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Narratives of Parental Involvement in Youth Sport

By

Melina Timson-Katchis

A Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for
the award of

Master of Philosophy of Loughborough University

July, 2011
Abstract

This study aimed to explore parents’ perceptions regarding their involvement in their children’s sport. Specifically, the study examined parents’ understanding of their role as sporting parents and how this role is managed alongside other commitments. Eleven (11) married couples (11 mothers and 11 fathers) from Cyprus and seventeen (17) married couples (17 fathers and 17 mothers) from the UK participated in semi-structured interviews. Narrative analysis revealed that being a “sporting parent” is challenging, demanding and ever-changing process, which appears to transcend cultural specificity. Parents built up a varied portfolio of roles over two distinct yet interdependent complex social dimensions: (a) the family and (b) the sport. Furthermore, the roles parents fulfilled also varied in terms of their direction, either being personally directed to one person (e.g., athlete) or being directed towards a relationship, with parents acting as facilitators (e.g., towards the coach-athlete relationship or sibling relationships). Overall results illustrated that mothers and fathers take their children’s sport seriously by trying to be positive role models and by showing an active interest in the child’s development both in and out of sport, whilst dealing with their other children, their marital relationship, and their professional career. Results are discussed in relation to previous research and recommendations are offered for applied practice.
Acknowledgements

First and foremost I wish to extend my sincere thanks to my supervisor Dr. Sophia Jowett. It is difficult to overstate my gratitude to her; her enthusiasm, inspiration and efforts to go through things with me, provide encouragement, advice, teaching and lots of good ideas...and not just academically but personally too. I would simply have been lost without her.

Immeasurable thanks go to the parents that participated in this study. Their contribution has been invaluable and I cannot thank them enough for opening up their homes to me, making me feel welcome and sharing their stories and experiences with me in such a candid manner.

Above all, I wish to thank my family, for always encouraging my learning and development. I owe a great deal of this to them. To my husband Jeff, for always supporting me and believing that this thesis was only ever 6 months away! For Mum and Dad and Michelle for their unwavering love and support. And last but not least, my two cheeky little girls, Maria and Annaliese, not necessarily for coming along at the right time, but for the very special people that they both are. Time to start on that list of things to do now ...“Yes, after your study mummy!”
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This thesis investigates the phenomenon of parental involvement in youth sport, as it is perceived and experienced by a group of sport parents. This introductory chapter serves to highlight the significance of the role fulfilled by parents of young athletes, by an extensive review of the literature which places it within the context of an athlete’s development.

1.1. Athlete Development

Research examining the development of athletes has evolved into a growing area of inquiry within the wider sport psychology field. A major study by Bloom (1985) investigated the development of talent in various expertise domains, (including sport) and following an integrative analysis revealed that talent development occurs over a series of stages of increasing commitment and specialisation.

Bloom (1985), assisted by his team at the University of Chicago, undertook a retrospective study involving 120 highly talented individuals from music, science, art and sport (including Olympic swimmers and professional tennis players). This revealed that talent development consisted of three critical stages of learning and development, which played out over years of committed learning, with quality support and teaching. During the first of these stages (ages 4-12) – the initiation stage (or early years), individuals were typically introduced to sport by their parents, who encouraged enjoyment and play, and in many cases also provided initial instruction. The second stage (ages 13-18) – the middle years or development stage, is distinguished by increased specialisation and practice and a transition into a higher level of engagement in sport. The individual’s identification with their chosen sport is strengthened, as their achievements are recognised by significant others, such as parents, coaches and peers. The final stage (age 19-late 20s), the perfection stage (or later years), is characterised by an even greater (even extreme) level of commitment to the sport, with much time and effort invested.
Bloom’s model provided an insightful early contribution to the study of talent development and has since inspired a growing amount of research on the issue of expert athletes development, which has further supported Bloom’s findings on the development stages (e.g., Wylleman, De Knop, Menkehorst, Theebom, & Annerel, 1993; Wylleman et al., 1999) and asserts the importance of commitment and practice (Ericsson, Krampe, & Tesch-Romer, 1993).

Following on from Bloom’s (1985) work, and in support of the findings highlighting that talent development occurs over a series of three distinct yet interconnected stages, Cote (1999) also identified three stages of athlete development: (a) the sampling stage (ages 6-12), (b) the specialising stage (aged 13-15) and (c) the investment stage (ages 16+). Cote and colleagues (Cote, 1999; Cote, Baker, & Abernethy, 2003; Cote, & Hay, 2002) argue that a young athlete’s sport participation at the sampling stage is characterised by ‘deliberate play’ (i.e., play without rules or free play). This differs from organised sport because it allows the participants to modify and adapt the activities to meet their needs, abilities and preferences. As young athletes develop and progress within sport, their participation is more likely to move into the context of organised sport and become more directed, with free play featuring less and less.

