Similarly, Mother R remarked that her son was '...not fussed though, he's not let it get to him or anything'. Again the effect on the children and how they viewed their

success and failure could be because of the parent's attitude. Father T talked about an incident when his son had not swum well. He explained how he had discussed with his son the fact that people have an 'off day or a bad day', how in swimming the difference between success and failure is in hundredths of seconds. To explain this to his son he had tried to start and stop his watch in eight hundredth of a second, which was the time that his son had lost a race by, and the closest he could get was one-fifteen hundredths, just 'to put it in perspective because to him eight one-hundredths sounded huge...'.

All this tends to support what has been discussed earlier about the general ethos of the club and parental expectations. For example when discussing some success her son had had at an open meet, Mother R stated:

> ...he was proud of himself when he won, but again just – you know I can't see him wanting to go any higher. He wouldn't want to be an Olympic swimmer or anything like that – he's never compared himself to James Gibson or anything like that ....

Another example is when Mother T was talking about a 100 metre swim that her son had recently done, she commented:

> ...I can't remember what his time is now – he's quite good. He's improved just this last – I don't know this last four months, he's grown as well. He's always had the technique but he's just started to grow. I just like to watch him swim because he just looks so good. It's quite relaxing watching him – he's got a lovely stroke – he really has.

This attitude was, however, in contrast to Family W who hoped that their son might make the Olympics. This could, perhaps, be an unrealistic dream bearing in mind the level that Child W was at. However, as stated above, Child W was clearly driven and at the time of the interviews appeared not to be pressured other than from the pressure he might be putting on himself to succeed in all aspects. The fact that his aspirations might be unrealistic were acknowledged by Mother R when talking about how Child W had beaten her son because Child W 'train(s) a lot more'. She recognised that perhaps Smalltown was not meeting the needs of Child W but she felt that Family W remained with the club because,

perhaps they are not as good as they think they are – well – he stands out here but he doesn't stand out ... anywhere else. I've seen other kids just as good...

At the same time Mother R emphasised the ethos of the club by stating that there were other children in the club with the ability who would shine if they wanted but 'they don't want to because it isn't the main objective for them to be Olympic swimmers'.

In terms of success at swimming, there was clearly a sense of achievement felt by the swimmers when they won a race. Mother R also talked about an annual gala when Child R nearly beat Child W (not identified as such by Mother R). She stated:

> This lad has been training so hard and it showed – he were brilliant, but before we broke up (for the summer) (Child R) was very close to him and he got very close last gala to his club record and that was a bit of an eye opener to the parents and to the child. To the child, because they want to win, they want to achieve and they've got that instinct they want to do it and he's put the hours in, and he's trained before, and (Child R) would have liked to have done that...

In spite of some internal rivalry, it was clear from the interviews, though, that all three children interviewed supported each other. For example, Child T stated '...I just get on with them really well'. Child R and Child T's definition of success indicated again the level of ambition within the club and the relatively little amount of pressure that appears to be put on the swimmers. For them success was doing well in age-group competitions and other galas and Child R also added achieving a club record or personal best. Child T realised, however, that for others success would mean having higher goals, but that was not for him.

Generally then, both the swimmers and the parents at Smalltown appeared to experience relatively little pressure. With the exception of Family W, neither the swimmers nor the parents set goals and swimming might be discussed at home, but only in general terms about what was happening in the club rather than discussing points of technique or other more technical aspects. Father T

perhaps summed it up when he stated that his sons were quite competitive but,

> they are not nasty competitive if you know what I mean. They are quite happy if the team is successful ... they wouldn't be the sort that would fall out with anyone because they've beaten them. They will take defeat you know as well as they take success .... They will listen to criticism and advice as well. So I think they are pretty well rounded on the difference between success and failure. I think most kids in Smalltown are though, to tell you the truth. I think that's why we don't get the bitchiness the bitterness if one gets beaten by another one, that sort of thing – you know.

Perhaps though, the one person who felt pressure in the club was Margaret, the coach. As already noted, Margaret was in the process of leaving when the interviews took place. The main reasons for this were to have more time for herself. She was coaching most nights of the week as well as working full time. She stated that she wanted to do more swimming and spend more time with her partner.

Margaret had clearly been the driving force in the club since she started in 1997. She had brought about several changes and the club had progressed. Father T felt that,

> she's been a victim of her own success really and she's done so many things that have worked and it's made the work load more and more and more – don't get me wrong – I'm not complaining but we really will miss her and I think the kids will miss her as well.

5.2.5 Summary
Smalltown certainly appeared to be a relatively small family orientated club where the social element for swimmers and parents was clearly important. Parents and members of the club were very supportive, although involvement was to varying degrees. Family W were perhaps the most committed in terms of competitive swimming but the other two families, with the exception of Father R, were heavily involved in the club both as supportive parents and committee members.

Margaret, the Chief Coach, held a central position but inevitably had to respond to the wishes of the committee although few conflicts arose. She was someone who was clearly respected by all those interviewed.

5.3   Longtown Swimming Club

5.3.1 The context

At the time of the fieldwork, Longtown Swimming Club ran sessions every night of the week except for Saturdays when there was usually a gala. Thursday nights was the official Club Night when the club had use of the main pool at the Longtown Leisure Centre from 6.00 p.m. to 9.30 p.m. and the small training pool from 6.00p.m. to 7.30 p.m. The training pool on a Thursday night was used for 'improver' sessions. Swimmers in the 'improver' sessions were not termed members of the club and had to undergo a trial just like any other new joiner before acceptance into the club. Historically, the club's 'improvers' sessions were in conflict with the 'learn to swim' lessons run by the leisure centre as both catered for similar levels of swimmers. However, just before the fieldwork began, there had been more liaison between the leisure centre and the swimming club with regard to these sessions and the club was now seen as providing a possible exit route for the leisure centre learners.

Up until March 1999, swimmers were allowed to go to any sessions except on a Thursday night when they were allocated to a particular group. From March, 1999 this changed and the swimmers were divided into groups and particular club nights were allocated to those groups. This resulted in children training with more or less the same group at each session. Although the club had sessions most nights, many of the children only attended the Thursday club night. There was no compulsion for the younger swimmers to attend a set number of sessions but the better swimmers were expected to train five or six hours each week. Swimmers from this club have reached district and county level and in the past the club has had age-group county champions. At the time of the study, the club had a President, which was a non-executive position. There were eight other committee members including the Chief Coach. Just prior to the commencement of the research the club had undergone changes with the departure of the long established secretary and treasurer who were both in their seventies and had been in the club for many years. In addition, a new Chief Coach had been appointed and the club had been awarded the Swim 21 award from the ASA.

<u>5.3.2 Observations</u>

Although I had not coached at the Longtown Swimming Club since 2001, I had had a long association with the club and had during my latter time with them been Chief Coach. I, therefore, had certain expectations of what I would observe during my time at the club. However, again I approached the research with an open mind with a view to discovering the changes that had taken place in the club under the new Chief Coach. My visits took place during February 2004. A total of seven hours of observation took place over five visits. A range of groups was observed. Because I was known to several of the club officials, members and families, people seemed willing to talk to me and were interested in what I was doing.
(Fieldnotes from the observations can be found at Appendix 3b)

Of the five occasions, three were on a Thursday evening, which was the main club night. During these sessions the groups swim at different times with the youngest and least experienced swimming at 6.00 pm. and the top group swimming from 8.30 p.m. to 9.30 pm. In addition, at 6.30 pm there were sessions in the small training pool of the leisure centre for learn to swim groups and others hoping to progress to a standard good enough to be accepted into the main club. The fourth visit was on a Sunday night when there was only one hour of swimming open to all groups. This took place at the local leisure centre. The final visit was on a Monday night where, again, there was just a one hour session, which took place at the local grammar school.

From these visits, it was clear that although the club appeared to be a friendly, family club catering for swimmers of all ages, there were areas of conflict and several people used me as a 'sounding board' whilst I was there. The main areas of conflict seemed to revolve around the overall aims of the club and the expectations of those attending the sessions whether they be parents, swimmers or coaches. Also it was clear that parents viewed their roles very differently. The relatively low number of parents watching the sessions tended to indicate that many families, for whatever reasons, did not watch

their children swim. As one might expect, there were more parents on the pool side for the younger age groups. It was also clear that, on occasions, those on the poolside would take a real interest in their children's swimming to the extent that they would video them or give 'advice' on how to swim.

The numbers of swimmers in the pool varied with each session and, although the Chief Coach felt that she could not cope with more swimmers, others in the club felt that there were no youngsters coming through and very little attention was being given to the younger members. This was in clear contrast to the Chief Coach who stated that she was targeting the younger swimmers and concentrating more on technique work thus ensuring that they did the correct sort of training for their age. Her future aims included trying to get swimmers to come to more sessions than just one a week. This lack of frequent attendance seemed to be an area that caused frustration amongst several of the coaches.

Certainly on the Thursday and Sunday sessions attended the pool was quite busy, except during the half-term period. However, during the Monday session there were only about ten swimmers, but this, according to Father C, who was coaching was a 'good night' in terms of numbers.

The fact that technique was being targeted by the Chief Coach as the main learning outcome, in itself seemed to be an area of conflict. A parent who was also a Masters swimmer and, therefore, swimming in Group 1, stated that he felt that Jane, the Chief Coach, was more of a teacher than a coach. He felt that the 'kids need someone to push them, to ensure that the sets were swum accurately and at the right pace'. He said that too much time was being spent on technique and the 'kids can't race'. When they race 'they look good but are always half a length behind'. He felt that what the club needed was someone to drive them and push them to swim better. It did not appear to be uncommon that parents wanted their children to train hard and be 'pushed'. Father C, who is a Masters swimmer, a parent and a coach at the club and also one of my later interviewees, talked to me about his daughter and how he

got frustrated because she would not race the 100 metres butterfly. He realised that he was quite 'tough' on her and added: 'See what a pig I am'.

With regard to the inability of the younger swimmers to swim fast in galas, similar views were expressed by the retired secretary of the club who reiterated that 'they (the swimmers) looked good but had no speed'. He stated that they could only manage about fourth place in the lower division of the Speedo League. He went on that the club was particularly short of boys and it was the younger age-groups that were more affected as the older 'open' age group was supplemented by university students. Interestingly, although some of these students assisted the club by helping with the coaching as well as swimming and scoring valuable points in galas, they in themselves caused some degree of conflict. As Jane, the Chief Coach explained, many of the students were being picked for galas because they were faster than the 'regular' members. Therefore, Jane had to decide whether she would swim her fastest team in order to gain points and encourage the club or whether to swim the members who had been with the club for a number of years, at the risk of not doing so well. A similar situation also happened lower down the club where she noted that many of those who join the club want to race and she, therefore, had to try and ensure that as many as possible have a chance to at least get a swim in a relay, again compromising the possible success of the club. Certainly, in spite of these problems, the club was experiencing success. They had been selected as one of the top three clubs in the county and were being invited to a presentation/award evening. On two occasions during my visits they had been visited by the local paper journalist because of this.

In terms of coaching, the amount of feedback that the swimmers received during the sessions varied. There were on occasions several coaches on the poolside. On one occasion, there were just 18 swimmers in the water and nine coaches on the poolside. Many of these coaches were either older swimmers, ex swimmers or students. Jane stated that this could be a problem. She did not want to discourage them from helping but at times such a large number was difficult to manage. In terms of setting the work to be

done, Jane stated that she planned the sessions for Groups 2 and 3 in terms of what sort of work they should be doing but let the coaches actually write the sessions. From talking to the younger 'coaches', this could be a problem. Wilma, one of the Masters swimmers who helped with the coaching, stated that she could not help with the coaching every week and when she did she stated that she tended to 'make the session up' as she went along, adding 'I haven't a clue really'.

Many of the issues and concerns by the parents and coaches that have been raised during these observations were also highlighted during the follow up interviews. It should, however, be emphasised that I only attended a relatively small number of sessions, but have no reason to believe that those I did attend would be significantly different from others. Also, my previous position in the club gave me a somewhat 'privileged' position and people were ready to talk and express views that they may not have done to another researcher.

In spite of the various areas of conflict within the club, there were several people including parents, swimmers and coaches who were committed to making the club a success, although at times the term 'success' may not be interpreted in the same way by all. Also, all the coaches, except the Chief Coach who received a nominal fee, helped on a voluntary basis and for older swimmers it was often seen as a way of putting something back into the sport they had enjoyed for many years.

5.3.3 The 'Ideal' Forms

As with Smalltown Swimming Club, the forms were completed prior to the interview and then discussed during the interview. Again, the number and variety of characteristics that were selected have made analysis difficult, but the results have been summarised below. Also, as was found with the Smalltown Forms, and perhaps for the same reasons, there was most agreement on the characteristics selected for the 'Ideal Swimmer'.

5.3.3.1 Ideal Coach

As can be seen from Table 7, there was a vast array of qualities given for the 'Ideal Coach', with some being only selected by one person. As with Smalltown Swimming Club, there were differences in expectations from each of the members of the triad.

Although qualities such as *kind* and *understands athlete,* were selected by the parents several of the other attributes chosen by them were to do with being *dedicated, committed* and *motivating the swimmer.* However, Fathers C and B along with Jane, the Chief Coach, recognised the need for *a sense of humour.* By contrast, the swimmers tended to pick qualities, which were more associated with how the coach related to the swimmer and they included such aspects as *friendly, helpful, considerate, supportive, gives praise* and *feels proud of their swimmers.* In addition Child A and Child B felt that the coach should be able to understand things from their standpoint and be able to discuss swimming in their terms. Swimmer A though felt that the coach should be *firm.* This notion of *firmness* and being a *disciplinarian* was echoed by both her parents. In fact, Mother A felt that the coach should *get rid of non-serious swimmers from the outset* and then be able to *motivate every one of the remaining serious swimmers.* However, neither Jane nor any other parent mentioned this quality, although Mother C felt that the coach should be *assertive.* During her interview, Mother C elaborated on this by stating 'not an aggressive person when dealing with swimmers but *assertive*'. Also both Parents B felt that the coach should *command respect* and be a person *to look up to* (Mother B). In her interview, Mother B stressed that she felt that many of the coaches at Longtown did not command respect and added that to do this 'you've to got to be a strong person, even in a quiet way, to coach'. She also pointed to the fact that she felt that the children would respect the coach if the coach could swim. She went on:

> It's nice for the children themselves to know that the coaches can swim and actually do what they are doing in the water and fully understand what they are going through.

However, the quality that was selected by all the interviewees, was *knowledgeable.* Both Swimmers A and B and Parents B felt that the coach

should be *knowledgeable* and be able to transfer this knowledge to parents, swimmers and other coaches, although for a variety of reasons Parent B felt this did not always happen. In addition, the coach should be able to put that knowledge into practice, be *able to communicate with the swimmers* and be *a reflective practitioner* (Jane). The need to be able to communicate with parents as well as the swimmers was also recognised by both Jane and Fathers A and B. Not surprisingly, Jane, the Chief Coach, also noted that both a *passion for swimming*, and *enjoyment in coaching* were essential and this reflected her love for both coaching and swimming rather than any need to control the swimmer. However, a passion for swimming was not mentioned by anyone else.

Table: 7

Ideal Swimming Coach – Longtown Swimming Club

Coach	Parent	Athlete
Knowledgeable	Knowledgeable	Knowledgeable, Experienced
Able to communicate	Good communicator	Talks and listens, Explains things
	Commitment	Committed to helping swimmers
Sense of humour	Sense of humour	
Motivator	Motivator	
	Understands athlete	Understands athlete
	Dedicated	Dedicated
	Firm, disciplinarian Assertive	Firm disciplinarian
	Approachable, kind	Kind, Helpful
	Gives feedback	Gives feedback
Enjoys coaching	Genuine interest	Involved
Reflective	Respected	Fair
Questions own plans	Patient	Friendly.
Vision	Planner	Proud of swimmer
Passion for swimming		Happy – says well done
		Punctual

5.3.3.2 Ideal Parent of Swimmer

Committed, supportive and *being realistic* were qualities selected by the coach, the parents and the swimmers at Longtown Swimming Club (See Table 8). The subsequent interviews clearly reflected that all parents, in their own way, were very *supportive* of their children. Being *realistic,* although noted by all categories of members of the triad, was something that Jane, the Chief Coach felt many parents were not. In her interview, she considered that parents could have unrealistic expectations of their child's ability and one of her main qualities of an 'Ideal Parent' was that they were realistic so as not to put too much pressure on their child. This too was echoed by Child A who felt that although parents should be *ambitious* and *intent on their children reaching their goals, their expectations should not be higher than those of the swimmers.*

Interestingly, Jane's demands of the parents seemed far fewer than those from the swimmers and the parents themselves. For Jane, the role of the parents reflected her wish for them to become *committed* and, as clarified in her later interview, to be *supportive* not just of the swimmer but also of the club as a whole. This quality was also selected by just one parent (Father C) who was himself a coach at the club. By contrast, the swimmers listed a large number of qualities that they would look for in the 'Ideal Parent'. Both Child A and Child C listed *supportive* as an important quality, though this was lacking from Child B's list. Child B, however, mentioned such qualities as *committed, pays attention, goal setter* and *interested* - qualities, which, perhaps, could be seen as aspects of being 'supportive'. Father B stated that parents should be *supportive* but *not pushy,* and this was also mentioned by Child B as a quality. Child B also stated that it was useful to have a knowledgeable parent who was *not pushy doesn't make you do things, tells you what you can improve on.* Similarly, Child C, whose father also coached, stated that she did not feel a parent should *push their child to the limit.* When discussing her form she stated that a 'parent should not directly coach their own child', but appreciated that there were benefits in having a parent knowledgeable about coaching. This may explain why *instructs* was one of the qualities on the form from the

swimmers. Swimmers may be prepared to receive instruction but were unhappy about being actually coached by a parent. Interestingly, all three fathers stated that a parent should be *knowledgeable* about all aspects of swimming, though none of the mothers stated this.

Table: 8

Ideal Parent of Swimmer – Longtown Swimming Club

Coach	Parent	Athlete
Committed	Committed	Committed
Supportive	Supportive	Supportive
Realistic	Realistic goals	Realistic
Interested		Interested
	Motivator	Motivator
Prepared to give up time	Dedicated, prepared to give up time	
	Gives Praise	Gives Praise, proud
	Not pushy	Not pushy
	Accept disappointing swims	Accept bad swims. Laugh about a bad swim. Not be crushed
	Ensures swimmer has good diet	Instructs
	Taxi driver	Honest
	Knowledgeable	Goal setter
	Good at keeping occupied on the poolside.	Pays attention, listens
		Ambitious (high hopes)
		Kind
		Understanding
		Not a coach of own child

Both Child A and Child B also felt that a parent should be *honest* and tell the swimmer if he or she has had a bad swim, though Child B concluded on her form that a parent should also be able to *laugh about your bad swim*. This attitude to bad swims was also echoed by Child A who felt that a *parent should not be crushed if a swimmer doesn't always achieve personal best times*.

Mother B appeared to appreciate that a parent's reaction could affect how a child responded to a situation. She recognised that parents should *know that in swimming there will be highs and lows* and that it is important for a parent to know the right thing to say *to suit the mood*. This may be in response to a situation that was later discussed during the interviews with Father B who described his reaction to what he considered to be a disappointing swim by Child B. Similarly, both Fathers A and C stated that parents should be aware that not all swims will be good swims and should not be *deterred by a bad swim* (Father A), and never blame the *swimmer or coach* (Father C).

The data from these Ideal Forms was again an indication of the time commitment expected by parents even at this level of competitive swimming. Several of the interviewees stated *committed* and *able to give up time*, and have a *limited social life outside of swimming* (Mother C) as qualities. Father B even stated that *jobs may have to be built around training time* and Mother C felt that it was important for a *parent to be able to have a hobby they can do whilst they spend hours sitting on the poolside*.

As mentioned above, Father C was the only parent to state that the 'Ideal Parent' should be involved in *supporting the club*, yet at the same time he recognised that it was not the parent's role to monitor the progress of the swimmers during sessions. It may be that he felt this because of his role as a coach and, as we shall see later in the result of the interviews, he disliked parental interference although he did confess to being a culprit of this himself at times.

Finally, both Mothers A and B recognised that an 'Ideal Parent' should understand the dietary needs of young athletes so that they had a diet that would sustain them during intensive exercise.

5.3.3.3 Ideal Swimmer

Physical, psychological and social qualities along with technical ability dominated the characteristics of the ideal swimmer (See Table 9). *Commitment, determination, self control, being able to remain focused* and *wanting to learn* were also mentioned by most and, closely associated with this; *mental toughness* was also listed by three of the parents (Parents B, and Father A) and Swimmers A and B. Closely associated with *mental toughness* is the quality of being able to *get over setbacks* selected by Jane, the Chief Coach. Interestingly, both Father A and Child A highlighted a *competitive nature, a killer instinct* and although Mother A did not state this, she included *ambitious* in terms of setting goals and improving at each gala. These ideas were also echoed by Jane, who felt that a *desire to win* was important. This idea of success in terms of winning, was one of the common characteristics of Family A, which was also evident in the interviews with them.

The importance of swimmers being able to *pay attention* (Mother A), to listen and to be able to translate *verbal instructions into physical practice* (Jane) were also seen as important qualities.

Although there is some agreement in the ideal qualities of the swimmer, Table 9 might suggest that in many respects the coach is less demanding of the swimmer than either the parents or the swimmer themselves. The parents and the swimmers seem to be in agreement over a number of aspects concerned with such things as being *tough, committed, competitive, focused, controlled.*

Table: 9

Ideal Swimmer – Longtown Swimming Club

Qualities of your ideal swimmer may fall into four categories: Please
include all aspects if appropriate. Examples are given below:
  1. Physical Qualities (e.g. strength, endurance, flexibility)
  2. Sports specific qualities (– e.g. fast turns; stroke technique;
     stroke length)
  3. Attitudinal qualities (personality traits e.g. mental toughness;
     sense of humour)
  4. Psychological (mental skills, e.g. concentration, anxiety control)

Coach	Parent	Athlete
Speed and sprintability, flexible, endurance,	Good technique, speed, endurance;tall, stroke length	Technique, endurance,good kick, strength, natural talent
Commitment	Commitment	Commitment
Ability to get over setbacks	Mental toughness	Mental toughness
Love of the sport	Love of swimming	Love of swimming
Desire to win	Competitive drive, eager to succeed.Ambitious, wants to succeed	Competitive. Ambitious
Listens. Ability to translate instruction into action	Willingness to learn, pays attention	
Sense of humour	Sense of humour	
	Discipline	Discipline
	Controlled	Controlled
	Confident	Confident
	Focused	Focused
Maturity		Maturity
	Have goals	Punctual
	Perseverance	Dedicated
	Team player	
	Kind and understanding, Friendly attitude	Close to family and coach
	Prepared to make sacrifices	

Father C particularly seemed to emphasise the need for an Ideal Swimmer to *be prepared to make sacrifices, to be able to work hard, to have a high pain threshold*, whereas two of the swimmers and two of the mothers emphasised the need for a *friendly attitude, sense of humour* and *the ability to interact with others*. This contrast could perhaps be the first indication of both the differing expectations of those involved in swimming and also the potential for pressure to be placed on the young athlete by the parent and by the swimmers themselves. It is interesting to note that, in spite of the time and energy these young athletes devote to swimming, only one swimmer and one parent included *love of the sport*, although this was highlighted as an important quality by Jane, the Chief Coach.