Expanding on this work, Soberlak and Cote (2003) investigated the amount of deliberate play and practice for each stage of athlete development. In this study the amount of time, which four professional ice hockey players engaged in deliberate play, deliberate practice, organised games and other sports, was charted from the age of 6 through to 20. Additional interviews were conducted with the athletes and their parents to further highlight and clarify the nature of those activities. Although the sample was small, the findings supported age-related trends in developmental activities that athletes engaged in. The study showed that the sampling years were characterised by deliberate play, whereas the specialising years were more focused on deliberate practice. Cote and colleagues (Cote, 1999; Cote & Hay, 2002) argued that due to the intrinsically
motivating nature of play-like participation, it may be predominantly important for athletes to engage in higher levels of deliberate play at early stages of their development, as it may serve to foster the discipline and commitment required for later stages such as the specialising or investment years.

In their research, Wylleman et al. (1999), explored each stage and identified the challenges athletes would have to overcome at each of these. According to their research, the first transition that athletes have to cope with is being socialised into organised sport and learning to adapt to a new social context, which is structured and led by adults. At this stage, Wylleman et al. (1999) identified the parent’s role as significant in enabling the athletes to successfully navigate this transition. How an athlete copes with this initial transition will to a certain extent be determined by their psychological readiness and maturity to engage in sport at this new level and thus be able to benefit from it (Brustad, 1993). This in turn is dependent on a child’s motivation to participate in sport, which may be for social reasons, skill development, and fun (Weiss, 1995).

The second transitional stage described by Wylleman and colleagues (1999) is that into an intensive stage of involvement, similar to the development years described by Bloom (1985) and the specialisation years described by Cote (1999). In line with Bloom’s and Cote’s work, this stage is characterised by increased training and competition demands, as well as coinciding with increased demands in other areas of a child’s life such as their education. Successfully balancing the demands of school and sport places increased expectations on young athletes and requires new skill sets (Wylleman et al., 1999).

The third stage of athlete development, as described by Wylleman et al. (1999) represents the transition into high level competition, at which stage an athlete may choose to pursue a professional career in sport, which usually requires a separation from their immediate social network (i.e. the family) or may choose to transition out of sport.
Wylleman and Lavallee (2004) added therefore an additional fourth stage to the talent development stages identified by Bloom (1985) and Cote (1999) that of a discontinuation phase representing the critical transition out of competitive sport.

By identifying the transition between the key developmental stages that athletes go through, Wylleman and colleagues (Wylleman et al., 1999; Wylleman, & Lavallee, 2004) proposed a model of transitions in sport adopting a lifespan perspective. This model (see figure 1) depicts the series of normative transitions that occur during an athlete’s career, which reflect the organisational nature of the context (either in education, vocation or sport) the athlete’s psychological and social development. The model therefore encapsulates the interactive and reciprocal influence of a young person’s development in sport, as well as in other key areas in their life.

![Figure 1. Wylleman & Lavallee (2004) Developmental Model of Athlete Career Transitions](image)

The model (see Figure 1) is organised across four layers: the first layer represents stages of athletic development; and the second represents stages of psychological development (i.e., childhood, adolescence, adulthood). The third reflects changes at the social level, and identifies those in an athlete’s social network that are regarded (by the athlete) as significant at each stage. The final layer, portrays developmental stages at the academic and vocational level (i.e., the transition within education such as primary to secondary to tertiary education and the transition into vocational training or a professional occupation.)
professional occupation). Each of these layers will now be discussed as it relates to the developmental stages of the athletic level.

1.1.1. Psychological Development

As illustrated by Wylleman and Lavallee’s (2004) developmental model of transitions, an athlete’s psychological development is defined in terms of the stages of childhood, adolescence and adulthood.

The primary concern for children (and their parents) is to prepare themselves for their transition into organised sport. In order to achieve this, children need to be personally motivated to do so, as it is possible that they were introduced into structured sport by a third party, usually the parents. At this stage of a child’s development, peers are considered to be a strong motivation for sport participation (Gould, & Horn, 1984) and therefore how a child compares their own ability and performance with his or her peers is critical to their continued participation in sport (Roberts, 1993). For example if an athlete perceives that their peers are more capable in sport, they may withdraw from sport altogether. The ability for social comparison is one that a child begins to develop around the age of 7 or 8 years (Passer, 1996), however full awareness and evaluation of one’s own ability does not occur until the age of 10-12 years (Fry & Duda, 1997).

An athlete’s psychological development continues in adolescence, a major characteristic of which is the development of a balanced identity (Erickson, 1959). To achieve this an athlete needs to explore all roles and avoid focusing on just one (e.g., the athlete role) at the expense of all others. However, this stage in an athlete’s psychological development is likely to coincide with specialisation in sport, with an increased commitment and time spent on sport, and therefore it is highly likely that an athlete will develop a strong athletic identity (Brewer, 1993). Doing so, will allow the athlete to cope with the difficult and demanding transition into a higher level of sport participation (Gordon, 1995). However this needs to be considered in light of evidence that suggests
that a well-rounded identity (e.g., one that is not uni-dimensional and limited to one role) positively influences an athlete’s transition out of sport (Brewer et al., 2000).