5.3.3.4 Summary

What has emerged from this exercise is that there are a large number of different qualities recognised by the different members of the triad. Although there are some areas of commonality between all the interviewees in terms of 'Ideal Qualities' those that have been selected by most are those that perhaps may have been expected. Interestingly, certain qualities given perhaps hinted at the diverse opinions and lack of understanding that emerged from the interview, for example, comments on the Ideal Parent form by Child C in relation to such things as parents not pushing their child to the limit and respecting others' views, which were echoed in the interviews and in the relationship that emerged between herself and her father.

5.3.4 The interviews

As with Smalltown, the transcripts of the interviews were read and re-read in order to establish emerging themes. The themes that did emerge were similar to those that emerged from the Smalltown data. This may be because of my question bias as the questions were framed in such a way to try to investigate certain aspects of the coach-parent-athlete relationship.

As with the Smalltown findings, the overall ethos of the club is discussed first and it is here that there appears to be major differences between the two

clubs, even though both appeared to be at the same level with regards to the Swim 21 criteria.

The themes then that emerged were
- Ethos and role of the club
- Demographics
- Why swim
- Roles and relationships
- Power and positioning
- Pressure

5.3.4.1 The ethos and role of the club

At the time of the interviews, the club had recently been awarded a Swim 21 award. Part of this award sets out the role of the club in terms of British Swimming criteria. This role is determined by things like the resources available to the club, such as the number of sessions, the qualifications of the coaches, and the ability level of existing swimmers. Longtown Swimming Club had been designated as a club where skill development was a priority. According to Jane, the Chief Coach, Longtown Swimming Club was placed on the third level of the Amateur Swimming Association's Long Term Development Plan, which 'sandwiches the two bits FUNdamental and Training to Train'. This had resulted in some dissatisfaction amongst parents, some of the other club officials, and some of the older swimmers with regards to the level of training and feelings that the younger swimmers were not being 'pushed' hard enough. For example, as noted during the observations, the club's former secretary felt that, although many of the younger swimmers had good technique, they did not know how to swim fast. The Swim 21 status afforded to Longtown Swimming Club also meant that once swimmers reach a certain standard they should then be moved up to a bigger club that could offer more in terms of coaching hours and other resources. For Longtown swimmers this would normally mean moving to County Squad.

Jane clearly saw this swimmer progression as beneficial for the club, though she also stated that it would be good if the initial coach of the swimmer had some recognition for the swimmer's subsequent achievements. She stated:

> I think it's the way things have got to go and I think the club has got to move more towards that – there are issues about the swimming club but I think as a skill development club it does work well.

However, she added:

> My own personal goal is to flood (County Squad) with our swimmers. Other coaches in the club are very funny about it – I don't think they necessarily understand the concept of us being a satellite club …and up to now there hasn't been a culture of acknowledging swimmers in the past coming from a base club, but I think it's a very positive thing and something I try to do.

This misunderstanding about the role of the club was an area of potential conflict and recognised as such by Parents B. Although their daughter at the time of the interviews swam with County Squad, she had to belong to a local club to comply with ASA rules, hence her continuing membership of Longtown Swimming Club. Mother B stated if it was not for this reason, then they would not belong to the club. When challenged about why Father B disliked the club he stated:

> I feel, it's not just Longtown to be fair. I've sat back and watched other clubs and heard other parents and there does seem to be a bit of a situation where the clubs like to hold on to the swimmers too long. They like to keep them in their place. Obviously it's easier for the coaches and to be fair a lot of the coaches are parents that go there and help and if they've got a nice stable lane of the same kids, week after week, after week – it's easier, and they do seem to not necessarily want to move the children on when they are ready – they want to hold them on. Now I can understand that because it's very easy to push a child on too fast and burn them out really early, even ones that aren't that good but there does come a time when the child is ready to definitely move on to the next group – the next lane or whatever and it shouldn't be a case of the parent having to fight to get the child moved on but it should rather be the coach coming to the parent saying 'They are doing really well, leading the lane comfortably, coping with the sets comfortably, they should move up', and that's never been the case, not in our days anyway.

Clearly, the fact that skill development was the primary goal of the club caused some confusion and dissatisfaction amongst parents and other

members (see former secretary's comments), especially if parents felt their children were competitive and wanted 'to race everybody all the time, and in every training session and in every race' (Father B). Father B stated that he had overheard a conversation in the foyer of the leisure centre where the club trained in which one of the coaches stated that the club was 'not really a competitive swimming club'. This, he felt, explained the conflicts he had had with the coach. He stated that he had 'suspected' this to be the case but that he had not really realised that it actually was. Similarly, Family A who, by contrast, was basically very satisfied with what the club had to offer, clearly saw the club as a 'competitive club' and Father A stated that his daughter's goals in swimming included winning races and developing personal best times, as well as building character.

This confusion about the actual role of the club was also apparent in the fact that Jane stated that people came to swim competitively yet the ethos of the club was more towards skill development. Parents would possibly understand the role of the club if they knew more about the Long Term Development Plan (LTDP) instigated by British Swimming and, which had led to the changes in both the training and competitive structure of age-group swimming. As a result of this framework, the 'Swim 21' scheme had been launched. Generally, however, the actual ethos behind the LTDP was not understood by the parents interviewed at Longtown Swimming Club.

Family A who one might describe as a moderately involved family knew nothing about it, although the daughter had heard of the British Swimming Age Group Category (BAGCAT) points. This might be explained by the fact Child A did not compete in county galas and so would not really have been affected too much by the LTDP or the points system. Mother C also had not heard of BAGCATs, and Father C, Parents B and Child B and C were aware of it to varying degrees. Generally the feelings towards the idea behind it were positive from both the other swimmers. For example, Child B stated that it was hard work but there was a chance to swim all strokes and this multi-stroke approach was echoed to some extent in the type of training she did at club sessions. However, Parents B felt that it did not have the desired effect

as the county championships were still won by a specialist breaststroker because she was so far ahead of her opponents that even though she did relatively badly in the other events her breaststroke points were so strong. They both seemed to be concerned about this because it affected their daughter's position, but Father B stated that now his daughter was specialising towards backstroke and freestyle, it would not be such a problem.

The lack of understanding highlighted during the interviews seemed partially to be the result of a lack of communication. The club did run parent meetings but many parents did not attend. Father B had only been to one and was not impressed and found that they could be a bit cliquey. He added, 'if you fall within that nice little ball of the club then fine, but if you move a little bit outside of it then you are very much outside of it'. It would appear then that members of the triad came to the club for a variety of reasons, and sometimes these reasons were at conflict. The interviews, therefore, sought to try and establish the reasons for each member's involvement in swimming. However, to do this, it is first necessary to begin to understand the actors within my story.

5.3.4.2   Demographics - The 'Actors'
Jane, the Chief Coach at Longtown
Jane had been Chief Coach at Longtown Swimming Club for about a year when the interview took place. She was married with three children. Her husband, David was President of the club and also coached regularly.

Jane worked as a Development Officer for Swimming. Prior to this she used to be involved in youth work. Her sporting background was not in swimming but in gymnastics and dance. Her husband, however, had been involved in swimming for a number of years and used to run a local swimming pool. At the time of the interviews, he worked as a solicitor in a local practice. Jane stated that she enjoyed competition and seeing young people progress in their chosen sport.

Family A

Family A were a middle class family who lived on an expensive housing estate. Father A was a financial director; Mother A did not work. They had two daughters aged 16 years and 13 years who attended the local private school. The elder daughter used to swim but had stopped and the younger daughter, who was interviewed, attended Longtown Swimming Club.

The family were of African Asian descent and had spent some time in Zambia where the father was seconded through his firm. It was there that the children first learnt to swim. Neither of the parents had a swimming background. The mother did not participate in sport but the father played rugby and cricket. He described himself now as a 'chair sportsman'.

Family B

Family B lived just outside Longtown. The father trained as a motor mechanic but was working for himself as a car windscreen repairer. The mother worked at a local chemical company. They had two children, a boy (10 Years old) and a girl (Child B), who was 13 years old at the time of the interviews.

Both parents had a sporting background. The mother competed in horse riding and, at the time of the interview, this still took up quite a bit of her time. The father was an ex- swimmer. He had learned to swim in Singapore, where he lived up to the age of six years at which time his family went to live in Cornwall. It was there that he became very involved in a local swimming club and became club captain and 'life revolved around' swimming. At the age of 16, he moved to Longtown and joined the swimming club there, but he never really enjoyed the club. After about six months he left and joined another club and then eventually stopped swimming at 18 years of age. The two children swam and both joined the club at the age of seven. The daughter (Child B) no longer trained at Longtown but swam with County Squad but continued to compete for the club in league galas.

Family C

Both parents were Scottish. The mother trained as a biological scientist having obtained a PhD and worked for a while as a research fellow. She, however, changed careers when her daughter was born. At that time they were living in America but moved to Longtown. When interviewed, she worked as a science teacher at a local catholic school.

The father was also a research scientist. He was a competitive swimmer when younger. He swam at county level but stopped at the age of 15 years. He re-started aged about 20 years whilst studying for his PhD. He stopped again for a short while but at the time of the interviews took his Masters swimming very seriously. He stated that his work was a means to being able to do what he wanted to do. If he did not have to work then he would swim full-time.

They had two children, a daughter aged 15 years (Child C) and a son aged 11 years. Both swam, although the daughter had cut back quite a bit on her training and only went about once a week. The son still swam but it was not his main sport. Both children led very active lives being involved in a number of sporting activities.

5.3.4.3 Why swim?

In all three families, it was the father who was the driving force in terms of introducing their children to swimming and continuing to make the largest investment in terms of their children's swimming career. In Families B and C, both fathers had been competitive swimmers when they were younger and Father C, although having stopped swimming at the age of 16 had, in later life, taken it up again and at the time of the interviews was very committed to his swimming and regularly trained and entered Masters Competitions. Father A, although not a swimmer, was a keen sportsman. All three mothers admitted to knowing very little about swimming. The mothers in Families A and C hardly ever went to watch their children swim. Mother C, who was asthmatic as a child never really enjoyed sport or felt at all positive towards it, until

relatively recently. She commented that she had tried swimming having been 'dragged along' by her husband and found it monotonous and

> not the most rewarding experience...sometimes when I – I'd tend to feel the benefits I would feel good about it when I had finished but getting there and getting cold wasn't the way I necessarily wanted to start my day...

This attitude was in sharp contrast to her husband's and she recognised that at times the children had received very different messages. However, her attitude towards sport was much more positive since she had become a teacher, a career change that was made when the elder child was born. In spite of her own rather negative experiences of swimming, she recognised it as beneficial for her children in terms of the activity itself and that it opened up other opportunities.

All parents, the swimmers themselves and Jane, the Chief Coach, felt that swimming was good for making friends. Father B stated that from his own experience as a swimmer he had 'better friends in the swimming world than I ever did at school'. Similarly all parents recognised the benefits of swimming in terms of fitness levels. This was particularly important to Mother C who recognised her own lack of fitness.

Other benefits of swimming were that it helped to increase a sense of responsibility and commitment and also helped to prepare youngsters for the challenges and competition they would face in life generally. Parents also felt that it built character and gave confidence to their children. Like some of the parents, Jane, the Chief Coach, recognised that children could gain confidence and she talked about her own son who 'wasn't much good at anything other than swimming', but gained a great deal of confidence because of the success he had in the sport. This was echoed by Mother C whose daughter used to struggle at school. She stated:

> The school values her hugely – the PE Department values her hugely because she is reliable and a team player and it's those qualities that they value and they tell me that – so I think that once she went to (name of secondary school) the whole PE kind of broadened out and other qualities that she had were being praised and not just winning ... so that whole thing seems to have blossomed...if she hadn't done the

swimming and had the athleticism and fitness from the swimming in the first place, then she wouldn't have been able to do that...

Both Father C and Father B, the ex-swimmers, felt also that swimming was, to some extent, intellectually stimulating. Father B stated:

> It's like attitudes and responsibilities. It's not just seeing someone perform in the water, is it? They have to be a certain kind of person to get on and do it, if they are going to do it well, em. I think it is a very good sport, discipline-wise and everything. Certainly good for the children.

The swimmers themselves felt that the social aspects were important. Other reasons for swimming were that it kept you fit and that it 'was just good fun' (Child C). Some indication that it might become a bit of a habit because it starts at an early age came from Child C who also suggested there was some satisfaction at doing something that you were good at. She said,

> I started from a young age and then it just carried on and then I got better at fly and I thought fly was the thing and I thought 'Oh yeah, I'm going to be good at that' so I was training for that.

This idea that it could be something that the swimmers could excel at was echoed by Child B. She stated '...I kind of knew that I was good and I thought I could get somewhere – so ...'. Child B also stated that she enjoyed training 'when it's quite easy but I like the little sprints as well and I like my coach at County[20]'. Liking the coach and being able to interact with him or her was important to Child B. She contrasted what happens at County with her experiences at Longtown. She remarked:

> Well at Longdown they didn't really talk so much, they just told us the session and we just did it and they didn't really come and laugh with us and that sort of thing and so...

Parents also saw swimming as something that families could do together. This was particularly true for Families B and C. Because Father C was also a Masters swimmer, he felt it was great to be on a team where both his children were also members.

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[20] Name of squad changed to protect anonymity

Finally, the fun element was also mentioned by the Chief Coach, Jane. She commented that she coached because she enjoyed it and liked the variety that there was in a club like Longtown.

Swimming then is a sport that demands a great deal of commitment. As noted earlier when discussing the Age-Group Structure, young elite swimmers are expected to swim up to 50,000 metres a week. Swimmers at Longtown were not swimming anywhere near this much but may attend sessions up to five times a week. In spite of this, all children interviewed took part in other activities outside of school. Child C at one time did dancing, gymnastics, trampolining, horse riding, football, netball and swimming but had to curtail her activities because of knee problems. She, however, found swimming to be much harder than the other sports, and commented,

> ... things like football you are part of a team and you don't have to work as hard and I only train once a week with football. With horses as well – I have a very high spirited horse but you don't have to work with that even, but with swimming you would work a lot and you had to be really motivated.

Commitment and motivation were two qualities an ideal swimmer should possess identified by parents, swimmers and the coach. This would seem to indicate an acceptance that swimming can be demanding and the sessions 'fairly gruelling' (Father A). However, all appreciated the benefits of swimming and generally had very positive views about its role in their lives, and one father stated it can become the 'main focus in your life' (Father B). This sentiment was echoed by Child B who swam six times a week and stated that it was now a 'way of life'. A life that could be a 'bit rushed' but she added:

> I don't think it's that bad really, we just don't have much time for other things, sort of like special occasions and stuff.

Clearly all three families interviewed were committed to swimming but the interviews showed that this may not have been the case with all who attend Longtown Swimming Club. Father C, for example, did not feel that those who came to the club were aware of what it meant in terms of commitment to be a competitive swimmer. He felt this went right through the club. He stated:

I think it's all the way through the club, I think there are some swimmers who are more committed than others, but I think in general kids have a lot going on in their life and the more committed swimmers tend to be the ones who have success and move on.

In support of this, Father B highlighted the difference between the attitude of the swimmers in the County Squad and those at Longtown. A place in the County Squad had to be earned and so all the children were working towards the same end and were committed. Because of this, they trained hard and knew that if they did not they would lose their place in the squad.

For Coach Jane, her philosophy was clearly to develop and motivate the swimmers. For her, winning was important, to some extent, because it would raise the profile of her club, but for her the important aspect of her coaching was to encourage the younger ones to develop. She enjoyed communicating with parents, swimmers and coaches and building a team. When asked what gave her a buzz, she mentioned the success of a young swimmer who did better in a gala than expected and 'led her race the whole way' and the club was mentioned by the announcer. She added 'that gave me a real buzz – that's why I do it, I get a lot of positives out of it'.

5.3.4.4 Roles and relationships

As at Smalltown, the interviewees were asked about how they saw their own and other's roles and this section will look at these role expectations for each member of the triad.

The coach's role

'Committed' and 'dedicated' along with knowledgeable were amongst the main qualities that it was felt by both swimmers and parents that a coach should possess. As to the actual role of the coach, views varied and because Mother A was not really involved in the swimming club she was uncertain as to the actual role of the coach.

Overall planning and direction was another area that was seen as important. This was felt to be particularly important by Father C who recognised that in a

relatively small club like Longtown, which relies a great deal on volunteers the overall knowledge of some of the coaching staff may be lacking. Also important was the ability to review the programme to see if it was working.

Development of the swimmers and other coaches was also seen as part of the coach's role. However, Father C felt that not enough of this went on in Longtown in terms of feedback and explanation about why certain sessions were being done, and neither swimmers nor parents were always aware of the objective of the session or individual sets. In training, it was also stated that a coach should watch the swimmers for several reasons. First, to ascertain if the programme was working, secondly, to ensure that the swimmers swam at the correct pace, otherwise the objectives of the session would not be met, and finally, to ensure that the swimmers felt that someone was paying attention to them, otherwise they may not work hard (Mother B). The need to motivate swimmers was one of the qualities that was highlighted by both Child B and Child C. The whole area of communication was seen as an important part of the coach's role. The importance for the swimmer to also be able to interact with the coach was stressed by Child B. She had recently left Longtown to join County Squad. She stated that she enjoyed the sessions more at her new club because of the feedback that she received from the coach and the fact that she could share a joke with her coach.

Generally parents and swimmers had mixed feelings with regards to the role of the Chief Coach. Jane had been involved in the club for some time, as a parent, a team manager and a coach. Her husband too coached at the club. Jane had only recently taken on the role of Chief Coach and was, in many ways, finding her feet. This role was not made easy by the fact that others in the club including Father C had been responsible for planning and writing sessions. At the time of the interviews, Father C was still planning the sessions for Group 1 but Jane was beginning to take over this role. Generally parents and swimmers felt that she was committed to the club although Parent B did complain about the fact that there was no club presence on the poolside at a recent district gala in which his daughter was swimming for the

first time. He had been given no advice about what to expect and he talked of how he and Child B felt like

> virgins... I knew nothing about not being allowed on the poolside. I hadn't got a coach's pass – there was no-one there and (Child B) was the only one there from Longtown and we were lost.

Mostly, however, Jane was seen as knowledgeable, although Father A stated that it was as yet 'early days'.

As already mentioned, Jane, herself, saw her role as developing swimmers to 'flood (the County Squad) with our swimmers' and since taking over the club she had focused much more on the younger age group. Her main involvement was, therefore, with the less able swimmers and she saw her role as directing the coaches and planning the sessions, although the assistant coaches could chose how they delivered the session. She appreciated that parents needed to be educated into the ethos of the club but there was a bit of a dichotomy about how she felt about being approached on the poolside. She said that parents could 'annoy' her but then she added:

> I quite like them hassling me. But...I went through a phase when I wasn't really that keen but actually I quite like parents coming up now saying 'I'm not pushy' but they all say that!

Jane also highlighted the problems of her role in dealing with some of these parents and highlighted Family B and C. She stressed that although she had had problems with Family B, especially Mother B who she dealt with the most, they seemed to have 'settled down' and 'were less demanding'. Of Father C, she said that he was 'a very easy person to talk to but not easiest to talk to about swimming'. By contrast, of Father A she said that he did not really get too involved although he did help at galas and also helped to get the blocks out at sessions but it's much 'more a neutral relationship'.

Jane also highlighted how difficult it was to motivate some swimmers either to come training more than once a week, or to train properly when there. However, she did consider that motivating the children was one of her strengths but highlighted she still had problems with Child C, although she recently only came to the sessions once a week. Interestingly Child C felt that

motivating swimmers was one of the coach's main roles but found that Jane did not always do this. She did not feel that it was necessarily Jane's fault but that recently, on occasions when she was coaching both the older and the younger swimmers at the same time, she tended to treat the older ones 'like little kids'.

The parent's role

As to the roles of the parents, there was agreement between all three parties of the triad that the parental role was to support their children in their sport. Fathers A and C also helped in the club to varying degrees, giving them a dual role of both parent and club official. Father A acted as a steward at galas, whilst Father C was very involved being both a coach and a swimmer. This could, at times, lead to role conflict and unhappiness within the family. An example of this was expressed by Mother C. She felt that it should be enough for someone in the club just to compete for the club. The fact that her daughter was taking part was, for her, what was important but she was aware that this was at odds with both her daughter and her husband who wanted more. To them success and winning were important. She described a situation where her daughter was racing when she was very young and commented,

> ... but it used to sadden me that she (her daughter) couldn't just turn up, four little girls, five little girls behind her just turned up to take part but she can't do that – she couldn't then – whether she can now I'm not sure – she certainly couldn't then.

Also within this family, for Child C, the fact that her father was also a coach caused some problems. She obviously found it hard reconciling his dual role as father and coach. She talked about how other children besides herself seemed to train better when they were coached by people not directly related to them 'out of swimming and out of the club, so we just knew them as a coach, not as a father or a friend, so it seemed a lot easier to concentrate and listen to what they are trying to say'. For this reason she found it easier to talk to her Mother about swimming,

> because she's not in the sport and so she doesn't know about it so it's easier to talk to her than my dad who is there. My mum does sometimes come down and watch, but no I think they are there to

> support and motivate really. I don't think a parent should be a coach of that specific child. A coach is fine – a coach would be pretty good because the parent would know what they are talking about and how to talk to the child but I don't think they should be the one to one coach... it's sometimes harder when he is a swimmer as well because he is always there. He's not in the stands like other parents ... before things he'll come up and say ' remember this', 'remember to enter your arms like this'.

Clearly she was not happy that during galas her father was not in the spectator area with the other parents, she added that she wanted to say to him, 'go and sit up there with everyone else!' (laughs)... do what you're meant to do – go sit up there...'.

The phrase 'do what you are meant to do.' indicated that the parental role was not one where her father would be on the poolside with the swimmers. Father C was very aware of these roles and the potential for conflict. Whilst talking about how both he and his daughter reacted to what he might consider to be a bad swim, he stated:

> She took it very badly. Sometimes I did as well (laughs) because sometimes I was able to play the role of the coach and sometimes I was able to play the role of the parent very badly.

He, however, felt that he would now not react in a similar way because he had learnt certain things, for example that strokes can change and develop. Therefore, he would not get cross with his child if she, for example, changed her stroke during a race as had happened in the past.

Father C appreciated that because of his coaching role and swimming knowledge, his behaviour, at times, caused problems with the other coaching staff. He talked about how, on occasions, when he was watching a session in which his daughter was swimming, he would go and talk to the coach, or even to his daughter 'which is undermining, to some extent, the position of the coach, but it was difficult because the opportunity was there' (Father C). He stated that on occasions he would realise what he was doing and so would go and talk to the coach about his concerns with regards to his daughter, rather than to his daughter directly. In spite of this awareness of his own actions, he also criticised other parents for similar behaviour. He stated:

> There are several parents either with the club or have been with the
> club who would put pressure on the kid from the back seat ... this is not
> where it is of a benefit to the kid for the parent to be there. When the
> parent is giving nods of approval ... they are giving instructions to the
> kid in the pool – well who is the coach?

He justified his own actions to some extent by saying that as a coach at the
club he may have planned the session and could see that his daughter was
not swimming it correctly. He knew what was expected. His main criticism
was against parents who had limited knowledge and who did not understand
the objective of the session yet would try to interfere if they felt that their child
was not swimming fast enough during a swimming set when the swimmers
had actually been instructed to swim slowly for a specific reason.

This potential for role conflict was recognised by Father B, who, although an
ex-swimmer and able to help with the coaching, had chosen not to. In fact he
played little role in the club other than that of a parent. The reasons he stated
were that if he did coach he would only be interested in his own children and
by doing so he felt that he would both put too much pressure on them whilst at
the same time not giving enough attention to others. Occasionally Father B
had coached his children away from the club when they all went swimming on
a Sunday morning. He stated though that it only worked if his children were
'in the right frame of mind'. He added that when he tried to give advice after
two or three minutes and the children would say, 'shut up Father you don't
know what you're on about,' because he recognised 'it is difficult to coach
your own kids'. He felt now that his daughter was a little older that it might be
easier. He stated that sometimes when they were driving home from the
County Squad sessions or when they were on their own, he could talk to her
about all aspects of swimming.

> I mean minute detail like hand entries or getting too close to the wall on
> turns, whatever, and we'll have quite an open discussion about it, and
> then it passes. It's not 'I want you to do this', it's a discussion on why I
> want (her) to do it.

Certainly his daughter stated that she did not like

him training me when I'm in the pool and that, and he is the coach because he did that once and I didn't like that but I don't mind him telling me what I'm doing wrong and how to improve it and stuff.

Similarly Child C, although she found her father's conflicting roles hard to handle at times, she did appreciate the benefits of having a parent who knew about swimming and gave the example of when she was trying to improve her butterfly turns. For example, she spoke of how her father downloaded examples of Australian swimmers performing a correct turn from the internet.

All three mothers interviewed did not play a very active role in the club. As stated, Mothers A and C seldom went down to sessions, leaving that role to the fathers. Mother A felt that it was her role to be at home and 'look after the domestics'. High on her list of priorities was ensuring that her children had the correct diet. Mother B felt that it was important to be supportive but not pushy. She did not feel that Longtown Swimming Club actually encouraged parents to have an active role in the club. She said:

> I don't know whether they like it when you take an interest. They don't really seem to – hmm – I don't get the impression they are overly keen. They say that they are interested in them (the swimmers) but I don't know they are not designed for a competitive swimmer.

Similarly Father C also felt that parents lacked an 'understanding of what it is to be a parent of someone who is involved in competitive sport ... it's not the kids' lack of commitment, it's the parents lack of commitment...'. He did not feel that now the club had a Swim 21 status it would make any difference. In his opinion, the club had not changed during the last five years and felt that it may be a 'fundamental thing' to do with the sport. Fathers C and A also expressed concern about this lack of commitment from those parents who just dropped their children off and, therefore, played no part in the club. Certainly, this can be a problem for a club whose very existence relies on volunteers.

Perhaps Child B best summed up what the swimmers saw as the parent role when she remarked,

> ...they're just always there – they are just always supporting me – besides swimming as well – everything else.

The swimmer's role

Child B clearly saw that her role was to try her best and improve. This was echoed by Child C who also mentioned the importance of being part of a team. When asked what she considered to be her role within the club, she stated:

> 'Em – to work as a team and try and work together to motivate each other to achieve a goal. Say, if you've set yourself a goal you have to reach that by the end of the thing and em to pass that would be even better. To work as a team – in like relays, everyone's got to concentrate and if one person doesn't concentrate – if you don't encourage one person then the whole team would fall apart, so you have to - like motivate each other to be able to work as a team in that relay, because if one person went too soon because no one was making sure they didn't touch properly then the whole team would lose out.

The idea of goal setting was also echoed by Mother C who also recognised the amount of discipline and hard work it takes to become a competitive swimmer. She commented:

> I think with a swimmer, I still think with a swimmer you need to be able to do this thing of working, training regularly towards a long term goal. That seems to me, if you are going to be a competitive swimmer that's the killing part.

Although the role of the swimmer was not always directly addressed in the interviews, this commitment to swimming and to working hard was echoed by several of the interviewees. For example, Father C stated:

> You can see these swimmers, they are good in the water and what they lack is a commitment to being there, or with their parents as well. They have other things that interest them. I think the thing that's come to me is that – is that it's not just about fast swimming, as well and a swimmer needs to work on all aspects of their race and a lot can be gained by taking time during training to work on starts, turns and finishes. I think, this is partly down to coaches. I think this is not always pushed, where you get swimmers gliding in, not gliding into the wall, but stopping short of the wall, turning on to their fronts in backstroke. I despair on that – they should be practising that all the time. Counting in, they should be trying to experiment on fly kick off the wall on backstroke, front crawl, see if it works for them, a little bit longer - setting goals for themselves.

Commitment was clearly seen as important by all the interviewees and sometimes it seemed that commitment should be such that sessions or elements of sessions were not questioned by the swimmer. Jane stated:

> Child B is a brilliant swimmer to coach because she is always so positive and it's rare for her to be negative em she will always have a go at what you ask her without questioning things...

5.3.4.5 Power and positioning

The coach

Although Jane had been involved in the club for some time, she had only recently taken on the role of Chief Coach. Clearly she found herself at odds with a number of the parents who did not necessarily recognise what she was trying to achieve in the club. The fact that Jane had not been a swimmer led Fathers B and C who had to feel that they were more knowledgeable about the sport. This led to power struggles within the club. For example Father C commented,

> ...I think even with (name of son) I react differently with the coaches with his trampolining because of my experiences in swimming... A lot of parents won't challenge what the coaches do but because I've learnt something I tend to be a bit more challenging (about) what they do and why they are doing it...em not all parents would do that. I mean someone's got to say – 'there is potential there on the swimming side'. Like when I would go and talk to the coach, or sometimes even talk to Child C, which is undermining to some extent the position of the coach, but it is difficult because the opportunity was there.

He was aware that by by-passing the coach in this way, his actions may cause conflict and that it was not really appropriate behaviour. However, he felt that there were times when he had no choice but to intervene. He added:

> So sometimes it put me in a difficult position and sometimes when Child C wasn't pulling her finger out and I didn't think the coach had been hard enough, sometimes I would intervene – just because of my position in the club.

By his 'position in the club', Father C was referring to his role of coach, a role in which he had firm ideas about how things should be done: Ideas that did not always agree with those of Jane. This lack of understanding of Jane's goals generally challenged Jane's position in the club. Father A who, on the whole, was supportive of Jane recognised that some parents did 'not get on

with her'. Because she was only recently qualified, he felt that she 'lacked experience' a bit, but that she did have a good mix of ideas about how to develop the club.

In spite of parental opposition, it appeared that Jane had positioned herself in the club in a role of authority with regards to the younger age group. She was clearly making headway with her goals and had noticed improvement with some of the younger swimmers who she felt had previously been ignored; she stated:

> There have been several kids in the club that have been coming to the development squad for years and have been overlooked and suddenly with a bit more input they've flown really.

She seemed to display a tacit authority in that she allowed the coaches to plan their sessions themselves and she just gave them the specific points of technique that they should be covering in their sessions. This rather 'softly, softly' approach meant also that she allowed Father C to continue, for the time being at least, to organise the sessions for the Masters Section and Group 1 of the club although she had stamped her authority on this a little by raising the level of entry into this group as she felt that once swimmers progressed to this group they received little individual attention.

Jane's position within the sporting triangles being studied in this project varied. With Family C, she clearly felt a little threatened by the father. Although she generally felt he was easy to get along with, she also felt that he was 'not the easiest person to talk to about swimming'. She went on:

> We did have chats and there was an instance when he and (Child C) had an interesting exchange of words on the poolside – em so I have had to talk to (Father C) about (Child C) but its very hard – you know in terms of what he wanted out of her...

Jane's relationship with Family A was 'much more neutral' probably because of the relatively low involvement of Parents A. Clearly this was an easier situation for Jane, where she could fulfil her role as she saw it without confrontation. Jane felt that her relationship with Family B had changed over time. They were less confrontational and she had had chats with them about

the possibility of Child B moving up to the County Squad. There had been earlier areas of conflict over whether or not Child B's brother should move into a higher group but, Jane felt now that Parents B 'had settled down'.

As Chief Coach in the club Jane had a certain amount of 'legitimate' power, but it would seem that parents felt in a position to challenge this. As a consequence, Jane positioned herself in such a way that she maintained a certain amount of authority and power, particularly with regards to ensuring that her goals materialised with respect to the younger swimmers, but allowed some freedom of action by parents and coaches in matters about, which she felt less strongly.

The parents

The parents appeared to variably position themselves within the club depending on their involvement. Two of the fathers in this present study who had been competitive swimmers clearly felt that they knew sufficient about swimming to both advise their child and to be critical of the Chief Coach. For example, Father C commented:

> Em, I still think she's (Jane) learning. She's got knowledge there. She's a bright person – she needs to develop a bit more of a charisma about her, how she is on the pond side interacting with people. I think she is at times a bit pedantic, not just with coaching but other things as well, and so it always comes across and as a bit critical and some may see that as may be a lack of confidence, so it's hard to say.

He was, however, aware of her goals and noted that she had achieved some success with these. He went on:

> Has she made a big difference? Well she's only been there for six months. She's trying to do things at the lower end of the club where you can make a difference. It's a lot easier for her to do that.

The final sentence seemed to suggest that it was easier for her to obtain improvement with younger swimmers than it was for him who often coached the older swimmers and Masters group. Clearly he was very conscious of his position as coach of this group and resented Jane's attempt at getting some control of this. However, he did at the same time appreciate that as Chief Coach she should have overall control. In response to a question regarding

whether things had changed at the club since her appointment as Chief
Coach he replied:

> Certainly not for me, 'em. For somebody who can have an input to the
> sessions I do – she wants to have an input and I felt that I'd given her
> an opportunity…and she…reported back to the committee and said she
> wanted to have more of an input and that she hadn't been given the
> opportunity and I was a bit surprised at that…I've been doing it for a
> long time and I felt I have a lot of experience and it would be difficult for
> her to come in and push me out. She wants to have overall control and
> I think that's right because she is head coach – she's responsible for
> what is delivered…

This response seems to indicate that Father C was rather unsure about what
his position should be in relation to Jane's. Clearly he seemed to want to
maintain his leadership role with the older swimmers, but at the same time
recognised Jane's authority.

Both Father B and Mother B also felt that they were in a position in which they
could criticise the coach. Neither parent took an active role in the club in
terms of helping but Mother B, in particular, was always there watching her
children swim. Father B seemed to position himself as someone who was
knowledgeable but who wanted to remain 'in the background', an observer,
not wishing to be actively involved. Although there was a time when he
seriously considered coaching he said:

> There have been periods of consistency, I mean Friday night was
> always done by Jason, em and he still does the Friday night…but at
> other times there has been and it's not through one person's fault,
> there has been disruption in the coaching – people leaving and some
> egos getting in the way and some shouting and arguing and people
> stomping around and its gone through periods of four or five months of
> 'who's going to be on the poolside tonight' and that leaves you feeling
> on your own. Sometimes you sit there thinking –they've had a good
> session tonight – that was good and you have another session when
> you think 'flipping heck' why are they in the water and I come home and
> think 'I should be coaching – they'd get some consistency then, but
> then they wouldn't listen to me because I'm dad…But for a long time I
> was working shifts and so it wouldn't have been practical anyway.

As seen earlier, Father B's main dissatisfactions grew from the issue of
moving swimmers through the club. He stated that he had had several 'little
battles' with Jane and even commented that he appreciated that she was new

to her position but that she had not 'got the balls to do the job'. Although this may not have been expressed quite so strongly by others there was certainly a hint that those interviewed felt that, although Jane had good ideas and was bringing some stability back into the club that had been lacking for a while, she had not, perhaps, the right personality to be Chief Coach. He stated that he felt that only two sides of the sporting triangle really communicated and the coach/parent link was missing. However, he appreciated that possibly this could be his fault because,

> I don't really want to commit to getting involved in the club so I take –
> so I'm quite happy to sit back and sit back and fume because
> something's not to my liking, but I can't go in and criticise because I'm
> not prepared to make the effort to join in with the club.

Father B also felt that Jane was too introverted, a trait he recognised in himself and surmised that this also may be a reason why they did not connect. However, Father B did mention other coaches whom he respected and with whom he felt communications were strong. He added,

> ... I mean when Frank was there the triangle was really strong because
> we got on with Frank, Frank got on with the kids, the kids loved Frank
> and it was a natural triangle if you like.

and similarly talking of another coach Mary, he noted:

> Mary, on the other hand, when she did a lot of work with (Child B) she'd
> always come round at the end of the session and say – I've tried to do
> this with her and I'd say 'Yes saw it – it was really good' or if there was
> a problem like (Child B's) breaststroke – it was appalling at the time
> and I could go to Mary and talk about it – then the triangle was there.
> But it's – I don't know perhaps it's just me but it does come down to
> personalities when you look at it.

Mother B, by contrast to her husband, had no real swimming background but felt that she knew sufficient through the hours of watching on the poolside to be able to challenge Jane's authority. One of the main areas of criticism, not just with Jane, but with other coaches was the lack of feedback. When asked why she felt there was a lack of feedback, she stated that she did not really know but went on to talk about the need for good relationships with the coach. She stated:

> I think also as a parent you think, it would be nice to have a good
> rapport with the coach and obviously that can't always happen because

you've got so many children and so many people, and not everybody will get on, but I do think you need it and whether you've got differences, I think you need to put them aside and be able to talk quite easily.

In terms of the coach-parent-athlete relationship, she felt that there was a coach, athlete, parent triangle to a certain degree but she added:

> I don't think there is enough interest on the coaches' side really to get the feedback that you need. If you are talking about someone who just wants to be a club swimmer all their life then I think, yes, it's probably quite ample, but it's not if you've got a child that wants more. This is where the let down is because you've not got enough enthusiasm from the person at the top. That's where it should be coming from as well.

Mother B felt that the triangle existed more at the County Squad, where Child B now mostly swam, but, in her opinion, even here it existed only if a parent showed an interest. She stated:

> I know (Father B) is very involved, but he is very different because he does sit there and watch night, after night and he won't criticise (Child B) but he will constructively tell her if she is doing something wrong and he will discuss it with Marcus (Child B's coach at the County Squad) as well and the pair of them usually come up with the same explanations as to why something's not quite right, which is nice, but a lot of parents go and they will probably sit in the car or do their shopping or something like that, but with (Child B) she's never wanted you to do that, she's always wanted you to watch, so that's basically why we're here.

In contrast to Mother B, Mothers A and C seldom visited the club or attended galas, but in spite of this Mother A still felt in a position to criticise the coaches who she considered 'so laid back' and who needed to take firmer control over the swimmers. Not only did she agree with Mother B that faults were not picked up but she felt coaches contradicted each other when instructing the swimmer as to which was the correct technique.

Mother C used to go and watch her children when they had swimming lessons but did not go down to training sessions once they joined the club. She knew some of the coaches and other parents of the club as she met them at social events but because she rarely attended swimming events, including social

ones, she clearly felt not to be part of the group and rather uncomfortable when she did. She said:

> Em, I mean I know them a little bit because I meet them outside in social situations but I don't know them really well. I wouldn't em – No. I sort of know because we meet at social events, but very rarely. So swimming club events for me are always a little bit difficult.

In contrast to the other Longtown parents interviewed, she believed strongly that parents should not be critical of the coach. She had, some time, ago gone to help her husband coach at a swimming club and parents had questioned her about what she was doing. She stated that she 'wouldn't want to be a parent who was too pushy over certain things. Going in and questioning the coaches. I wouldn't like to be that parent'. She clearly felt that parents should not only support their child but also the coach and appreciated the vulnerable position that the coach was in. She contrasted this to a school teacher's contact with parents,

> I know that a lot of parents do go there and do sit at training sessions …. or do go to galas. I know there are a lot of parents there and a lot of support of the coach through that – em I think that the down side of that is if something isn't going so well, and that happens on occasions, that the parents are very close to come and voice their opinions and can do that on the pond side when they are feeling very strongly about something and we don't get that in teaching. There is a distance. They have to 'phone us up usually before they can get to us to express their opinions. And I think that that – I imagine as a coach that can be quite intimidating, that a parent can come and get to you on the poolside and express their view if they are not happy.

Mother C stressed the point that many of the coaches were volunteers with varying amounts of training, and so it was unfair for them to be so openly criticised. She added:

> I do feel for the coaches that sometimes they are put in a difficult situation. If you've got a parent who comes and expresses a really nice opinion to you – it must be fabulous to have a parent on the side, but if you've got a parent who is not happy about what you are doing, they can express that there and then – that may be isn't quite so positive.

Mother C's lack of swimming knowledge compared with the rest of her family meant when she went to watch galas in which the rest of her family competed she felt herself positioned as somewhat of an outsider. This lack of swimming

knowledge and knowledge of the club made her feel excluded and ignored by the rest of her family. She stated:

> I would go and watch and I would just be completely ignored as if I wasn't there at all – em and so after a while I didn't go...they (Father C and Child C) were busy with their team...so if they got a medal they would just about remember to come and show it to me. Because they were busy – it wasn't about me being there it was about them being with their friends and the rest of Longtown Swimming Club. That was kind of their family there....

The swimmers

Overwhelmingly, both parents and swimmers felt that the parents should be and were supportive of their swimming. The interviews showed that whilst the children were young and in the 'Sampling' phase (Côté 1999) of their athletic careers, they were happy to follow their parents position of authority and go to the activities suggested. As the children themselves became immersed into the swimming culture, they were happy to continue for a variety of reasons. However, tensions did arise. The children on the whole seemed to accept their mothers' and fathers' authority when the parents were in a position of parent, particularly when they positioned themselves in the role of the supporting parent. However, the swimmers appeared to resent this authority when the parents positioned themselves as coaches either formally or informally. In these instances, both Child B and Child C exerted their own superiority in terms of indicating they had greater swimming knowledge. Child B stated that she did not like her father training her, although she did not mind him telling her what she is doing wrong. However, as noted when discussing parent's roles, Father B clearly felt that his children paid little attention to him. Similarly when he showed his children swimming videos that he had bought and he wanted to talk through with them, the children tended to adopt a position of power by making it clear that they 'don't want to know'. However, he did state that now his daughter is a little older she would discuss points of technique in the car on the way home from galas.

This power play can cause tension and Mother C clearly felt that there were tensions between her husband and daughter. She felt that swimming was a really good sport but added:

There have been times when it's been kind of ... been too much and I've felt that if she (Daughter C) hadn't gone any more it would be OK because it was all getting a bit too intense with (Father C) coaching her a bit and being so involved in the club as well – it all got a bit intense, but basic swimming – very happy with that.

Mother C also described how Child C now a teenager, had reached the age when she 'either wants to go a lot, or give up' meant that threatening to stop swimming became a weapon and Child C, who

could ... use it as a tool to threaten – she could say to him (Father C) 'If you make me do that, then I'm not going to go swimming any more', and it became a weapon. But it was a weapon she couldn't use on me because I didn't care (Mother C),

Mother C illustrated the position she felt parents should take in relation to their child's swimming when she discussed a friend who

was a very keen swimmer...and she thought her mum was one of the best parents on the pond side because other parents were there shouting and screaming at their children giving them advice when they came out the pool. Her mum sat on the side, read a book, and ... then they went home and didn't talk about it and she thought that as really good. You know everyone else spent their journey home analysing their training session. She really appreciated the fact that her mother sat on the side, read a book and then went home.

In terms of the positioning between the swimmers and the coach, the swimmers accepted the authority of the coach, but also saw the coach as someone who

would support us and be...just like – tell us about our technique and how to improve and stuff.... Yes tell us how to swim it before we swim it and after – get times, he can get our times and splits and stuff and tell us how we can go out and keep it up and stuff (Child C).

Thus, there was some indication that the swimmers were in a somewhat powerful position in relation to the coach. They allowed the coach to exert authority over them but at the same time expected a 'service' from the coach in return. Comments from the parents also indicated that swimmers did not always totally respect their coach's authority, for example Father B stated if he coached some of the swimmers he 'would be tearing my hair out with them'. Similarly Father C talked on several occasions of the lack of commitment by

the swimmers to perform sets correctly, something also echoed, to some extent, by Jane herself.

The swimmers clearly expected the coach to be knowledgeable and give feedback and also be able to communicate with the swimmers. Something, as already noted, that Child B felt happened more at County Squad than at Longtown.

5.3.4.6 Pressure

The interviews showed evidence of various pressures that were exerted not just on the swimmers but also on the coach, the parents, and the family as a whole. Pressures on the coach, parents and family tended to stem from the time commitment necessary, even in a club of the level of Longtown. As has been noted already, family life tended to revolve around swimming, which became a 'way of life'. Social life outside the club was restricted and children sometimes had to choose between going to parties on a Saturday night and competing for the club. For the parents, the stress of watching their child compete was outlined by Parents B. Father B described how the pressure suddenly come off once his daughter had achieved her National qualifying times and Mother B also talked about how, when watching her daughter her

> heart – it really, really races when (Child B) is standing on the blocks and knowing how nervous she must be. My mind goes back to my mother and how she couldn't watch the show jumping or cross country and I think, 'Well I can understand that now'. She'd do anything rather than watch me and swimming's not really dangerous is it (laughs). So I can understand how she used to feel.

For Jane, the Chief Coach, whose three children and husband were also involved in swimming, it was a juggling act to coach, be a mother of three and hold down a job. The expectations from the parents, the swimmers and the club itself in the form of the committee, about what role she should play and the subsequent conflict in terms of what she was trying to achieve and the views of others about the role of the club, all added to the pressure placed on her. However, it is the pressure on the swimmers that was primarily highlighted within the interviews and it is on this that this section concentrates.

Pressure on the swimmers, which could lead to stress came from a variety of sources, from the parents, from the coach, from the expectations of being a member of the club and from the swimmers themselves. With regards to pressure from parents, evidence from the interviews seemed to suggest that those parents with a swimming background tended to have quite strong opinions on a variety of matters in swimming and to some extent put pressure on their children to succeed, even though this may not always be recognised by them. Father C, however, admitted that he had, perhaps, been tough on his daughter and felt that he was less so with his younger child. As has already been noted, the interview with Mother C clearly highlighted how the parent/child relationship could be full of tension if a parent was also a coach. She told of an incident where Father C once left his daughter at the swimming pool and drove home. She went on:

> He drove home and left her to walk home (laughs). He can be very tense, they both are, I think that's personality rather than swimming. Perhaps - I'm not sure that either of them would be as successful if they didn't have this part of their personality but I am sure some of it doesn't have to be quite so full on – they can end up in a huge row with each other... I was horrified that my daughter was walking home distressed and took the car to find her.

The frustration and anger felt by the father was the result of his daughter refusing to swim 100 metres butterfly in the gala in which they were competing. Mother C explained:

> I mean it's a thing that for him, swimming is a very big deal and so it was a very big deal that she hadn't swum this distance. In my world it's really not that big a deal (laughs), you know – em – but then I'm also the person who doesn't do any exercise...

Possibly because of this pressure, Child C reduced her training to just once a week and according to Mother C her husband has 'kind of settled himself for that I think – but for a long time he wouldn't do – he was making her go ...'. Some of the problem, Mother C felt was because of his extreme competitive streak, which she surmised was 'good if he wants the team to succeed but sometimes doesn't give him distance when he is dealing with his daughter'.

According to her mother, Child C's decision to cut back on her swimming was as a result of a row with her father. This was confirmed by Jane, the Chief Coach, who stated that Father C pushed her to the point that 'she just couldn't swim any more'. Jane felt that his expectations were 'completely unrealistic' and that Child C was desperate to please him. However, when speaking to Child C, the story was very different. Child C stated that the decision to cut down followed a discussion about her SATs (school exams) and the fact that because she had a great deal of school work her father advised her to cut back on the swimming. A slightly different version of events came from Father C. He stated how he hated swimmers who came down to training sessions and spent the time 'dossing' about, even if one of them was his daughter. His annoyance with this was not just simply because they were not committing themselves to the swimming but because they were wasting everyone's time,

> ...because I appreciate the time that the people on the pond side have given up. If you are going to be there then you should get down and do it, rather than do it half-heartedly, but as time wore on I realised my daughter's commitment was becoming more and more half-hearted ... and when she initially said – OK it was probably not she that said stop. I said 'Get out, if you're going to continue swimming like this'. I think probably she wanted me to take it out of her hands...it's become a large part of her life and I experienced this when I was younger. There are times when you need somebody to take it out of your hands and make the decision.

Father C also accepted that Child C's primary reasons for swimming may have been to please him and if there was ever an argument she would say 'I'm only doing it to please you'. He realised that she never really enjoyed all the training. He also stated:

> I think there may have been times when I pushed her, but I expected her, as I said she had the four sessions a week, which wasn't an unreasonably large amount, but when she was in the pool, I was hard on her.

Parents may not always be aware of the pressure that they might be putting their child under. For example, Father B felt that parents should support their children but 'you can't just push and push...if their hearts are not in it', but he was happy to push his daughter 'as far as she wants to be pushed'. He recognised that it was an easy situation to get into if a parent was not careful and that he was 'very competitive when (Child B's) swimming'. He wanted her

to do well particularly at the Nationals and to go on the following year, but if she did give up he realised that he would have to respect that, but he did stress that he would be 'disappointed'.

The interviews showed that parents had various expectations of their children's sporting careers. For Father B, in spite of many of the above comments, it would appear that there was pressure placed on his daughter to reach a certain level, although he felt that she could 'deal with pressure far better than I ever could', he clearly was very aware of other likely swimming rivals to his daughter. He stated that when he went down to County Squad, he did not just watch is daughter but he would watch others.

> Yeah I'll sit and watch them all – if there was another swimmer there that was .... There is Jenny – she's younger than (Child B) and she's coming on really well as a backstroker. I will watch her – I'll watch people in direct competition ... I'll watch them quite a lot – but mainly (Child B).

Perhaps as a result of this, Child B also had adopted a fairly ego orientation. According to her father, Child B viewed success in terms of 'beating somebody that she considers competitive with her'. In answer to the question, 'what is important to her the clock or other people' he answered, 'the other people probably, the clock is inanimate but even people she's not friends with but names you see written and spoken about. I think she compares herself with those'. Also, as a family they had started to set targets for Child B. He talked about:

> Just sitting round the table eating sort of targeting – not hard and fast and we said to her that if she could be doing National level times by the end of the year that would be fantastic, and that was as far as it went really, and then she went out and did them at the age-groups and it was just unbelievable and we were just totally blown away by it – unbelievable – and I couldn't believe how emotional I felt about it that she got the times ... and it was strange because it relieved so much pressure that I didn't realise was there ...

Clearly, Father B was keen for his child to succeed and it was very emotional when she did. However, he illustrated the dangers of reacting emotionally to what he considered to be a poor performance. He mentioned an instance where his daughter swam a 200m backstroke race at the district gala. He was

expecting her to do really well as she had very recently swum a good 100m race and 200m was her better distance. He went on:

> I made a very small mistake that caused quite a bit of upset for the rest of the day really. As she finished, being a backstroker, she looked straight up at the crowd. I looked at the clock – it wasn't a bad swim but it was disappointing after the 100 and I saw the time and went uggh and my face was like…and she looked straight at me and that image and she thought 'Oh dear I've let him down' or whatever, 'he's going to be mad at me' or whatever went through her mind, I don't know, but we came home in abject silence…it was not a pleasant journey home and she…went straight to her bedroom and there was tears and real upset and it was just over split second facial expression.

On the way home, he stated that he was trying to relate to his daughter that although it was not a great swim, it did not really matter. However, he felt that she did not listen because in her mind she believed that her father thought she had swam badly. As a result she too was 'gutted because she swam badly'. He went on:

> I was trying to say to her, 'Yes I was upset, I was disappointed – *why shouldn't I be because potentially you could have had a much better swim, but you didn't so it doesn't matter.* There are plenty more times when you will have good swims and plenty more times when you will have bad swims' (my emphasis).

According to Child B, her normal reaction to what she considers to be a poor swim was that 'sometimes there is a slight cry, like just when I get touched out, but the coach[21] is always 'No it is a good swim'. Thus, she normally takes something positive away, but it seems that a parent's reaction can have a devastating effect. Mother B also felt that her daughter put herself under a lot of pressure in terms of expectations, and this was something not always helped by her father who commented on races almost immediately after they had taken place.

Mother C also discussed the effect that not a look could have but rather dangers of parents saying things when they have not really thought it through. She explained:

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[21] Coach at County Squad.

I think some parents can put things on to their children that can be hard and I think to some extent that is what Child C had with Father C's expectations and it came home and stuff, which isn't entirely good.

Mother C thought that her daughter hoped she would do really well as a butterfly swimmer but there was a 'huge crisis point' when Child C overheard her father say that he felt she would never be a certain quality of swimmer.

> And she never forgot because she's got some of my genes as well – laughs - so once she heard it she never forgot and at any opportunity would throw it back at him again. Em – so I don't think in his head he ever imagined her being more than a good competitive swimmer, but that comment was a huge problem.

Even though Father C might not have seen his child as anything more than a 'good competitive swimmer', he still saw success for her in achieving district times. He also saw success in holding club records, not so much winning the trophies but club records because 'those are judging your performance against top swimmers all year and not just at a particular time'. When asked what he thought success was for his daughter he answered,

> ...always getting better without too much effort...I think that would be success you know...that she would progress without having to put a lot into it...she just wasn't prepared to put in the effort. That's the way I saw it. That may be a bit unfair really.

This comment may also highlight the fact that Child C was involved in many other activities and perhaps the commitment to swimming for her was just too much.

The emphasis on qualifying times be they district, as in the case of Family C, or national as in the case of Family B, can certainly cause pressure on the child to achieve and may result also in the child and parent's expectations being somewhat unrealistic. For example, Mother B stated that in addition to achieving qualifying times, for Child B just improving is success but that ideally she would like to achieve the ultimate and go to the Olympics.

For Child C, success was achieving personal best times and 'beating what she had done before'. She added 'It might seem crazy not wanting to win but achieving a PB is best for me than winning'. However, she did relate her

pleasure in winning an event that she was not expected to win. On this occasion the expected winner was a girl who was much bigger than Child C and who 'cried afterwards because I beat her' (Child C).

From the interviews, it appeared that the extent of the pressure that parents exerted on their children stemmed from their different philosophies to swimming. Clearly, these philosophies varied not just between families but within the families themselves. Even between Mothers A and C, neither of whom were really heavily involved in swimming, the attitudes were different. Mother A stated that her goals were to encourage her daughter to 'win in whatever she does'. She recognised that Child A was not a top swimmer and that the commitment to be at the top would mean that her school work suffered. She believed that her daughter was happy if she achieved personal best times (PBs) and did well in the club. This was echoed by Child A who stated that success to her was achieving PBs and winning races that she was not expected to. Although in this family neither parent could really be termed over-involved in swimming, this emphasis on 'winning' and 'success' could put pressure on Child A if not handled carefully. However, although Child A felt disappointed by failure, the importance attached to her school work seemed to balance her view of swimming. By contrast Mother C, who like Mother A could be termed 'under-involved' on the Hellstedt's (1987) continuum of parent involvement, was just happy for her child to be taking part and realised that this was at odds with both her daughter and her husband. This difference of opinion and mixed messages coming from the parents may well also add tension and pressures within the family.

5.3.5 Summary

Longtown is a relatively small skill development club that relies a great deal on voluntary help. This help, therefore, varies in terms of knowledge and qualifications. The only paid official in the club is the Chief Coach who receives a nominal fee. There are parents and members of the club who are extremely supportive and who give up a huge amount of time. As commented by several of those interviewed, swimming can take over one's life and this was the case with two of the families interviewed. Even at this level of

swimming, a great deal of commitment and support is required by the coach, parents and other members of the family, if the young swimmer is to continue in the sport.

The families interviewed were involved in the club to varying degrees. Family A may be termed as 'moderately involved'. Swimming was not as important as perhaps it was in Family B and had been in Family C, although Father C took his Masters swimming and coaching very seriously indeed.

In all families, it was the father who was the driving force in terms of swimming and through his own admittance Father C, at times, put pressure on his elder child but had eased off with his second child, a boy. This may be because swimming was not his son's main sport, but it may be that he was treated differently because he was a boy. Although Family A could be termed only 'moderately involved' in swimming, there too was pressure on their children to succeed in whatever they do.

What has become clear from the interviews is that there appeared to be areas of conflict and tension with varying goals and expectations being expressed by the separate parties involved.

Endnote
Since my visits to the club, the local leisure centre where the club holds most of its training session closed for refurbishment and re-opened in January 2006. During this period sessions took place at various pools throughout the borough. Also, Jane, the Chief Coach at Longtown Swimming Club, has now resigned as have three replacement coaches, two ex-students and one final year student from the local university. One left to take up a coaching position abroad, the second left to take up a permanent coaching position in the UK, and the third left because of the time commitments and the stress felt by trying to meet the various expectations of all the parties involved in the club. Currently, the role of Chief Coach is being undertaken by an ex swimmer of the club, now a parent with children who swim. Jane's younger daughter now swims for another club although Jane still has some involvement with

Longtown. Both children in Family B had left the club, but returned because of the problems of the travelling involved and the time commitments needed to swim at County Squad. Child C, according to Father C, has now a renewed interest in swimming and is training more regularly.

5.4   Conclusion

This chapter has detailed the main findings from the research undertaken at the two swimming clubs in this study. Although similar themes emerged from the data analysis, there are distinct differences in the two clubs, mainly in terms of the overall ethos of the clubs and the relationships of some of the members with the Chief Coach. These findings will be discussed in Chapter 6.

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION

6.1 Introduction

This section discusses and analyses the data described in the findings chapter. During my research journey, I have accessed literature from both the fields of psychology and sociology in an attempt to increase my understanding of the coaching process and the relationships within it, and to begin to deconstruct the triangle of coach, parent and athlete. However, perhaps what has been fundamental to this understanding is the Jones et al.'s (2002) article, which suggests a framework consisting of three 'inter-related' (p.34) concepts, namely role, interaction and power for the analysis of the coaching process. During the initial analysis of the findings, these concepts were clearly embedded in the data and emerged as main themes.

Before discussing the findings it should be noted that what has emerged from this study is a confirmation of the complexity of the relationships within the sporting triangle, a complexity that cannot be easily explained through one theoretical perspective. In Chapter 3, when addressing the theoretical framework for this project, a number of theoretical perspectives were discussed that would help with this analysis. Two specifically appeared to hold most promise: namely, Goffman's (1984) dramaturgical approach to role theory and the concept of social positioning (Giddens, 1984; Davies and Harré, 1990). Giddens criticises Goffman's emphasis on the "'given' character of roles (p.84)" and his view of the self as something relatively fixed and static and, as a result, he proposes social positioning as a better way to understand behaviour. For Giddens, the concept of social positioning allows exploration of 'the situation and impact of specific actors in social systems' (Auer and Welte, 2007 p. 779), and brings together notions of structure and agency. However, as discussed in Chapter 3, Davies and Harré (1990) drawing on language analysis, move away from the concept of structure and stress the importance of context and how one's social position can in fact be played out in a variety of ways. Thus, 'Social Positioning', especially as defined by Davies and Harré (1990), is a much more fluid and dynamic concept than role and emphasises the more complex aspects of human interaction.

Although I agree that role, as viewed by Goffman, is relatively static I believe Goffman's work complements that of both Giddens and Davies and Harré. Giddens (1984) too, in spite of criticising Goffman, does not dismiss his dramaturgical approach and accepts the relevance of his work to structuration theory (see Chapter 3). For Giddens, social interaction is situated in a particular time and space, but within a social system, such as a swimming club, these interactions will become routinised as they will subsequently be reconstituted over and over again in different areas of time and space. However, even though such 'encounters' are routinised, they do not just happen. According to Giddens, Goffman's work has helped to demonstrate how such interactions have to be "'worked at' continually by those who sustain such activity" (p.86).

Individuals will meet within different contexts and within these contexts they will be positioned differently. Each encounter will have a different routine and as a consequence the power balance will alter depending on the context in which the interaction takes place. This concept of the shifting of the balance of power, together with Goffman's notion of 'impression management' (see Chapter 3) have been most helpful in the analysis of the data from this study. However, within this present study there are limitations in the use of Goffman. Because of the nature of the research, most of the data are from semi-structured interviews and thus are derived from the actors' own words. Little time was spent actually observing the 'actors' in their interaction with other members of the triad, therefore, what impressions they were trying to portray can only, in turn, be derived from what they say or what others have stated. Also, information derived about the actors and their views on swimming helped in understanding them a little more and why they performed as they did in each of their various roles. In addition it highlighted, to some extent, the 'positions' they held within the various settings as they acted out their role/s. It should be noted that for Davies and Harré (1990) and Giddens (1984) the notion of 'positioning' supercedes that of role. However, in the discussion that follows, the term 'positioning' is used when discussing the various power 'positions' assumed by the actors in my story as they interact with other

members of the triad either within the same or different roles. Therefore, the concept of 'role' is still pertinent and it more clearly defines such notions as the multiplicity of self (Davies and Harré, 1990), of 'performance' and of 'front' as used by Goffman. These notions are considered important in the understanding of the complex relationships of the coach, parent and athlete.

The structuring of this chapter has not been without problems. Initially it was proposed to discuss the findings of this study under the headings of role, relationships, positioning and power, the main themes that resulted from the analysis of the data. However, because of the inter-relationship of these concepts and the complexity of the coaching process the resulting writing tended to be repetitive and a little muddled. It was decided, therefore, to structure the discussion, under the headings of the initial research questions. The first section will be relatively descriptive as it simply lays out the initial scenario and helps in the understanding of the members of the triad better in terms of their philosophy and reasons for involvement in swimming. The next two sections draw on the literature, applying theory to the data in an attempt to display a clearer picture of the coach-parent-athlete triad.

6.2   The philosophy/attitudes of the coach, swimmer and parent with respect to their involvement in swimming.

6.2.1 The coach

The data have revealed that both Chief Coaches were enthusiastic about swimming and committed a great deal of time in providing opportunities for young swimmers to gain positive experiences from the sport. Margaret had been involved in competitive swimming most of her life and she felt that these associated experiences affected how she coached and indeed who she was. She had been socialised into swimming through her role as a swimmer and she talked about how her experiences helped her to understand what the children were going through. She emphasised that one of her main roles was to ensure that the swimmers were happy during their sessions. However, she also emphasised the fact that her aim was not just for the swimmers 'to enjoy swimming' but also to 'get them to swim faster – swim better – improve technique and I think it's to try and cater for all their needs'. Without doubt,

though, her background had clearly left her with a competitive edge, which, at times, meant that she became frustrated in a family club like Smalltown where commitment by both swimmers and parents was not always as she would want.

By contrast, Jane had not been a swimmer but her whole family was heavily involved, with her husband coaching at the club and her three children swimming. She saw her main role as developing swimmers to eventually pass them on to the County Squad where they would receive more advanced training. She clearly enjoyed concentrating on the younger swimmers and mentioned that one of the main benefits of coaching was to see their progression. Having said this, Jane also stated that she was competitive by nature. However, this, she revealed, expressed itself in the satisfaction of seeing the children improve. She stated:

> I'm very competitive I think – partially. So actually I think it's transferred
> - I quite enjoy watching kids improving, getting better and er – I also
> like to see kids having fun, getting something back out of learning a
> new skill or whatever – it's quite a challenge...I like the variety
> really...at Longtown and sort of at the bottom and then those going on
> to County Squad.

She also appreciated that because of competition from other sports, it might not be possible to fulfil her dream of having 'pool sessions' 'crammed', where it would be a struggle to fit everybody in the lanes.

Both coaches, then, were very positive about swimming as a sport. They both had to deal with a wide range of swimmers, where commitment varied and they appreciated that although this was not their ideal situation and could at times be frustrating, they both adopted a relatively holistic approach to their coaching. Thus, they were in their own way both competitive for the young swimmers as well as showing an interest and concern for their development. This, they felt, would ensure that that they could gain maximum enjoyment from their sport.

6.2.2 The parent

The findings showed that there appeared to be clear differences in philosophy towards swimming, not only between Longtown parents and Smalltown parents but also between parents within a club and, indeed, within one family. However, all demonstrated that they were enthusiastic about swimming and felt that it enhanced their children's lives in a variety of ways and, in addition, was something that families could do together. As may have been expected, parents mentioned the safety aspect of swimming as a reason for introducing their children to the sport, but as with the swimmers themselves, the social aspects of swimming were also clearly very important.

The parents in this study had been chosen in relation to their perceived position on Hellstedt's (1987) parent involvement continuum and although Mothers A and C, and Father R might initially be viewed as 'under-involved' (Hellstedt, 1987) or what Brackenridge (1998b) refers to as under-involved/disinterested parents, because of their lack of attendance at galas and training sessions, this was clearly not the case. Even though these parents had positioned themselves as 'non-attenders' (see Kirk and MacPhail, 2003), they were far from 'disinterested'. It was how they interpreted what it meant to be a supportive parent that was different. Their support and their involvement was much more 'behind the scenes', backstage, not as part of the 'performance' on stage (Goffman, 1984) at a training session or at a gala. Mother C, particularly, expressed her lack of understanding of the importance given to 'winning' by both her child and her husband. She did not agree with the way that parents (including her husband) tended to analyse a race or a training session in the car on the way home, nor did she agree with some of the actions that her husband took in relation to Child C's swimming.

Harrington's (2006) study of Australian fathers highlights the importance fathers attach to their children's involvement in sport. Data from this study also showed the important role that both Fathers C and B played in their children's swimming career. Father C and Parents B at Longtown were totally committed to swimming and competitive for their children. Father B and Father C had both been competitive swimmers when younger and the data

from the interviews tended to indicate that this had influenced their philosophy towards swimming. As Father B stated when he was younger 'it was something that life revolved around'. However, neither Father B nor Father C had reached the top level in the swimming world and, although there is no direct evidence to support this, they may well be living or reliving their own sporting careers through their children. Research would tend to indicate that this is sometimes the case with parents who themselves have been athletes and perhaps had not reached the levels they aspired to (see Kidman and Hanrahan, 1997; Gould and Lauer, 2004).

In contrast to Fathers B and C, Father A at Longtown could be called a 'Moderately' involved parent. He attended training sessions, but tended to read the newspaper during this time. He helped out at galas and positioned himself as an enthusiastic committed member of the club. However, although this enthusiasm for swimming was shared by all of Family A, it was tempered by the fact that there was an expectation within the family that the children should also succeed in whatever else they did, particularly at school. This commitment to non-sporting activities such as schoolwork and music seemed to provide a balanced way of life. The commitment to achieve could also have put stress on Child A, unless handled carefully. However, from the interview their seemed to be no evidence of this and what did emerge was a close committed family.

As mentioned above, there was a clear difference in the philosophy of the parents towards swimming at Smalltown. Generally here, the parents saw their club as a family club, which participated in competitions but was not strongly competitive. It was not seen as the place to train if you wanted to become an elite swimmer. The parents who were somewhat different in their view were the parents of Child W. He was, at the time of the interviews, the most successful of the Smalltown swimmers. However, it is interesting to note that although they talked about moving to another more competitive club, Family W continued (and still continues at the time of writing) to be members of Smalltown.

Attitudes towards swimming clearly varied between parents. However, all those interviewed were, without doubt, positioned as 'supporters' and strove in their own ways to create an environment in which they felt would give their child the best chance to get the most from their swimming career. Some of these attitudes towards swimming clearly stemmed from past experiences. However, there was also evidence that the children were not only socialised into swimming by their parents but also vice versa. In agreement with the literature (see Barber, Sukhi and White, 1999), not only had the parents socialised their children into the sport of swimming but there was also evidence to suggest that it was primarily because of the children's involvement in swimming that some of the parents themselves became more involved and their own attitudes to swimming developed. This bi-directional nature of the socialisation process (Barber, Sukhi and White, 1999) was also evident in the study by Kirk and MacPhail (2003) of Forest Athletic Club, where several of the parents became more involved in the club as the children spent more time practising their sport.

6.2.3 The swimmer

All the swimmers in this present study with the exception of Child B were positioned as 'Specialisers' (see Côté, 1999; Côté and Hay, 2002). The majority had done and still did other sports but gradually the numbers of other activities had decreased as they began to concentrate more on swimming. As 'Specialisers', swimming competitions were clearly important to them, yet in terms of being successful most stated that success for them was in achieving personal best times rather than simply winning. Child W also talked about the 'fun' achieved through challenge, the anxiety before a race and 'the feeling' on winning. Child R was the only swimmer to describe the enjoyment of just being in the water with just his own thoughts to occupy him. Having said this, Child R also stated that committing so much to swimming also meant that he was unable to do other things. This time commitment to swimming could potentially cause some tension within the families and there was evidence in the data that, on occasions, swimmers were 'encouraged' to attend by one or more parent.

Although the swimmers were positioned as competitive swimmers, without doubt one of the main reasons for swimming was the social element. This was at the forefront of many of the responses from the swimmers when asked why they swam. The importance of the social element in the club was also something that was also very apparent in Kirk and MacPhail's (2003) study. Being a member of a social group was clearly important to them and for some was the main reason for attending the club.

Both parents and swimmers spoke of the enjoyment of achieving and being good at swimming as a reason for continuing with the sport, although there was also a sense from the swimmers, particularly Child C, that because one begins swimming at such an early age, it can become a habit and a part of one's life that is done, almost automatically. Finally, the importance of a good relationship with the coach (see Weiss and Chaumeton, 1992; Wylleman et al., 1997) was highlighted particularly by Child B as she compared her experiences at Longtown with what she felt were more positive ones at County Squad. There was a sense that once a young swimmer had entered into the 'Investment years' (see Côté, 1999; Côté and Hay, 2002), as was the case with Child B, even more commitment was needed as training load and expectations from both the swimmer and others around him or her also increased. Without this support and feedback from the coach, the young swimmer may well drop out of the sport.

6.2.4   Summary

The findings of this study revealed that the attitudes of those interviewed towards swimming, although generally positive, were varied and complex. However, the one thing that seemed common amongst the swimmers and their parents was an appreciation of the social element, something that is extremely important in a sport, which takes up so much of, not only the athlete's, but also the parents' and coaches' time and indeed life.

6.3 Identify the role and expectations of the coach, swimmer, and parent as viewed by themselves and the other members of the triad.

As noted in the Methodology Chapter, two main traditions in relation to role theory have emerged, namely the structural functionalism tradition first proposed by authors such as Linton (1936) and Parsons (1951), and the interactionist tradition, which has grown out of the work of Mead (1934; see Breese 1997).

The discussions around the concept of role have shown that when discussing this concept it is important to bear in mind that, although human beings are capable of defining their own roles within society, both the actor in that role and others will have expectations about what that role entails and people will behave, to a greater or lesser extent, according to those expectations. As Goffman (1984) states:

> When an actor takes on an established social role, usually he finds that a particular front has already been established for it. Whether his acquisition of the role was primarily motivated by a desire to perform the given task or by a desire to maintain the corresponding front, the actor will find that he must do both (p.37).

The participants in this study had all been involved in the two clubs for a number of years and, as a consequence, would have been socialised into the world of Longtown and Smalltown Swimming Clubs. Within these 'communities of practice' (Lave and Wenger, 1999, see below), they would have learnt how to become a coach, a competitive swimmer and a swimming parent respectively. They formed a role 'set' and their performances within this role set were shaped to some extent by the expectations of other members (Jones, 2004).

Each of the 'actors' in the 'story' was asked during the interviews what they felt was not only their role but the roles of other members of the sporting triangle. In addition, they were asked to complete forms on which to detail characteristics of the ideal coach, parent and athlete. Although one of the families did not complete these forms information from the interviews also gave some insight into their expectations with regards to role. The 'Ideal

forms' completed in this study together with the interview data revealed that role expectations were not always the same. Although certain criteria appeared on the majority of the forms, there were variations between the different members of the role set. For example, when noting the ideal coach, parents tended to stress knowledge, commitment and the ability to communicate, whilst the swimmers themselves looked for more affective qualities. They wanted a coach that was helpful, friendly, supportive, gave praise and felt proud of his or her swimmers. As noted earlier, if the coach does not fulfil these expectations, then the coach-athlete relationship is compromised (Weiss and Chaumenton, 1992; Wylleman et al., 1997; Jowett and Cockerill, 2002). Similarly, although there was general agreement that an important role of parents was to be supportive, Child W stressed more the importance of parents not getting too nervous or pushing the child too much, an indication perhaps that he had experienced this himself. Another example of differences in role expectations came from Margaret who strongly believed that part of a parent's role was not just to be part of the club and help out, but he or she should become part of the whole 'swimming experience' and clearly felt that in many cases this did not happen.

Because of the importance in understanding the role and role expectations of the sporting triangle, each member's role, perceived or otherwise, is discussed in turn.

6.3.1 The coach
When discussing the role of the coach, Jones (2004) notes that it is necessary to recognise that coaching is still part of a social structure where similar attitudes, beliefs and cultural traditions prevail, in spite of being different within different contexts. As noted in the Literature Review chapter, according to Armour (2004) coaching itself can be defined as a 'pedagogic setting' (p.107), because learning to be a coach is situated within specific communities of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1999). Drawing on the work of Lave and Wenger (1999), Armour implies that this does not mean all interests are shared but that the varying interests and viewpoints contribute to the setting and the participants share understandings about what they are doing. Coaches,

therefore, learn the 'culture of practice' (p.107) important to their sport – in this case swimming. As noted earlier, the study revealed that Margaret, through her long-term involvement in swimming, had been 'socialised' into the mores of that sport. For Jane it was slightly different: not a swimmer herself, she had become involved because of her family and had thus absorbed some of the 'culture of coaching'. She most likely had to some degree 'learnt' from those around her what was expected of her and how she should behave.

Data from research would tend to support the case that people will learn these 'perceived' roles to a degree through their contact with those occupying a similar role. Citing Cushion (2001), Armour (2004) points out that within coach education there is a tradition of mentoring and it is likely that the behaviour of coaches will be influenced by role models so that they act either in a similar fashion to their own coach or, if their coaching experience was not positive, in a contradictory way. Although Jones et al (2002), in their research interviewing several coaches, found that none of the coaches actually admitted to having a role model, many could identify a coach who had inspired them in some way. Certainly Cushion (2003) notes that it is

> through participation and observation from a player through to becoming a coach, methods of coaching are experienced and witnessed. These methods are steeped in a culture, which, in turn, are internalized and embodied (p. 217)

and,

> ...Even though coaches' past experiences are uneven in quality and incomplete, they form a screen or filter through which all future expectations will pass (p.218).

The pressure to adopt a behaviour in order to conform to the expectations of that role and thus avoid conflict was clear in the case of Margaret at Smalltown. Margaret may have wanted to push swimmers into attending more sessions so that they would ultimately swim faster and the club would be more successful as a result, but she did not do so. This was because to do so would mean going against the overall ethos of Smalltown Swimming Club, which, in turn, could have resulted in conflict and disharmony within this 'friendly' club. Similarly, Jane was willing to take a back seat in terms of coaching Group 1 and the Masters group until she felt more established and

so in this setting she adopted a subordinate role to Father C who was acting as their coach. Thus, both these coaches to some extent and with varying degrees of success had learnt what 'front' (Goffman, 1984) should be visible during, which performances so that they appeared credible in their role. By acting against their own philosophy, both coaches may, to some extent, fail to live up to their own self concept and this, inevitably, may lead to role strain and role conflict (see Luiukkonen, 1999).

This necessity of a coach to adopt the correct 'front' (Goffman, 1984), when in the presence of his or her athletes, is clearly portrayed by Jones (2006) in his auto-ethnographical account entitled 'Dilemmas, Maintaining "Face" and Paranoia: an Average Coaching Life'. In this paper, which has been constructed from past memories of coaching experiences, Jones (2006) strikingly outlines the personal traumas of a coach trying to appear confident and in command during a pre-game scenario, when clearly circumstances led him to feel quite the opposite. In the endnotes Jones explains:

> The front constructed relates to convincing athletes that the coach is confident, expert, in total command of events, sure of his or her judgement and, hence, is to be unquestioningly respected…The case, thus is made that coaching relies less on the mechanics of how or what to coach and more on who is coaching, their perceptions of how coaches ought to act, and the relationships they have with those being coached (p.1017).

People then will, on occasions, wear a 'mask' (Goffman, 1984) to cover how they really feel and to act in ways that they perceive are appropriate for the 'performance' they are about to give. As we have seen in the previous section looking at how the coaches were positioned in the various clubs, both Chief Coaches, to some extent, 'played their role' according to expectations. However, in the case of Jane, for some, she did not portray the confidence that readily made her accepted by those parents like Father C who felt they were more 'expert' in certain areas. Also, she did not always display the expected authority, which would have enabled her to win over the confidence of those parents who felt that the club was becoming less competitive as a result of her emphasis on skill development.

Jones (2004) notes, the necessity of creating a framework and clarity of roles if there is to be harmony with any social group. Following the interviews with a number of coaches carried out by Jones, Potrac and Armour (2004), Jones (2004) notes that the coaches, particularly team coaches, felt that the athletes should be clear about their role both on and off the field. However, data from the interviews in this current study seemed to indicate a lack of understanding with regards to the various roles within the role set of coach, parent and athlete. For Jane at Longtown, there appeared to be some confusion and role strain with respect to her role as Chief Coach. To be Chief Coach, Jane clearly thought she had freedom to re-structure the club in ways that she felt would benefit it. However, how she interpreted her role seemed at odds with others within the club and there was some limitation as to how she could define her role and act according to that definition. Margaret, on the other hand appeared freer to define her role and clearly felt that this was not too influenced by the committee, which she called 'informal'. However, as noted above, in spite of this, she was clearly aware of the expectations of the other members of the role set and was constrained to accept the values of the club and to act in ways that conformed to those. An issue that did arise with regards to the fulfilment of Margaret's role was that she had defined her role in such a way that it had outgrown her ability to manage both it and her home life. Mother W felt that there were time constraints on Margaret to fulfil all her roles whilst Father W referred to the 'huge job' of coaching in a club like Smalltown. Ultimately, the conflict for Margaret in trying to manage her multiple roles, at work, at home and at the club led her resigning her position of Chief Coach,

A clearer understanding of each other's expectations may well have prevented some of the conflicts of interest that were evident in the clubs and led to more harmonious relationships especially at Longtown. At Smalltown, Margaret was seen by parents and swimmers as approachable and someone with whom it was easy to discuss swimming related matters, whereas at Longtown the situation was different although Jane had stated how she liked to chat to parents, not necessarily on the poolside as this might disrupt the session.

However, Parents C and B felt that there was poor communication and subsequently not a great relationship was established with Jane. Father B, in his interview, mentioned several instances when he felt that communication was not strong with Jane but, at the same time, mentioning other coaches within Longtown with whom he did feel there was a stronger relationship. He felt that 'it comes down to personality really'. Father B also mentioned the better relationship he felt he now had with the coach at the County Squad – something also echoed by his daughter. According to Côté and Hay (2002), as a young athlete moves from the 'Specialising Years' into the 'Investment Years' more commitment is demanded and more hours are spent on deliberate practice. As a consequence, a greater period of time is spent with the coach and inevitably the coach/athlete relationship grows and the role of the parent changes to that of being a supportive follower (Côté and Hay, 2002). Child B was now entering the 'Investment Years' and this may explain why both she and her father felt that the new coach spent more time with her and was happy to answer Father B's questions, as well as having a stronger belief in the abilities of Child B. Hogg (1995) illustrates how the role of the coach can change as the athlete moves through his or her competitive career. Hogg suggests that during this time there is an increase of power sharing on the part of the coach and, as a result, the relationship changes from an authoritarian one to one in which the coach adopts a more humanistic approach. Child B, in the 'Investment Years' was entering a more power sharing phase where there appeared to be greater communication and feedback, something that the data from this study revealed was lacking for some of the other swimmers. This is not to criticise the coaches at Longtown because they were limited, to some extent, by the numbers of swimmers that they had to coach. Also, all the assistant coaches and helpers at the club were volunteers and not necessarily qualified to coach swimming.

Although constrained, to some extent, to conform to role expectations, people still possess the power to create their own roles. Thus, it is necessary to recognise the contribution of both structure and agency on the construction of role (Callero, 1994; Jones, 2004). Structure may to some extent limit how far an individual can go in defining their role but, as can be seen from some of the

data concerning the role of parents, it is important for individuals to clearly comprehend what their role should be.

6.3.2 The parent

Parents in particular stated that, when new to the club, it was difficult to know what was expected of them. This lack of awareness was not restricted to attendance at club sessions but also at swimming galas. The findings showed that on one occasion Father B took Child B to compete at the District Age-group Championships. For Father B and Child B this was a new experience. As Father B stated they felt like 'virgins'. They had not learned how to behave and did not know what to expect within this context. Father B wanted to go onto the poolside but the structure put in place in terms of the need for a coach's pass prevented him acting in a way that he would have wanted in his role of supportive parent. He was clearly positioned in the role of spectator and as such had to obey the rules put in place, even if this meant leaving his daughter alone on the poolside unaware of how to behave in the role of a competitive district qualifier.

In terms of imparting information to parents, mechanisms were in place at both clubs but, as noted, data showed that these appeared not to be always very effective. The parents who positioned themselves as the non-attender clearly were difficult to reach and at the time of the interviews Smalltown had just developed a web-page to help disseminate information. However, both Chief Coaches talked about lack of commitment amongst the parents and expected more help from some, especially with basic organisational things like putting out the lane ropes. In spite of this, Mother B did not feel that Longtown Swimming Club actually encouraged parents to have an active role and was not sure that 'they like it when you take an interest'. However, she did add that she felt that Longtown was really not 'designed for a competitive swimmer'. In this instance, the lack of consensus between parent and coach with regards to parental help may be again down to the misunderstanding of the overall goals of the club or perhaps more precisely the overall goals of Jane, the Chief Coach. Generally though, the failure to obtain help from parents may simply have been due to a lack of awareness, confidence and

knowledge on the part of the parents about what do. Kirk and MacPhail (2003) in their study of Forest Athletic Club found that it was only once athletes had been going to the club for a while that the parents felt confident enough to move from being passive spectators to active volunteers and become more fully involved in the club.

All parents in this current study had been involved with swimming over many years, and at least one parent regularly attended swimming sessions and galas, and several were committee members. Thus, they had some firm views on what the role of the parent should be. In addition, the swimmers' roles of committed club members, as in Kirk and MacPhail's study, helped to define the roles subsequently occupied by their parents. As already noted, most of the children interviewed were at the 'Specialiser' stage of their swimming career as defined by Côté and Hay (2002) and all parents were without doubt committed supporters and invested varying degrees of time and money in their children's swimming career. During the interviews, Father B, particularly, seemed passionate about his daughter's swimming and illustrated the stress that competition at this level could place, not just on the child but also on other members of the family. His reaction to Child B achieving national qualifying times may have been because of his elation simply for his daughter and her success, or it may be that because of his own swimming experiences there was a sense of defining his own self-worth in terms of his daughter's success (see Smith and Cumming, 2006). Similarly though, Father B, when describing his reaction to his daughter's disappointing swim demonstrated how letting that 'mask' (Goffman,1984) of supportive parent slip could have devastating effects. Child B saw her father's reaction and, according to Father B, resulted in daughter feeling that she had 'let him down' and that he was 'going to be mad' with her and as a result . Wood and Abernathy (1991) found that the most pressure-inducing behaviours of the parents were those that resulted in a judgement being put on the swimmer's self worth. This may well be what happened in this situation as Father B commented:

it was not a pleasant journey home and she ... went straight to her bedroom and there was tears and real upset and it was just over a split second facial expression

In contrast to the high commitment and involvement of parents such as Mother and Father B and Father C, those who positioned themselves as non-attenders played out their role of supportive parent very differently. Mother C clearly felt that a good 'swimming parent' was one who unquestionably supported his or her children, but also who did not analyse swimming either at or away from the pool. Similarly Mother A felt that her role was to ensure that her child had the correctly balanced diet needed by someone active in swimming. Neither of these parents, along with Father R at Smalltown, often supported their children in terms of attending swimming sessions and galas, but they clearly interpreted their roles as supportive. In a similar way to Rosenthal's (1991) study, which suggested that parents could disagree about the amount of time and money that should be invested in training, this current study showed that the difference in the way those interviewed saw their roles could sometimes lead to role conflict and ambiguity. This conflict could affect family relations and ultimately the sporting experience of young athletes. Mother C clearly found herself at odds with her husband and her daughter as she could not understand why taking part in galas was not enough for them both. Clearly, there were times when Child C resented her father's involvement – he was not acting the role of supportive parent in the way that she defined it. She did not want him on the poolside with her acting in the role of 'swimmer' at galas or the role of the 'coach' during club nights. As a consequence, she found it easier to discuss swimming matters with her mother who was consistently acting out her role of supportive mother as expected. This was non-threatening and comfortable.

The problem of being a parent/coach has been highlighted by Jowett et al (2007), who found that although within 'abnormal' coach-athlete relationships such as that of parent/child, there may be more trust and shared understanding: there can also be the added emotional aspects of the relationship. Jowett et al (2007) also noted the relationship of parent/coach and child/athlete changed depending on the level of interdependence within

that relationship. Where there was less interdependence, there was evidence of conflict with the child wanting to discontinue the coach-athlete relationship. In such a relationship the basis of dependence was characterised by parent/coaches' control and a lack of commitment on behalf of the athlete. This may be an explanation for the relationship and the conflict between Child C and her father, highlighted by Child C using the threat of giving up swimming as a weapon in arguments with her father. Data from the study by Jowett et al (2007) also revealed that at times the parent /coach can be tougher on their own child than others in the group. Father C admitted that at times this had been the case with his own daughter, and clearly expressed the conflict that he felt when occupying the dual role of father/coach. He stated

> ... sometimes I was able to play the role of the coach and sometimes I was able to play the role of the parent very badly.

The problems of father/child, coach/athlete relationship and the potential for conflict was also highlighted by Family B where the father, although attending the training sessions and discussing swimming with his daughter at home, felt that if he also coached his children, they would never be able to give each other space.

Parents who become committed club members will often take on additional roles other than coach, and data from the interviews revealed that the adoption of these additional roles could also lead to role conflict. Mother R felt that her role of supportive parent in terms of watching her child swim was compromised by taking on extra responsibilities. As a supportive parent who clearly became involved in all aspect of the club, she found that by her taking on extra responsibilities at the club she had 'missed a lot of my kids' swimming – when you are recording you don't see anything, you don't have time'. Although she firmly believed that parents should become involved in all aspect of the club, she did regret not being able to fully support her children and fulfil her role of parent in the way she felt she should.

The stage the swimmers were at in their swimming career, together with the expectations of what a swimming parent should be, defined to some extent

how the parents behaved. However, interpretation of what it meant to be supportive varied not just between different sets of parents, or between swimmer and parent, or coach and parent but, on occasion, between parents within one family.

Finally, the findings with respect to the roles of the swimmers in this study are now discussed.

6.3.3 The swimmer

The interview data showed that the swimmers had probably not previously considered what their role was and found it had to define. They had almost unconsciously, through socialisation, learnt role expectations experiencing life as a competitive swimmer. Not only did the swimmers learn their role through experiencing their sport but familial expectations also played their part and, at times, these expectations could be seen to potentially provide a degree of role ambiguity. An example of this was with Child A who saw herself as a competitive swimmer and success was defined in terms of winning and achieving personal best times, yet, at the same time, data from the family interviews revealed that school work was probably as, if not more, important. However, it emerged that ambiguity was actually avoided as both Child A and her mother stated that her role as a competitive swimmer was not in conflict with her role as a 'committed scholar' but was seen as something that provided a balance to her life.

Although swimmers in the study found it hard to discuss what their role was within the club, when questioned further and especially when encouraged to discuss their 'Ideal Swimmer', commitment and dedication were at the fore, along with mental toughness. Even though the amount of commitment within this small group of swimmers varied, the findings emphasised that, even at this level of competition, a huge amount of time and energy had been invested by these young athletes as they commit to their sport. Being committed was something that the parents and the coaches felt that swimmers should be and there was evidence to suggest that the commitment displayed by some of the swimmers was not always enough for some parents. The huge commitment

expected by some of the parents could lead to stress being placed on the swimmer as could be seen in the case of Child C.

As noted above, with the exception of Child B the swimmers were at the 'Specialising stage' of their swimming career. They were positioned as competitive swimmers but, success was perceived by most of the swimmers in terms of achieving personal best times rather than simply winning. However, the data revealed that it was clear that parents such as Parents B and Father C kept a close eye on their children's main rivals. In swimming, this is easy to do as programmes for swimming galas usually contain the times of the competitors along with their names. This can easily promote a climate where comparisons take place and an ego orientation rather than a task motivational climate prevails with an emphasis on outcome rather than process prevails. As can be seen from the literature, such a climate can put stress on the young athlete (see Tierney, 1988; Harwood and Swain, 2001; 2002) as they try to fulfil parental expectations in their role of a competitive swimmer.

6.3.4 Summary

Any discussion of roles within the coaching context will highlight the complexity of the coaching process. The findings clearly indicated that varying expectations from the 'Ideal' forms and this lack of agreement was inevitably also reflected in the role expectations of members of the triad. What has also begun to emerge from the data derived from this study is a beginning of an understanding of the 'power dynamics' (Jones, 2006) within the social settings of a swimming club as roles are played out during the various 'performances' given by each member of the triad of coach, parent and athlete.

6.4 Identify the role these inter-relationships play in shaping the coaching environment and process and how, in turn, these roles are shaped by the context in which they are played out.

Data from this study have revealed the complexities of the relationships within the sporting triad and the multiplicity of selves as people adopted different roles within different contexts. This, together with the different expectations of how others within the triad should behave, could lead to conflict and misunderstanding. In order to try to understand this further the data are examined in terms of how members positioned themselves within different contexts and different relationships and how the power struggles played themselves out. Each member of the triad will again be discussed in terms of how they positioned themselves within the overall coaching process and with other members of the triad.

6.4.1 The coach

Authors such as Lyle (2002) maintain that the coach is at the heart of the coaching process and it is his or her role to manage that process and to create an environment in which athletes can perform optimally. If Kirk and MacPhail's (2003) arguments about the use of 'Positioning Theory' as derived by Davies and Harré (1990) are accepted, it can be seen the findings of this present study that the coaches were positioned differently in each club. As noted in the findings chapter, it would appear that the activities of both coaches but in particular those of Jane, the Chief Coach at Longtown were constrained, in varying degrees, by both the parents and the committee. The structure of Longtown Club and the power of the committee and, to some extent the parents, limited her freedom within her role as Chief Coach. At worst this restricted what Jane could do and, at best, if she did bring about changes, she was criticised by both parents and officials of the club. By contrast, at Smalltown, the locus of control seemed to be very much with Margaret, and the committee were more willing to do what Margaret wanted. As a result, in her role as Chief Coach, Margaret understood that it was expected that she would put before the committee any ideas for major organisational changes, but that there was a willingness on their part to do what she wanted, as they believed that this was for the benefit of the whole

club. This is not to say that there was no conflict in terms of the philosophy between the coach and the committee. In both clubs, the Chief Coaches were, to some extent, at odds with what others in the club wanted and expected. Margaret resigned herself to the fact that '…winning is well, you know, it's not achievable with our calibre of swimmers'. She clearly appreciated that the parents, with the exception of Parents W, were not that competitive, with few ever encouraging their children to enter open meets. Also she seemed to accept that attendance by some of the swimmers at training session could be a 'bit sporadic'. Although this frustrated Margaret, she knew that to approach the club differently would be to risk conflict and a loss of the 'good team atmosphere' and the friendly nature of the club where 'people support each other and things like that'. Again, although free to act in many ways as she wanted, Margaret's role was inevitably determined by the structure and the ethos of the club.

As seen when reviewing the literature, coach-parent conflict can occur when parents feel it is their responsibility rather than that of the coach to ensure that the children work hard (Ryan, 1995; Engh, 1999). At Longtown it seemed, both during my observation periods when I was approached by parents at the club as well as during the actual interviews, that several parents had firm views about the types of training that should be done in a swimming session. Because of this, the data revealed that Jane seemed to have problems persuading some parents to accept her belief that based on the ASA recommendations Longtown should be a skill development club and should, as such, concentrate on the development of technique. Although this had found favour with some parents, there was a feeling from others that the swimmers did not swim fast enough and were not pushed hard enough. Within her role as Chief Coach Jane had chosen to follow the ASA recommendations. The interview data revealed that this is how she saw her role and she talked about how thrilled she was when she saw improvements in young swimmers, particularly if in the past they had been overlooked and not given the attention in terms of stroke work that she felt was needed. This concentration on skill development clearly caused tension; probably because of the lack of understanding by other members of the 'position' that Jane saw

herself fulfilling in this context. Kirk and MacPhail (2003) in their study of a youth athletics club note how skill and talent development are part of the official agenda of youth sports clubs, yet in spite of this it is not necessarily the dominant agenda, as was the case with the Forest Athletics Club they studied. As a result of this variety of agendas, they go on to observe:

> Few of the agents (young people, parent, coaches and officials) are able to understand or appreciate the range of positions that it is possible for individuals to adopt or to be given. This partial knowledge of what the club is, and the multiple and overlapping practices that make 'the club' a living, dynamic reality, means that there are tensions, conflicts and complexities that need to be managed (p.26).

This apparent lack of understanding at Longtown was possibly why one of the chief criticisms of Jane was that in her interactions with both swimmers and parents she did not give the impression of being 'tough enough' and this led Father B to remark that she had not 'got the balls' for the job. It might be the case that in order to convince parents that she had, Jane would need to adopt a 'front' (Goffman, 1984) that would be an alien and uncomfortable way to behave. She was not seen as central to the club in the same way as Margaret at Smalltown Swimming Club, and she appeared to find it hard to be 'the boss' - something that Bob Dwyer, a rugby coach interviewed by Potrac and Brewer (2004) felt coaches had to be (see Jones et al., 2004). Father B's rather gendered remark may also be evidence of the fact that coaching is still a very male dominated profession where the view of the coach as a male benevolent autocrat (Vanden Auweele 1999) still prevails to some degree (See Fasting and Pfister, 2000). Fasting and Pfister report on a study undertaken by Staurowsky (1990) of ten female coaches who coached only men. They reported that both these female coaches and their male players experienced sexism and how they overheard another coach saying 'Guys, you've got to beat that team because you can't lose to a woman' (p.213). Also they note that at matches the female coaches were not believed to be Head Coaches, but rather girlfriends, family or reporters. Although this research is now rather dated, one can question whether things have really changed.

The data suggests that Jane seemed, then, to lack the respect that the swimmers, the parents and the coaches afforded to Margaret at Smalltown. The importance of a coach having respect in order to be trusted enough that his or her goals are accepted by the athletes and others involved in a club has been highlighted by Jones (2006) who notes the importance of the coach 'presenting a coaching "front" and fulfilling perceived roles' (p.1019), something that Jane on occasions appeared to fail to do.

Data from the interviews indicated that a great deal of Margaret's respect came from the fact that she had not just 'legitimate' power (French and Raven, 1959) because of her role as the coach: a power also held of course by Jane, but Margaret also had 'expert' power (French and Raven,1959), something that Potrac et al (2002) believe is essential to commanding the respect of the athletes. Margaret was respected and admired because of her previous experience as both a top class swimmer and water polo player. She also, on occasions, swam for the club. This was clearly something the members appreciated particularly as she nearly 'always wins' (Child R). There was no doubt in the members' minds that Margaret should be Chief Coach. She was positioned as 'the expert' and as such was able to instruct them and make appropriate changes to the structure and organisation of the sessions. Even though Margaret stated that the committee was less formal than her previous experiences, the ultimate power still rested with them and, although generally they were willing to go along with Margaret's ideas, they ultimately had the power to make the final decision. On the poolside then Margaret was in a powerful position but this power balance would shift whenever she bought new ideas to the committee.

The impression Margaret gave both to me whilst observing her and during the interviews was of a firm, but essentially caring coach. As such she had, perhaps reluctantly, accepted the overall ethos of the club and 'positioned' herself in such a way that she created a friendly, 'fun' atmosphere, in which the swimmers worked hard and were happy to put something back into the club by helping with things like putting out the lane ropes and coaching the

younger swimmers. She was someone the members openly stated, would be hard to replace.

This luxury was not afforded to Jane. As has been noted in the previous chapter, some of the parents at Longtown 'positioned' themselves so that they felt able to criticise her, at times comparing her to other coaches they seemed to respect more. It is true that Jane had only been with the club for a relatively short time as opposed to Margaret who had held that position for about eight years. Jane was only beginning to establish herself and put in place some of the new structures with regards to the training sessions. However, the perception of some of the members of Longtown Swimming Club was that Jane lacked 'expert' power and a sense that some of the parents, particularly Father C and to some extent Father B felt that they knew more about swimming than Jane. Father C, particularly, was heavily involved in the club as a parent, swimmer and coach. He clearly positioned himself both within many discourses in the club and during the interviews as someone who was knowledgeable about swimming and at times could do a better job than the coach, particularly with the older swimmers. He stated that it would be difficult for Jane to 'come in and push me out' even though he felt that it was her role to have overall control. His assumed knowledge and expertise meant that he was prepared to intervene in coaching sessions, in spite of stating how much he resented parents doing just that. As the data show, he was willing to admit that he had himself intervened in a session in which he was not coaching. He, however, excused this behaviour by explaining that it was a session that he had planned but, which was being taken by another coach who was not ensuring that Father C's daughter was swimming the session correctly[22].

Jane, however, seemed to have control of the difficult situation with regards to who should coach the older swimmers. It may appear that by allowing Father C to continue to coach the seniors she had put Father C in a powerful position but as Tauber (1985) notes, it is also powerful to allow oneself to be sub-

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[22] It is interesting to note that although Father C appeared confident both on and off the poolside in relation to swimming, he was obviously concerned about the impression that he portrayed to me during the interviews. On frequent occasions he asked if what he said was alright and what did I think.

ordinated. Jane was clearly confident and happy both coaching and organising the coaching of the younger members of the club. Here she felt there were swimmers that had been ignored and could be encouraged with more time being dedicated to them. She allowed Group 1 and the Masters group to run as it had done before her arrival, and there was a sense that she would establish herself at the lower end of the club before embarking on organising the older swimmers.

Perhaps Jane should have found ways to more effectively communicate her coaching philosophy to the club and committee in order to obtain their support. Certainly Vanden Auweele (1999) found that co-operative behaviour between coach and parent resulted from frequent contact. A view that is in contrast to the common view of parents by coaches as interfering and threatening, and also a view that is not supported by Strean's (1995) research, which suggested that the less parents knew about a sport in which their child participated, the less they were inclined to intervene. More recently Jowett and colleagues (Jowett and Cockerill, 2002, 2003; Jowett et al., 2007) using the constructs of Closeness, Commitment and Complementarity (3 Cs) have carried out a number of case studies investigating coach-athlete relationships. As a result of these and the resulting emphasis that has been placed on the bi-directional nature of the relationship (see Jowett and Cockerill, 2002), a fourth construct, that of Co-orientation (shared knowledge and understanding) has been added. The findings of the case studies revealed that,

> shared knowledge and understanding were the result of coaches' and athletes' open channels of communication and affected relationship outcomes such as interpersonal satisfaction, motivation to strive towards common goals, and performance accomplishments (Jowett 2006 p.70).

It would appear then, that Jane, as a new coach, needed to ensure that there were strong lines of communication both between herself and the swimmers' parents and between herself and the swimmers in order to ensure that they understood her philosophy and she gained their support. Parents B and Father C felt that this not to be the case with respect to communication

between parents and coach at Longtown. Within this relationship, the lines of communication between these two parties were weak or even 'broken' at times showing conflict (see Hellstedt, 1987). Jane, herself, admitted that she found it hard to talk to Father C about swimming, though she felt that her relationships with Parents B had improved over time. Jane stated that she was generally happy for parents to come and chat to her and parent meetings were held at the club. However, data seemed to suggest that these meetings were often poorly attended. As a consequence of this poor communication Jane was struggling to obtain acceptance of her overall aims for the club. Parents interviewed appeared unaware of Jane's work in terms of her observation of the swimmers, her thrill at their progression, the realisation that there were limits to how far the swimmers could progress within the club and the need to move them on. As Goffman (1984) notes, sometimes it is difficult and time consuming to dramatise what is actually being done by the actors in order for this work to be recognised. He suggests that,

> The work that must be done by those who fill certain statuses is often so poorly designed as an expression of a desired meaning, that if the incumbent would dramatize the character of his role, he must divert appreciable amount of his energy to do so. And this activity diverted to communication will often require different attributes from the ones, which are being dramatized' (p.40).

and,

> as a result those who have the time and talent to perform a task well may not, because of this, have the time or talent to make it apparent that they are performing well (p.43).

The Chief Coach in each club was without doubt dedicated and committed to their jobs, but the data reveal the importance of being able to establish a positive dialogue with parents and others within the club so that they fully understand the reasons for decisions that are being made and the variety of 'positions' that coaches must occupy within the club as they enter into discourse with a variety of other members. Without such understanding conflict and power struggles may arise and the effectiveness of the overall coaching process will suffer. In the case of Longtown, such conflict was eventually to see Jane and subsequent coaches leave the club. Such parental power has been evidenced in previous research (see Strean, 1995).

6.4.2 The parent

The parents in Kirk and MacPhail's (2003) study of Forest Athletic Club positioned themselves in several ways such as 'The non-attender', 'The spectator', 'The helper' and 'The committed member'. Kirk and MacPhail also note that these 'various parent positions were circumscribed by other selves ...' (p.33) both within their life in the club and outside in the wider context. In a similar way to the parents in Kirk and MacPhail's study, the parents in this current study, also occupied a 'multiplicity of self' (Davies and Harré, 1990) as each fulfilled their role/s in a variety of contexts – at home, at the pool during training sessions and competition, in the car transporting children to and from the pool etc. Within these contexts, the parents would also take on other roles, such as the coach, the club official, the gala official, the supporter, the non-attender and in the case of Father C, also the swimmer. Within these roles different 'positions' were taken and at times the power balance would change (or at least be perceived to change) as they interacted with their partners, the coach and their children swimmers.

Within the setting of the home, parents within this study, as elsewhere, will naturally possess the 'legitimate' power that comes from simply being a parent. However, data revealed that within the home, there were, for some of the families, power struggles over swimming. In both Smalltown and Longtown Swimming Clubs it was clear that, on occasions, parents compelled their children to attend sessions. Within Smalltown, the children interviewed gave the impression that they were happy for this to happen, because once at the session they were pleased that they had been pressured into going. Research has noted that, how, on occasions, it is important to encourage and motivate and at times necessary to become what Gould and Lauer (2004) describe as parents with an 'optimal push' (p.6). This may be the situation at Smalltown. As with Jane in the example above concerning her interactions with Father C, the children, in this interaction and in this particular context, held some power because they allowed themselves to be made to go to the sessions. It would be interesting to have asked if there were ever occasions when they still refused to go in spite of their parents wishes and if this did happen how the parents reacted, but this information is missing from the data.

The interview data tended to reflect the fact they did not feel coerced into going. Child T, in fact, stated that his parents left the decision to him but for Child W and Child R there was a sense that, through past experiences, they knew that once at the club they would be happy to be there. There appeared to be with these two swimmers an acceptance that there were occasions when they needed cajoling into going.

By contrast, the pressure put on Child C at Longtown led her to use the threat of stopping swimming as a weapon against her father. However, it was not possible to use such a weapon against her mother, a non-attender, who clearly did not care if her daughter stopped swimming. Ultimately though, it would appear that within this context the position of power was still occupied by Father C because during the time of the research Child C continued to swim, even if only once or twice a week[23]. The variation in the reasons for stopping swimming given by Father C and Child C could be because Child C was trying to convey to me a particular impression, one of co-operation with her father where there was a sharing of responsibility for her attending fewer swimming sessions. The idea though of using the threat of giving up swimming as a weapon raises an interesting point in relation to positioning and power balance within child-parent relationships. It would seem that if parents were relaxed about their child's swimming and not too concerned if they quit the sport, as was the case with the majority of the Smalltown parents and Mother C, then the children did not feel coerced and once nudged attended willingly. The locus of control could be perceived to be with the parents, but possibly the children also felt powerfully positioned in their acquiescence and subsequent attendance at the swimming session. However, if the child felt coerced into going swimming, as seemed the case with Child C, and knew that a parent would not want him or her to stop, then that could be used as a weapon and the power shifted to the child – even if this power was perceived rather than real.

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[23] I subsequently learned that later once the pressure to attend was removed Child C started going to more swimming sessions.

Parents B and Father C at Longtown 'positioned' themselves as 'experts' and, like Mother W at Smalltown, were very heavily involved in their child's swimming. Both Father C and Mother W, on occasions, coached at the clubs, though in the case of Mother W this was done rather unwillingly. Father B and Father C had been swimmers when younger and were competitive for their children, yet Father B had 'positioned' himself within the club, not as a coach, as he felt that it would be difficult to coach his own children but as someone who observed and was critical, not simply of Margaret, but of the whole ethos of the club as a place for primarily skill development. The impression that he 'managed' to portray (Goffman, 1984) during the interviews was of someone who cared passionately about swimming, who was highly competitive for his children, yet was careful not to appear 'pushy'. He often stated that he did not want to put pressure on his children, but the family life clearly revolved around swimming. Swimming was discussed around the dinner table and in the car coming home from galas. Both he and his wife had expectations of what they wanted their children to achieve, even though this may be at odds with the coach, as evidenced from the conflict that arose over the fact that their son as not progressed in the club as fast as they thought he should be.

Father C's position in the club as seen above in his relationships with Jane, caused power struggles. Father C clearly felt that he could not learn anything from Jane in terms of coaching the older swimmers, though he appreciated Jane's position with regards to the younger, less able members of the club. In conversations with Jane about swimming, he positioned himself in such a way that Jane found it hard to talk to him, though she admitted that he was easy to talk too when discussing topics not associated with swimming. This 'expert' power that it seemed Father C perceived he possessed meant that he also felt that he was in a position to criticise other parents who either did not commit sufficiently to the club, or who interfered with sessions by giving advice and swimming tips to their children. Something that he as an 'expert' felt he in turn could do even though he appreciated it was undermining the coach. However, as a swimmer in the club, Father C occupied a less powerful position in that, if selected he would have to go along with the team managers decisions like any other swimmer. With respect to swimming, there were

clearly tensions between Mother and Father C. Mother C's opinion that parents should be 'silent' supporters was clearly at odds with Father C. In some ways she was the 'onlooker' absorbing what was happening, being there for her family when needed, but not always agreeing with her husband's reaction to their daughter's swimming. At times Mother C's position became that of 'outsider' particularly at galas when both her husband and daughter were competing where she stated clearly that she did not feel she belonged. However, in view of the changing nature of the family (see Kay, 2003) and the fact that now it is usual for both parents to work, perhaps the role of Mother C and the other 'non-attenders' is vital for without such 'backstage' (Goffman 1984) support other members of the family would find it hard to carry out their numerous commitments associated with their various roles.

The fact that, for some families, this 'supporting' role adopted by a parent appears to be an important aspect in helping the young athlete to progress in his or her sporting career, would tend to indicate that Hellstedt's (1987) model may be too simplistic. Although Hellstedt includes in his description of under-involvement such aspects as minimal financial investment in equipment, which would not necessarily apply to Mothers A and C and Father R, other aspects such as lack of attendance, discussions with the coach, non-participation in setting performance goals and volunteering, clearly would. Although Byrne (1993), when discussing Hellstedt's model, acknowledges that there may be several reasons for non-attendance, Hellstedt's model itself fails to indicate the varying roles that are played by the father and mother and that non-attendance does not necessarily mean 'disinterest'.

The work of Jowett (see Chapter 2) has suggested that for the young athlete to reach his or her potential there should be harmonious relationships within the coaching process. The data from this study would seem to indicate that for such relationships to exist there needs to be an understanding of the motives, expectations and goals of the young athlete and also of the power that these young people possess within the coach-parent-athlete relationship.

6.4.3 The swimmer

Because of their subordinate role to both coach and parent, it might be assumed that the swimmers themselves had very little power within the swimming clubs. However, the swimmers also occupied powerful positions because of their perception that they had more knowledge about the sport than their parents. As noted above, at the time of the interviews all the swimmers with the exception of Child B were positioned as 'Specialisers' (Côté and Hay, 2002). Data revealed that initially when they were 'Samplers' the swimmers were happy to be socialised into the sport by their parents but as the children themselves became more committed and more knowledgeable, they began to take less notice of their parent's advice and paid little attention to things such as the swimming videos that may be brought home by a parent. However, it would appear that as the swimmers grew a little older this again could change. Father B stated that he felt that Child B was more willing to listen to him now than previously when he discussed points of technique in the car on the way home from galas. This change could simply reflect the child becoming more mature in discussing aspects of swimming with her father, just as she may find it easier to talk to him generally. This expert power possessed by the swimmers was also displayed when the older swimmers adopted the role of lane coaches at the clubs.

In terms of positioning between the swimmers and the coach, data revealed that the swimmers on the whole were willing to accept the authority of the coach, but in Longtown Child B and Child C felt that they were in a position to criticise the coach. The swimmers had expectations of how they wanted their coach to behave and what qualities he or she should possess as identified both in the interviews and on their 'Ideal' forms. They appeared to be happy to accept the coach's authority if in return they received support, feedback and advice from the coach. Observations and comments from parents revealed though that behaviour within the pool by some of the swimmers, showed a certain lack of respect and perhaps a way of rebelling against the coach's authority. The data revealed that at times parents, including Mother A, who seldom actually visited the club, felt that often the swimmers' behaviour was unacceptable and the coach should have taken firmer control.

As illustrated in the case of Father and Child C, the importance attached to swimming by the parents could also be a cause of conflict as a threat to give up swimming could be used in any argument in order to gain the upper hand.

6.4.4 Summary

The above discussion of the data has demonstrated that coaches, parents and swimmers at varying times and within varying contexts positioned themselves in such a way that they asserted a degree of power over one or both of the other members of the triad. If this power was seen to be legitimate and deserved then it would seem no conflict occurred but if there was any doubt about where the locus of control should be, there was a potential situation for conflict: Conflict that could clearly affect the overall coaching process and ultimately the enjoyment of the young athletes.

6.5 Conclusion

The aim of this study was to deconstruct the sporting triangle of coach, parent and athlete. In doing so it has revealed that in spite of the fact that the parents and the coaches believe that they are acting in a way that will enhance the young athletes swimming experience, there are still areas of conflict and misunderstanding.

At the beginning of this journey, through my experience as a coach, I had sensed that people came to any swimming session with a variety of expectations that were not necessarily shared by other members of the triad. The present study's research data have tended to confirm this is indeed the case on many occasions. In addition, from the commencement of this study, the importance of the context in which the social interactions between coach, parent and athlete take place has been emphasised. The findings clearly indicate the importance of the context and the impossibility of discussing relationships within the coaching process without considering this important variable.

Longtown and Smalltown Swimming Clubs were chosen because they were both at the skill development level and also because of ease of access as I was known to both Chief Coaches. However, the overall organisation, structure and ethos of the clubs have had significant effect on the relationships of those within them. Also as a backdrop to this study, it should be remembered that this research took place at a time when the ASA itself was changing its age-group swimming structure. The emphasis within this structure was, and still is, on Long Term Athlete Development. As part of this, Longtown Swimming Club had been awarded Swim 21 status as a primarily skill development club. However, with the exception of the two Chief Coaches few of those interviewed in both clubs, were really aware of exactly what the new structure meant. This misunderstanding seems fundamental to some of the conflict that was evident at Longtown.

Both Smalltown and Longtown Swimming Clubs had similar membership in terms of numbers of swimmers but in terms of overall members Longtown Swimming Club was far bigger. This may well explain the influence of those who administer the club on the overall coaching process. There was certainly a sense that the Committee was in control and that the emphasis was on the children swimming fast. Against such a collective culture it became impossible for Jane to simply negotiate and discuss issues with parents in isolation. The Committee (which consisted of several swimming parents and Master swimmers) had its own agenda, which seemed to include the emphasis on fast swimming and training hard. This was confirmed in later correspondence with Jane who stated that, in her opinion, the Committee was club rather than athlete driven with little sense of skill development and long term development of the swimmer. Within this ethos, Jane's philosophy struggled and she found it hard to survive the continual criticism. By contrast, at Smalltown, although the Committee had the ultimate say, they relied on her 'expert' judgement and were happy to support Margaret in most things that she requested. It also appeared that the small friendly nature of the club, made it easier for close relationships to formalise.

Initially, in this study, the club was seen as a vehicle for analysing the relationships within it. However, what has emerged is confirmation of the link between structure and agency and the limitations on behaviour that can subsequently be imposed. Cushion (2006) acknowledges the importance of taking external factors into account when he states that because of the 'inherent complexities of the coaching process' (p.83) it is necessary to examine the contextual purpose, particularities, and subjectivities of coaching before any 'guidelines of recommended practice can be made' (p.83). Therefore, when discussing the sporting triangle, it is important to note that this triad cannot be looked at in isolation as it will inevitably be influenced by critical contextual factors. The relationships within the triangle exist within the context of the club, which has its own ethos and culture. The club in turn is impacted upon by the overall sporting environment in which it is positioned. This relationship is illustrated in Figure 3.
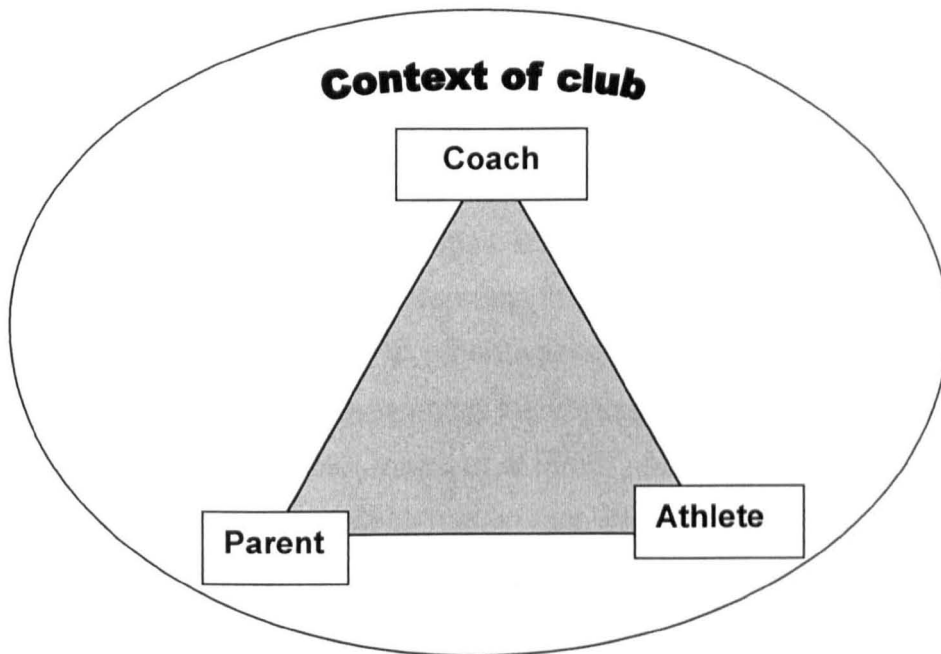
Figure 3: The Coaching Process in Context

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND LIMITATIONS

7.1   Introduction

This research grew initially out of my experience as a swimming coach and my concerns that the enjoyment of the young swimmer was at times being compromised because of the different expectations and goals of the three members of what Byrne (1993) terms the 'sporting triangle' (p.41).

The research was also influenced by the fact that there was a growing realisation in the coaching literature of the importance of the social element of the coaching process and, indeed, Jones et al (2002) had proposed that the coaching process could best be understood in terms of the social constructs of role, relationships and power. In recent years, Jowett in the field of psychology is one author who has noted the importance of the coach-athlete relationship, and although she (Jowett et al., 2007) has begun to investigate the role of the parent, little research has, in fact, investigated the triad of coach, parent and athlete from a sociological perspective.

Added to this, at the beginning of the research, the ASA was in the process of restructuring its age-group swimming programme and swimming clubs were being encouraged to gain the Swim 21 award, which along with other things, designated clubs according to their resources and membership type. In the midst of these changes, it seemed an ideal opportunity to try to understand the complex relationship of coach, parent and athlete, and to do this within a club setting that was non-elite. In such a setting, the coach may not necessarily be so privileged but because of the reliance on voluntary help the parents may adopt a multitude of roles including coach and club-helper.

Therefore, in an attempt to deconstruct the sporting triangle of coach, parent and athlete the study aimed to:
- investigate the philosophy/attitudes of the coach, swimmer and parent with respect to their involvement in swimming,

- identify the role and expectations of the coach, swimmer, and parent as viewed by themselves and the other members of the triad.

and, as a result of the above,

- identify the role these inter-relationships play in shaping the coaching environment and process and how, in turn, these roles are shaped by the context in which they are played out.

7.2   An overview of the research process and findings

At the commencement of this research process, an extensive literature review was carried out. As limited literature specifically examined the complete triad, the review, therefore, includes literature, which examined the concepts of role and the relationships between two members of the triad. The bulk of the review of literature was carried out before the commencement of any field work, but also continued throughout the research process in order to inform the research.

Thus, the literature review along with my own experiences as a swimming coach informed and guided the subsequent fieldwork investigations. Two clubs were selected, which were both accessible and could provide examples of 'triangles'. In both clubs, I was known to the two Chief Coaches and after initial contact and approval from the Club Committees, I commenced the fieldwork.

Each club was investigated in turn. The first club to be studied was Longtown Swimming Club and once these investigations were completed, fieldwork was begun at Smalltown Swimming Club. During these observations, informal discussions on the poolside also provided material, which proved useful in framing my questions during subsequent interviews. After the initial observations, the participants were selected and approached. The choice of families was guided by Hellstedt's (1987) continuum of family involvement.

The methodology used was informed by an interpretive theoretical perspective and a constructionist epistemology, and analysis of the data essentially followed a grounded theory approach. After data collection, the data were coded and categorised into themes, which provided the framework for the analysis of the findings. However, because of the inter-relationships between the various themes and the problems of structuring the Discussion Chapter around these, it was finally decided to use the initial research questions as headings for the Discussion Chapter.

Perhaps one of the main findings from this study is confirmation of the extremely complex nature of the coaching process. Coaching is more than simply to do with the 'how' of coaching and, as Jones (2007) rightly notes, definitions of coaching on which coach education courses are often based, are

> ill-defined and irrelevant, in that the activity has less to do with styles of delivery, sport-specific knowledge and sequential management of a set procedure than with the minutiae of the social and endlessly unpredictable pedagogical coach-athlete[24] relationship (Jones, 2007p.159).

Throughout this present study the coaching process was seen as being something that was clearly multifaceted and dynamic and, in agreement with Jones (2007), should be seen as a 'complex socio-pedagogical process' (p.159), and not a something that can be reduced to easily definable terms.

Other findings are outlined below:

1. There were varied reasons for being involved in swimming, but essentially all those interviewed were positive towards the sport. However, data revealed that because it is a sport that starts at a young age, going swimming can perhaps become habitual. If this is the case then once the children becomes less reliant on parents in terms of taking them to the swimming club they may cease going. An appreciation of the motives for attending swimming clubs may well help

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[24] In this present study coach-athlete-parent relationships

coaches deal with these situations and thus keep young swimmers in the sport and ensure that their needs are met, whatever the reasons for doing so.

2. Whatever the motives for taking part, the data revealed that for all families swimming required a huge commitment even at this non-elite level. It clearly took over the lives of most of the participants in the study. However, it was also seen as something that the families could do together. It was for a majority of the parents and swimmers the main social element of their lives.

3. Interview data and the 'Ideal Forms' showed the different expectations that arose in terms of what was expected in the role of the coach, parent and swimmer. The data confirmed that people do not come to a swimming situation value free but bring with them expectations, goals and hopes, which they have gained through their own socialisation into the competitive world of the swimming club. These further develop through their experiences at the club and their interaction with others in that environment.

4. The roles of, and relationships between, members of the triad emerged as extremely complex. The roles performed, and the relationships that evolved, were heavily affected by the context in which interactions took place. Within the swimming clubs, the structure and organisation of the clubs and the power of the committees clearly limited the extent to which the members of the triad could define their roles. This was particularly true of the two Chief Coaches. The data revealed that, within the context of a small swimming club where the locus of control is often with the committee, if the coach's goals are at odds with the committee and other members then there is potential for conflict. Such conflict may become unmanageable and lead to the resignation of the coach from the club.

5. The variety of roles adopted by the various members of the triad led to role conflict and ambiguity. This was particularly evident where a parent took on the role of a coach and/or a swimmer. In such a capacity, the parent was not fulfilling the role of 'supportive parent' as defined by the child swimmer or the role of 'parent of the swimmer' as defined by the Chief Coach.

6. On occasions, members of the triad found it difficult to define their role. This was particularly true of the swimmers, although the 'Ideal Forms' did, to some extent, show their own expectations of behaviour in their role of competitive swimmer. Similarly, the data revealed that parents were not always clear of what was expected of them by the Chief Coaches in the clubs.

7. The different ways in which people positioned themselves also illustrated areas of conflict and power struggles. This was particularly evident in Longtown Swimming Club where some parents saw themselves as having a certain amount of 'expert' power and because of this positioned themselves in a way that allowed them to criticise the coach, other parents and swimmers.

8. Even within families, there were power struggles as the pressure from a parent or parents, in terms of the expectations put on their child swimmer could lead to conflict both between parent and child, and parent and parent.

In addition to the above more general findings, the in-depth nature of the data provided additional evidence of the supportive role played by the parents. First, it was interesting to note that the definition of supportive varied from parent to parent. Those positioned as 'non-attenders' were as supportive as the 'committed member' but demonstrated their support behind the scenes. It was also evident that without such support it would be hard for other members of the families to devote so much time to the sport, something that is clearly important within a sporting context that relies so much on parental voluntary

help. Bearing this in mind, it would seem that parents do not necessarily fit neatly onto Hellstedt's (1987) 'Parent Involvement Continuum'. As noted in the Chapter 6, Mothers A and C and Father R clearly did not adopt the position of 'under-involved'. All three acknowledged the benefits their children received from swimming and, as a result, adopted the roles that they felt would be most suited to helping their children progress.

The above would indicate that, in terms of Hellstedt's model, refinements are needed if it is to be more representative of relationships between the coach, parent and athlete. Although Hellstedt talks of a 'parent' who could be either the mother or the father, his model does not clarify the fact that parents within one family may have differing but equally important roles, some more visible than others. Consequently, parents are not easily classifiable as over-, moderately and under-involved and, although Byrne (1993) does note that there may be varying reasons for non-attendance, the model does not really acknowledge this to any degree. Findings from this present research indicated that parents can show support in ways other than those mentioned by Hellstedt, and behaviours that he notes illustrate a lack of interest may be acted out for many other reasons. Thus, the complex social interactions which take place within the coaching process make it really difficult to compartmentalise those actors within it. As a consequence, rather than the somewhat rigid definitions of Hellstedt's model, a more fluid structure is necessary, which would take into consideration these complex dynamics.

Such a structure is evident, to some degree, in the model proposed by Lee and Maclean (1997) who, when investigating sources of parental pressure amongst age-group swimmers, note that individual athletes perceive pressure in different ways and what may be too much or too little input from a parent for one athlete may not be perceived as such by another. This idea of perception of parental input is important. As noted above, the parents in this present study all perceived that they were supporting their young athletes and certainly, for some of these athletes, those apparently showing little support in terms of attendance at clubs were clearly considered by their offspring as fulfilling a vital role. It may be that, in agreement with Hellstedt, those parents

who do not attend club sessions or liaise with the coach to any degree, do not have a very meaningful relationship with the coach, but they cannot automatically be termed 'disinterested' or 'under-involved'. Perhaps, MacPhail and Kirk's (2003) term of 'non-attenders' may be more fitting, but what this present study highlights is the need for the coach to know both the athletes and parents and not to assume that non-attendance necessarily indicates 'disinterest'.

The problems in trying to model the coach, parent, athlete triangle are similar to those encountered when attempting to model the coaching process itself. As Cushion, Armour and Jones (2008) note such attempts have tended to reduce this process 'in complexity and scale' (p.83) and as a result the 'essential cultural elements of the process are often underplayed' (p.83). They argue that the complexity of the coaching process demands that the 'contextual purpose, particularities, and subjectivities of coaching' (p.83) must be examined and taken into account. So it would seem when trying to model the relationships within the coach, parent, athlete triangle. Any approach must retain sufficient fluidity to accommodate the almost infinite variations in the complex dynamics that exist within these relationships.

A second aspect with regards to parental support came from the findings that parental expectations were not always realistic and although there may well be times when parents need to provide motivation and encouragement, care should be taken that when doing so no stress is placed on the young athlete.

7.3   Theoretical considerations

All through this study I have been very aware of the issues surrounding the theoretical considerations. The nature of the research and the complexities of the relationships within the coaching process led me to consider a number of theories and to access the literature from both the fields of psychology and sociology. Although Goffman's (1984) dramaturgical approach to role and the concept of positioning (Giddens, 1984; Davies and Harré, 1990) have proved to be the most helpful, other concepts and theories have been explored. What this study has highlighted is the tension between structure and agency.

As noted in Chapter 3, Gidden's (1984) Structuration Theory is concerned with the 'duality of structure'. Certainly the behaviour of the actors in this study was constrained, to some extent, by both the social structure of the club and the sporting environment in terms of the context of age-group swimming. In parallel, the social structure of the clubs was being both produced and re-produced by the ways in which the 'actors' behaved. Indeed, the social structure of the clubs could not exist without the interaction of the coach, parent and athlete. In this respect, the data makes clear the indissolubility of agency and structure, yet also the relative 'independence' of both. This study has also shown that, in agreement with Davies and Harré (1990), within different contexts a social position adopted by one of the 'actors' can be played out in different ways and, at the same time may also be affected by the way in which that person is in turn positioned by other members of the role set.

It seems, therefore, that within any social interaction there will be this continual tension between structure and agency. This study did not set out to resolve this longstanding dilemma (of the relationships between structure and agency) within social theory but it has pointed out that such relationships need to be both understood (theoretically) and addressed (empirically) if we are to attempt to deconstruct complex social relationships such as those that exist within the 'sporting triangle' of coach, parent and athlete.

7.4   Limitations

Because of my background as a coach, a swimmer and a swimmer parent, I had some pre-conceived ideas about what this study would reveal. Without doubt my research journey has confirmed some of these views. The two clubs in this study were chosen partly because of ease of access. The fact that I was known to some of the participants, did, I feel, help them to speak to me more freely and openly than they would to a stranger, but again it must be acknowledged that my knowledge of the clubs may have affected my judgement. Throughout the research process, I was, therefore, careful to be reflexive and continually consider my position within the research. As previously acknowledged, this study remains my account of the research

experience and as such will inevitably be a consequence of my background, experiences and culture.

The nature of this project demanded a small scale study designed to elicit in-depth understanding of the subject matter being investigated – in this instance that of the coach-parent-athlete relationships. By nature such a study cannot provide data from which generalisations can be made but it is hoped that the data will contribute towards a greater understanding of the importance of the social relationships within the coaching process.

7.5   Recommendations for policy and practice

What has emerged from this deconstruction of the coach-parent-athlete relationship is a deeper understanding of the issues that arise within relatively small sports clubs that rely on volunteer help. Such clubs form the backbone of the sporting structure of the United Kingdom and if we are to ensure that, within such an environment, the young athlete's sporting experiences are positive, certain considerations need to be taken into account. Below are some recommendations, which I feel would aid this process and lead to a greater understanding of the expectations and aspirations of all members of the sporting triangle. Although this study has investigated the coach-parent-athlete relationships within the context of age-group swimming, many of these recommendations could be applicable to youth sport in other contexts.

- It may be useful for youth sport organisers to recognise the significance of the 'sporting triangle' in the career of the developing athlete and ensure that processes are in place, which allow for strong communication between all three members of the triad. In this way, role expectations might be more realistic and allow all members to work together towards the benefit of the young athlete. Within the research, all felt that they were individually working for the benefit of the athlete, but in practice many areas of conflict and misunderstanding were evident.

- The importance of the social aspects of the coaching process needs to be recognised in coach education. An awareness of the complexity of this process and a move to a more holistic approach, which would include things other than simply the 'how' to coach, would better equip coaches to form more meaningful and successful relationships with both athletes and their parents.

- Parents and swimmers require information. Agencies such as UK Sport, Sportscoach UK and the National Governing Bodies have a role to play in ensuring that information with regards to age-group structure of the sport, in this case swimming is available. British Swimming does have details on its website but this did not appear to be accessed by the parents or indeed the swimmers interviewed.

- Evidence from this study showed that often parents do not always know what is expected either of them or their child athlete, either in the club environment or at competitive meets. Clubs could ensure that information is available that outlines what is required of both parents and young swimmers in terms of commitment and behaviour during training and competition. Time trials or 'mock' galas held on club nights could also be used to 'initiate' the young swimmer into the world of swim meets, so they and parents know what to expect and the initial experience is not so overwhelming.

- In order that the needs of all are met, an understanding of the varying reasons why people participate in a sport appears to be paramount. Similarly there needs to be an understanding of the various ways in which parents perform their role of 'supportive parent'.

7.6   Recommendations for further study

This study has revealed several opportunities for further research. Potential areas for study include:

- A longitudinal study that would follow a young athlete through a stage of transition in their sporting career to investigate the changing relationships with members of the triad.

- Investigation of the coach-parent-athlete relationship during the time when the athlete is living away from home, for example when at university.

- In-depth studies of 'special' coach/athlete (parent/coach, athlete; spouse/coach, athlete) relationships from a sociological perspective.

- An examination of relationships within the context of age-group swimming within other settings and countries.

Although not directly concerned with coach-parent-athlete relationships, the findings also revealed that the pressures placed on the two female coaches within what appears to be the predominantly male environment of swimming coaching, led to both leaving the clubs, albeit for different reasons. Margaret left because of the difficulty she found in balancing her role as a coach with her university career and the demands on her to spend more time at home with her partner. By contrast, because Jane's family was also very involved in the club, the pressures on her were somewhat different. She eventually left because of the continual criticism from members of the club and the barriers she felt she faced when trying to implement changes. At Longtown Swimming Club, the interviews with some of the parents, particularly with Father B whose opinion that Margaret had not 'got the balls for the job', suggested that there may be some rather male-dominated attitudes in terms of what was expected from a coach. In view of these varying pressures placed on the two female coaches, another area of research could be:

- A longitudinal study following female coaches in both voluntary and professional settings to reveal the issues faced by them working in what is still primarily a male dominated environment.

7.7   And finally

There appears to be a strong understanding within sport of the significance of the 'sporting triangle'. The development of young athletes inevitably involves a partnership, active or otherwise, of parent, child and coach and the relationships between these three are the subject of frequent informal and formal discussions and debates. Guidelines exist that seek to inform parents of their role and advise them about how to perform it to maximum benefit for their child. Yet although literature on relationships within the coaching process has highlighted many of the issues that emerge in this study, relatively little research has sought to unpick the triangle from within. This study seeks to move beyond a reliance on anecdotal evidence to a more systematic understanding of the triangle. What has emerged is the fact that even at a relatively low level of competition, as in the case of the two clubs in this study, passion towards a sport is high. Parents, in particular, although very supportive of their children can, often inadvertently, react in ways that lead to negative consequences.

This study has taken place within the context of age-group swimming. However, it may be that many of the findings apply to other sporting contexts where young people take part from an early age. Indeed, I feel that the strength of this study lies in the richness of the data, the fact that all voices of the three members of the triad are heard, and the confirmation that many areas within sport for young people still need addressing. Coaching needs to be viewed as a 'pedagogical enterprise' (Penney, 2006) where success relies,

> not least upon the development of productive pedagogical relationships with athletes but also with other members of their 'learning community' (p. 26).

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The Chairman
Longtown Swimming Club
Longtown

Dear

Research Project: The Sporting Triangle: Coach-Parent-Athlete Relationships in Age-group Swimming

As you may be aware, I am a member of the School of Sport and Exercise Sciences at Loughborough University. Currently I am investigating the coach, parent, athlete relationship in swimming and wondered if your club would be willing to take part in this research.

The research would consist mainly of semi-structured interviews with the swimmer, their parents and their coach. Obviously, agreement of all parties would be obtained prior to commencing any investigation and any data collected would be strictly confidential. Any person taking part in the study would not be named in any report or papers that may result from this research.

If possible, I would also like to observe some of your training sessions and trust that this also would be acceptable.

Could you let me know, as soon as possible, if your club is agreeable to my carrying out this work. If there is any other further information you require, please let me know.

Yours sincerely,

Di Bass
Course Tutor, Loughborough University

Appendix 1b: Letter of introduction to the Chairman of Smalltown Swimming Club

The Chairman
Smalltown Swimming Club
Smalltown High School
Smalltown

Dear

Research Project: The Sporting Triangle: Coach-Parent-Athlete Relationships in Age-group Swimming

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to do some sessions and skill analysis workshops with your swimmers. I do hope that they, and the club in general, found them useful. As you may be aware, I am a member of the School of Sport and Exercise Sciences at Loughborough University. Currently I am investigating the coach, parent, athlete relationship in swimming and wondered if your club would be willing to take part in this research.

The research would consist mainly of semi-structured interviews with the swimmer, their parents and their coach. Obviously, agreement of all parties would be obtained prior to commencing any investigation and any data collected would be strictly confidential. Any person taking part in the study would not be named in any report or papers that may result from this research.

If possible, I would also like to observe some of your training sessions and trust that this also would be acceptable.

Could you let me know, as soon as possible, if your club is agreeable to my carrying out this work. If there is any other further information you require, please let me know.

Yours sincerely,

Di Bass
Course Tutor, Loughborough University

Appendix 2: Detail of Research for Clubs

Research Project: The Sporting Triangle: Coach-Parent-Athlete Relationships in Age-group Swimming

Outline of rationale behind the research to be undertaken

Current need for research into the Coach, Parent, Athlete 'Triangle'.

If sport is to fulfil a positive role within the lives of young people, it is vital that we obtain a complete a picture as possible of their sporting experiences. An important aspect of these experiences is the social relationships that young people have with others within the sporting context. Particularly important 'influential others' are the parents and the coaches of these young people and it is on these, as well as the swimmers themselves, that this study will focus.

This study will aim to understand the social element of the coaching process, and by doing so identify some of the many factors that contribute towards a young person's sporting experience, within the context of age-group swimming.

It is hoped that the information gained from this research will help those involved in the coaching process to ensure that young people's experiences of swimming are positive ones. In turn it is hoped that this will result in less drop out and more young people reaching their true potential.

Di Bass
Course Tutor, Loughborough University

Appendix 3a: Field notes Longtown Swimming Club

Field Notes – Thursday, 5th February 2004
Longtown Town Swimming Club (LTSC)
Charnwood Leisure Centre – 25 m pool 6 lanes

I had spoken to Jane who is now Chief Coach of Longtown Town Swimming Club and she agreed that I could come and observe some swimming sessions with a view to eventually carrying out some form of 'interviews' with parents, swimmers and coach.

I arrived at 7.20 just before the 6.45 group got out. They were swimming relays, a common practice at the end of swimming sessions. There were about 30 children in the water and 12 parents on the pool side. A couple of parents were in the café area overlooking the pool through a window. On the side one parent was videoing his daughter another parent stopped his child as he walked back down the pool to the start end and started to give him instruction concerning his stroke/dive (I was not close enough to hear what was said).

At the shallow end of the pool the next group – Groups 2 and 3 were beginning to arrive.

The 6.45 group got out. Prior to getting out a press man took a group photo. On enquiring what it was about I was told that the Longtown Swimming Club had been selected as one of the top three clubs in the county and was being invited to the local football stadium for a presentation evening.

The atmosphere at the pool seemed 'happy'. At times it was hard for me to observe because a number of people approached me to talk and ask how I was etc.

The 7.30 group (Groups 2 and 3) warmed up – there were 6 parents watching. The coaches were Mike[25] and a number of older swimmers (about 5 in all) plus Coach S who took Group 2. There was little actual coaching that seemed to take place. The swimmers were told what to do and left to do it. Where there was any instruction it tended to be rather poor with incorrect technique being taught. The Chief Coach stated that although it was good to have so many of the 'older swimmers' as helpers it can 'cause problems' as they all need to feel wanted and doing something.

The Chief Coach took no coaching role in this session. She talked to me and mentioned that a number in Group 3 only train once a week and that that needs to be addressed. She also talked about tackling the coaches from 'the bottom up' and get them to write their sessions and ensure they were at the right level. She talked of one coach who was taking some younger swimmers, and produced one of the sets I had written when I was coach at

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[25] Names changed for anonymity.

the club. This set was suited to older more advanced swimmers and not at all appropriate.

During the evening the 'retired' secretary and treasurer came and had a word. I said that from reading the local press the club was doing very well. He stated that he thought the standard of coaching was poor (he has always been a pessimist!). According to him there were no youngsters coming through and very little attention given to the younger members. He added that the swimmers did not know how to race, for example, during galas some of them looked good in terms of technique but had no speed. He stated that they could only manage about fourth place in the lower Division of the Speedo League. The problem he felt went right up to age 15 and 'wasn't so bad' with the girls but there were no boys. The older swimmers, though, were better. This may be because the older swimmers were strengthened by a number of Longtown University swimmers who cannot get into the squads at the university now train at the club. This point was made by Jane (Chief Coach) during a conversation on the 'phone. She said that it can cause problems in terms of selection as the more 'regular' members were having their team places taken by the faster students. With regards to younger swimmers Jane made the point on Thursday night that most kids join the club because they want to race. She therefore tries to ensure that as many as possible have a chance to at least get a relay swim.

During our talk Jane asked me what I wanted to do. I said at this point in time it was not completely clear but I hoped that the observations would help to give me some ideas. I had talked to her previously about interviewing a disinterested and an over enthusiastic parent and she said that the former may be difficult to find as they just don't come to the club. She also reiterated that they would be pleased to do anything to help.

The next group (8.30 group – Group 1 and Masters) consisted of swimmers aged 15-40 years. There is a strong Masters group at Longtown Swimming Club who competes in Masters Competitions for both competitive and social reasons (they will often go away together for the weekend to a competition).

The pool was very crowded about 32 swimmers but because of their size it seemed much busier than it had done in the earlier session where about 30 swimmers were in the water. Jane said that they may have to do something to control numbers – e.g. a waiting list for joiners. This was an interesting comment because earlier the retired secretary had said that no sessions pay for themselves indicating that attendance was not great.
I only stayed for 30 minutes of this session but it seemed again that there was little coaching taking place. The schedule was placed at the end of the pool and the swimmers really 'just got on with it'. There were 3 coaches on the poolside. Jane + 2 others.

On leaving Matthew who has been the person who has 'driven' the work needed to be done for Swim 21 accreditation stopped me and asked what I had been doing. He asked if I could put it in writing as he was keen to show that the club had links with the university so that they could go for the Swim 21

gold award (they have silver at the moment). I also mentioned that a young swimmer from Longtown Swimming Club who is also national standard modern pentathlete was going to swim with my squad at the university for a couple of sessions during the half-term week. He was keen to get any information like this in order to further his progress towards the higher award.

One other point worth mentioning was when I arrived at the club Father C who is also a swimmer and a coach asked what I was doing. After I told him he said that he found it easier to 'coach' his daughter rather than 'teach' her. She was now older and more receptive but also there were fewer things that she needed to know and had to do in terms of technique etc.
Db 6/2/04

Longtown Swimming Club (LTSC)

Thursday, 12th February 2004 7.30-8.30 p.m.
18 swimmers in pool. Nine 'coaches' on pool side, which included the Chief Coach, Jane, two other coaches and six swimmers.
A photographer from the local county newspaper was down again, talking and videoing swimmers – this was in connection with the 'top club' award.

Father C who is in his 40s – still swims sets the sessions for the top group and has a daughter who is also a swimmer, came and talked to me. He talked about his daughter and stated that she is 'scared' of racing 100m fly. She only wants to swim 50s fly or free. She had the chance to move up to Group 1 but declined. He thinks he is quite tough on daughter and stated, 'See what a pig I am'.

Group 2 is composed of swimmers up to about the age of 14 years who train regularly.

Jane the Chief Coach stated that her aim was to 'flood the County Squad with swimmers'. She also expressed concern about the fact that the younger swimmers tend at the moment to swim with the older ones and she feels they need more skills-based sessions. Her future aims include organising this and also trying to get more Group 3 swimmers down more than once a week.

In terms of planning the sessions: Jane plans for the development and up to and including Group 2 but the coaches actually writes the sessions. Peter her husband plans and writes Group 2 sessions and Father C plans and writes the sessions for Group 1.

The actual session ran much the same as last week. Some feedback but limited from poolside.

Swimming sessions are on
Monday and Wednesday: 6.30-7.30 and 6.30-8.00 at the Local Grammar School
Friday: 7.30 – 8.30 at another local school
Friday :8 – 9 occasional sessions at the local university pool

Sunday: 5 – 6 at the local leisure centre
Tuesday: 8 – 10 at the local leisure centre
Thursday: 6.30-9.30 (3 sessions) at the local leisure centre

Thursday, 19th February 2004

Very few people down this week – half term. Looked at the earlier sessions 6.45-7.30 as well as 7.30 – 8.30.

Spoke to Wilma who helps – she is not able to go every week and says she tends to make up the sessions as she goes along and added 'Haven't a clue really!. She said that many of that she coaches only come once a week and tend therefore to swim 'fly all the time' and that is the stroke scheduled for the day they come.

I was approached by another master (also a parent) whilst there to ask what I was doing. He said that they needed someone to take Group 1. Jane, he said, was more like a teacher than a coach and they and the kids needed someone to push them and ensure that the sets were swum accurately and at the right pace etc. He said that he felt too much time was spent on technique and the kids 'can't race'. He felt they needed a coach to drive and push better. When they race they look good but are always half a length behind!

Jane was unable to come to session as she was at a 'swimming festival'. Peter (Jane's husband) arrived – had been supposed to be down at 6.00 but because of work commitments only managed to get down by 7.00. My impression is how hard these 'volunteer' coaches work. Matthew came and showed me a cutting from the local county newspaper where the Longtown Swimming Club and also the university swimmers were featured. They had been nominated as 'team of the year' . Comments from Peter about Wilma's teaching were that she was very good and good with the kids. Wilma is and ex swimmer who still trains and competes at Masters level. Andrew, a Longtown Student, who trains with the university squad and also with Longtown Swimming Club was also down and Peter also commented on how much the kids liked him coaching.

There were a number of young coaches on the poolside and Peter said that this was one big difference about the club. The older (some qualified!) coaches acted more as 'mentors'.

Matthew expressed some dissatisfaction (which according to him was also held by others) with the fact that the retiring secretary and treasurer had been nominated for an award and had received credit for helping to get Swim 21 through whereas in fact they were very destructive and tried to do everything to prevent progress.

Sunday, 29th February 2004

As I couldn't attend last Thursday I went to have a look at the Sunday session. The pool was very busy – about 35 in the water. Three coaches were on the pool side (Mike , Mary and Peter). The groups looked like Groups 3 – 1.

It struck me as a more lively session. Mike and Mary were instructing quite a bit and were also giving feedback and demonstrations regarding technique. Peter did not appear to be doing anything but running his groups (Group 1) – pretty well letting them get on with it.

After a while I sat with the four parents who were watching and who had been discussing the new rule on the backstroke turn and asked for my interpretation. I explained what I understood to be the rule and said I would let them have some information on this.

Nothing else much happened. Matthew had printed off some leaflets about the club for distribution at the schools gala the following Tuesday.

Monday, 30th February

I went to the Monday 6.30 session to see what took place. About 10 swimmers were in the pool and this was 'good' for a Monday session according to Father C. I reflected that a couple of years ago when I was coach Monday was incredibly busy. Father C said that the grammar school had been closed down and that it never again really took off after that. Father C was the only coach down. I helped get out the lane ropes but the other 'parent' who was there at the time did not help. In Lane 4 there were some older swimmers including a couple from the university. In Lane 3 they were of similar standard. Lane 2 – I would guess about Group 2/3 standard – probably 3 and in Lane 1 was a very tiny 10 year old to whom Father C gave mostly technique work. In fact Lanes 2 and 3 did similar workouts as did Lanes 3 and 4. During the hour session Father C concentrated mainly on younger swimmers and the older ones just got on with the set.

One boy was down being videoed by his Mum who is head of PE at a local school. This was in connection with his A level course. Mary came and nattered to me. She said that the club had done well at the counties the previous weekend and that one swimmer had swum particularly well. She said she thought she had done it to show her coach at the County Squad where she now swims. He wants her to go more than the three times she can manage. This swimmer wants to be a vet and so is heavily involved in school work. Her parent's farm and her Mum just drops her off and then leaves. Mary said this would be a great 'triad' – the keen coach; the swimmer who can't commit to what the coach wants and the disinterested parent!

At the end of the session Father C asked me what I was doing. I had told him at the beginning but he obviously did not hear. I always feel that Father C is very self-conscious when I am around and perhaps sees me as a slight threat and worries that I will be critical.

Appendix 3b: Field notes Smalltown Swimming Club

Smalltown observations: 11 July 2005 6.30 – 8.00

When I arrived the session was already underway. The pool (just under 25m) was divided into 4 lanes, each lane had 8-10 swimmers in it. There is no trough in the pool so the water is very choppy.

Margaret the Chief Coach was away on holiday and so she had given the other 'coaches' the schedules and they just told the swimmers what to do. Lane 4 the far lane had the eldest swimmers in it and they were left rather to themselves for the first half of the session.

Three lanes (Lands 2-4) swam for the full 1.5 hours whilst 8-10 year olds swam for the first 30 mins. These swimmers were future diddy league swimmers and those on 'improver' lengths. After 30 mins they got out and a group of 8 – 12 year olds swam for an hour. These included some 10 year old team swimmers plus others.

The overall atmosphere at the club was very relaxed. I had done some clinics at the club a few weeks earlier and on my arrival I was greeted with a 'Hello Di'. Several others also said hello.

The swimmers too seemed to be enjoying the swims. Discipline was low key but probably adequate. There was very little if any stroke correction. During the time the second group were in the pool one of the mums went up to the end of the lane - she did 'apologise' to the coach before she instructed her daughter on a point of technique.

When a seat next to her became vacant I went and sat with her. She told me about her children in the pool. She had two – one in Lane 1 and one in Lane 3. I asked her how long they had been coming and she said about 3 years. I also quizzed her about correcting her daughter and she said that she doesn't usually do it but gets frustrated when there is no stroke correction. She was not a qualified teacher, but had picked up a lot whilst sitting on the poolside over the years. Her husband (not there) was a teacher and used to teach at the club but now does only diving on a Friday because of work pressures. I also spoke to one of the mums who helps collect money on the desk and explained what I was doing.

Questions: Are the coaches the same for each session?
Do the same coaches consistently take the same swimmers?
How are swimmers moved up through the club?
What qualifications do the coaches have?
Are there certain parents who always willing to be involved and others who are not?
Do most of the swimmers go to all the sessions that are available to them?

History of the club.

Thursday, 15th July 7.15-8.45

Arrived 7.20 – 7.15 group already in – 2 lanes of younger swimmers had been in since 6.45 and would get out at 7.45 when a new group swam from 7.45 – 8.45. Two coaches on the poolside Margaret and Elizabeth (one poolside helper absent) Margaret therefore took one lane of the younger swimmers. The older swimmers looked after themselves.

There were about 6 swimmers in each lane and about 8 parents watching. I had spoken to Elizabeth on the phone to discuss coming down but she didn't acknowledge me at all evening. Seemed a bit stern!

Overall impression – happy relaxed club – kids well disciplined, very little larking around but clearly enjoying what they were doing – lots of smiling faces.

During the evening I spoke to a couple of the parents. One parent had 3 children – 2 girls and a boy who belonged to the club. The boy had got a bronze in the county age group 200m breaststroke for 15/16 year olds. The Other parent had two younger swimmers and was waiting for them to get changed.

I explained what I was doing and they stated that it was a happy club.

On occasions a lane may have no coach – not always the lane with the older children but they all got on with what they were supposed to be doing – very little mucking around. The coaching styles seemed relaxed, some but limited technique instruction.

At 7.45 Margaret moved to take the older swimmers. Elizabeth took the two lanes with the younger swimmers in it. The older swimmers did quite a lot of kick sets whilst the other lanes did a variety of technique work.

During the evening I spoke to the Vice Chairman, Father T. His wife was also there, she is secretary. He mentioned what a friendly club it was and that only once in his seven year association with it had there been an argument amongst the swimmers. He stated that the atmosphere at galas was particularly good and I should go to the annual gala, adding that he would 'find me a job judging or something! Father T holds a number of posts including Child Protection Officer and whilst I was there several people handed in their forms to him. He used to swim himself for a nearby swimming club but doesn't coach 'no I avoid that'. He, however, stated that those that do coach do a fantastic job. He said swimmers respected Margaret because she was a really good swimmer and loved it when she got in the water. Three of the swimmers there tonight had returned from university for the holidays.

Other things to note
Sweets trolley

One of the Mums who I knew because we had used her DVD player for the swim clinics I had done at Smalltown got changed for a swim and swam with the 7.45 group.

11 August 2005

I arrived at 6.45 two groups were swimming and one got out at 7.15 to allow the older swimmers to do their session which runs from 7.15 to 8.45. It is in this group that the swimmers for the interviews will come. This was my first visit to the club after their summer three week break. Several of the swimmers were still away but there were still, on average, 30 swimmers in the pool.

One boy, Child W, in the top group was noticeably the most talented. I spoke to Margaret about him and she asked if he could swim some sessions at the university. I said I would see what I could do. He just missed out on his district times last season. He is an 'unlucky' birthday and although 14 still quite small for his age.

I chatted to a few parents sat on the poolside. One helped coach on occasions, he had recently moved to the area. At his previous home he had done quite a bit of coaching, with some success at age-group level. One of the mums had a couple of children swimming one of which was an elder girl (she looked about 12/13) who 'just swims to keep fit' she doesn't do galas. The younger swims about twice a week and had been invited to come down on a Monday as well but didn't want to and the mother felt this was fine and wouldn't push her to do it.

I also spoke to a dad – who I had chatted to before. Not sure of his name but her mentioned that Smalltown swimming club now had a website and suggested I posted some info on in re technique, which could be useful for the swimmers.

Nothing much really happened. The session was very similar to what had gone on before. All the swimmers were working well and generally seemed to be enjoying what they were doing. The session finished with relays at which point I left.

I had taken down with me some info regarding the interviews and with Margaret's help had selected some potential interviewees. Hopefully next week they will be down to start making contact.

DB
11/08/05

Smalltown Observations

18th August 2005

Went down to the club tonight. Although still the holidays and several swimmers away, it was still pretty busy. Approximately 6-8 swimmers in each of the four lanes.

I arrived at 7.15 for the final session and stayed until 8.45. I had hoped to meet some of the parents that Margaret had suggested might be suitable for my study but only one of the parents was down. She was Mother R. She is chairperson of the club. I nattered to her for most of the session. Sometimes about swimming and other general things.

The session ran much the same as previous weeks and nothing really much to report.

Mother R has been chairperson for about 18 months and seems to be one of those people who just gets involved in things and has tons of energy. She is trained as a nursery nurse and amongst other things helps out with cub camp. She joked about her husband's response when she tells him that she has taken on something new. She has three children. All swim but her elder son is probably the one most suited to be interviewed.

She agreed to take part and took home some of the forms. I said I would see her next Thursday to discuss this some more.

NB. At the end of the session on 11th Margaret asked if there was any chance Child W could do some sessions at the university. Subsequently I took him for a couple of morning sessions and spoke to his mum. They too have agreed to take part in the research.

DB
18/08/05

Appendix 4: Interview letters to parents

Dear

I am carrying out research within .... Swimming Club with a view to increasing understanding of the relationship that exists between swimmers, their parents and coaches.

I have already carried out some observations of your club sessions and would now like to interview some coaches, swimmers and parents. I was wondering if you would be willing to take part in this study.

I would like to talk to you on two occasions. I envisage that the first meeting will be relatively brief to outline the procedures and then the second will interview probably last about 45 minutes. If you are agreeable I will tape record the interviews to ensure accuracy, but would stress that all data will be treated with the strictest confidence. Pseudonyms will be used in any write-up of the data to ensure complete anonymity.

I would also stress that you can, should you wish, withdraw from this study at any time. If you have any concerns or queries, please do not hesitate to contact me.

I do hope that you will agree to take part and in order to confirm your consent could you please sign the enclosed form. If you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact me. My direct line at the university is 01509 223276 and my email address:D.Bass@lboro.ac.uk.

Yours sincerely

Di Bass
Course tutor
Loughborough University

Appendix 5: Details of Research for Parents

The Sporting Triangle: Coach-parent-athlete Relationships in Age-Group Swimming.

Details of research to be undertaken.
My name is Di Bass and currently I lecture in the School of Sport and Exercise Sciences at Loughborough University. In addition, I am investigating young person's involvement in swimming and have been given permission by the Committee and Coach at Smalltown Swimming Club, to carry out some of this research at your club. A brief outline of the research is given below.

Current need for research into the Coach, Parent, Athlete 'Triangle'.
If sport is to fulfil a positive role within the lives of young people, it is vital that we obtain a complete a picture as possible of their sporting experiences. An important aspect of these experiences is the social relationships that young people have with others within the sporting context. Particularly important 'influential others' are the parents and the coaches of these young people and it is on these, as well as the swimmers themselves, that this study will focus.

This study will aim to understand the social element of the coaching process, and by doing so identify some of the many factors that contribute towards a young person's sporting experience, within the context of age-group swimming.

It is hoped that the information gained from this research will help those involved in the coaching process to ensure that young people's experiences of swimming are positive ones. In turn it is hoped that this will result in less drop out and more young people reaching their true potential.

What will the study involve?
In order to do this it will be necessary to observe some of your club's swimming sessions and also to carry out interviews with selected parents, coaches and swimmers between the ages of 12 years and 15 years. I may therefore ask both you and your children to take part in these interviews. The interviews will be relatively informal in nature and be at a time and place that is convenient to you.

The information obtained from this research will be treated with the strictest confidence and any person taking part in the study would not be named in any report or papers that may result from this research. Please also note that participation is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw from this project at any time.

Di Bass

Appendix 6: Parents Informed Consent Form

The Sporting Triangle: Coach, Parent, Athlete *Relationships* in Age-group Swimming

<u>PARENTS INFORMED CONSENT FORM</u>

<u>(to be completed after Participant Information Sheet has been read)</u>

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.

a) I agree to participate in this study.

     Your name _____

     Your signature

     _____

b) I agree to my daughter/son _____ participating in this study

     Your signatures

     _____

Name of Investigator _____

Signature of investigator _____

Appendix 7: Informed Consent Form

The Sporting Triangle: Coach, Parent, Athlete Relationships in Swimming

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

(to be completed after Participant Information Sheet has been read)

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.

a) I agree to participate in this study.

Your name _____

Your signature _____

Name of Investigator _____

Signature of investigator _____

Appendix 8: Ideal Form Letter to Interviewees

Dear

As you know I am investigating the relationships between coaches, parents and swimmers and am really interested in your views as to what you consider to be an ideal coach, an ideal parent and an ideal swimmer.

In order to form the basis of subsequent discussions with yourself could you please list the qualities that you would look for in each of these on the attached forms. There are separate forms for swimmer, parent and coach. Each form is also divided into two columns. Please can you put each quality on a separate line in the left hand column and if you feel it would helpful to provide a fuller description of any of the qualities you have listed, please do so in the right hand column. Can I also ask that you do not discuss your choice of qualities with anyone. Finally, may I remind you that all information given to me by you will be treated in the strictest confidence.

Thank you for being part of this investigation, your contribution is greatly appreciated.

Yours sincerely

Di Bass
Course Tutor
Loughborough University

Appendix: 9

Coach Interview

Demographic information

Background
Why coaching?
Why do swimmers come to the club?
Coaching philosophy
Style
What does success mean to you – how important is it?

ASA Long Term Development Plan
Views on specialisation
Type of training- frequency
Views on advancement of swimmers with high skill level and/or potential for improvement?
Opinion over causes of drop out

View of coaching role
Why do you coach?
Why do you coach as you do?
Your role in relation to:
In relation to club committee
In relation to parents
In relation to swimmers
Has coaching role changed over the years?

Sporting Triangle
How triangle got together?
What is coach's position in triangle ?
View of relationship with parents and swimmers? Does it work?

Role of parents
Dialogue with parents
Regular meetings
Parent support pack

Relationship with swimmer
Has coach behaviour altered because of child protection issues?
Swimmers goals – agreed with swimmer? Discussed with parents?
Swimmers potential
How coach feels he is viewed by parents generally and by parent in case study in particular?
How coach would want parents to behave
How coach would want swimmers to behave

Have there been occasions when you have had disagreements with parents/ swimmer?

Appendix: 10

Parent's Interview

Demographic information

Background

Importance of swimming
> Do you play sport?
> Do you or other member s of the family swim?
> Why does your child swim?
> How many clubs does he/she belong to?
> Why does she/he belong to the club?
> How often does/should your child train?
>
> What are your goals for your child in terms of swimming ?
> Do you think your swimming coach/swimmer has the same goals for you?
> What does success mean to you?
> What do you consider your child's potential is in swimming?

ASA Long Term Development Plan
> What do you know about it?
> Opinion over causes of drop out?

View of coaching role
> What do you consider is your coach's philosophy with regards to swimming?
> What do you consider the coach's role to be?
> What do you consider the coach's philosophy to be?

View on parent's role
> What do you consider your role to be in the club?
> View of role of parents
> > In you sporting career
> > In the club

Sporting Triangle
> How triangle got together? Does it work?
> What is your role in triangle ?
> View of relationship with swimmer/coach
>
> Supporting swimmer
> > Do parents you watch at training/competition?
> > Do you enjoy watching?
> Dialogue with coach
> > Regular meetings?
> > Approachable?
> > Any disagreements?

Appendix: 11

<u>**Swimmers' Interview**</u>

Demographic information

Background

Importance of swimming

>Other sports, commitments
>Do other member s of the family swim
>Why do you swim?
>Do your parents play sport?
>Why do you belong to the club?
>What particularly do you like/dislike?
>What do you consider your role to be in the club?
>What are your goals?
>>Do you think your swimming coach/parents have the same goals for you?
>>What does success mean to you? How important is it?

ASA Long Term Development Plan
>What do you know about it?
>Opinion over causes of drop out

View of coaching role
>What do you consider is your coach's philosophy with regards to swimming?
>What do you consider the coach's role to be?

Sporting Triangle
How triangle got together?
What is your role in triangle?
View of relationship with parents/coach.
Dialogue with coach
>Regular meetings
>Approachable
>Any disagreements?

View of role of parents
>In you sporting career
>In the club

Do parents come to watch you train/compete?
Do you want parents to watch?

What do you consider your potential is in swimming?