Although psychological factors have been shown to play a crucial role in an athlete’s development, evidence has shown that psychological development is highly influenced by social factors. For example, parental encouragement has been associated with a young athlete’s perceived level of self-efficacy, and in turn their motivation for participating in sport (Brustad, 1993; Harter, 1981). Furthermore, parents’ behaviour has also been shown to influence an athlete’s self-esteem, which in turn impacts on an athlete’s motivation and commitment. Additionally, Power and Woolger (1994) illustrated that parental support was positively associated with a young athlete’s level of enjoyment in sport, whereas Scanlan, Stein and Ravizza, (1991) demonstrated that parental expectations negatively influenced this, due to the increased pressure placed on athletes.

Adolescence is not only a change experienced by the adolescent him / herself. The changes experienced require adjustment on the parents’ part. Adolescence is described as a rebalancing process between parent and child (Spring, Rosen, & Matheson, 2002). This process of renegotiating the interdependence of their relationship (Csikszentmihalyi, Rathunde, & Whalen, 1993), can prove a valuable tool for coaches working with youth athletes and if aware of it, coaches can better understand the behaviours of parents thus establishing more effective relationships.

Indeed, research from family psychology has documented how the transition into adolescence can prove to be very challenging for parents (Spring, Rosen, & Matheson, 2002). Williams (2003) suggested that over parenting, whilst benevolent in many instances, can be perceived by adolescents as questioning of their competence, and can be regarded as excessive. Over parenting can be paralleled to over involvement in sport and can threaten the decisional and behavioural autonomy of the young athlete, thus
leading to conflict. Parents often feel that granting a child more autonomy would equate to relinquishing it (Williams, 2003), however this need not be the case. Granting a child some autonomy can lead to increased trust between parents and children and the optimal way of identifying this, is the spontaneous disclosure of daily activities on the part of the child. If a child feels that they are being interrogated, in the case of a reluctant parent to grant more autonomy, they will not feel at ease to open up and communicate freely (Williams, 2003).

It is irrefutable that parents of a gifted child have indeed an unenviable, some could say, impossible task. They must strike a balance; they have to encourage without pushing. Parents are always walking a tight rope. On the one hand they want to appear supportive of their child’s sporting endeavours so that in future years the child does not regret not pursuing something and realising their potential, but yet they must be mindful of how the child perceives their involvement, which may change as the child grows and develops.

1.1.2. Academic and Vocational Development

Most developing countries now have a compulsory education system until the athlete reaches late adolescence, which implies an athlete’s progression in sport, runs concurrently and in parallel to their educational journey (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004). As illustrated in Wylleman and Lavallee’s developmental model (2004, see figure 1) the stages of academic and vocational development are: (a) primary school, (b) secondary school, (c) higher education, (d) vocational training and (e) postgraduate, lifelong learning. Each of these stages is likely to overlap with transitions at the psychological, athletic and social levels and as such will place increased demands on a young athlete as they are expected to achieve in both sport and academic domains. Evidence suggests that as a result of these demands, athletes are likely to drop out of sport at key academic transition points (Greendorfer & Blinde, 1985; Wylleman, De Knop & Theeboom, 1993).
For every athlete, balancing academic workload alongside a demanding athletic career is a major challenge and is likely therefore to impact both an athlete’s academic and sport development. For example, during secondary and tertiary education, which is likely to coincide with an athlete’s development and mastery stage in sport, there will be both an increased time commitment for training (Soberlak & Cote, 2003) in addition to increased demands from school and/or college. Furthermore, as athletes explore their higher education options, they may do so with a primary focus on their sport career, which in later years may result in a delay in being able to enter the professional workplace (Naul, 1994). The task of combining a high-level sports career with higher education is undoubtedly fraught with challenges, primarily due to time constraints, to the detriment of an athlete’s psychological and/or social development (De Knop et al., 1999; Wylleman et al., 1993).

1.1.3. Social Development

In their study of children’s social relationships, Furman and Buhrmester (1985) demonstrated that these [relationships] “each have a unique role, but the roles of different relationships complement and reinforce one another” (p.1022). Wylleman and Lavallee (2004) also consider the influence of these relationships on an athlete’s development. The model posits that an athlete’s social development will influence their development and consequently their level of success in sport. Relevant to an athlete’s social development is his or her role within the social environment and the role other relationships play in the quality of their involvement in sport. The role of relationships is significant throughout an athlete’s sport career in light of the support that they can provide to athletes. For example, Rees and Hardy (2000) investigated the importance of social support by high-level sport performers, and concluded that “important others can play a crucial role in the life of the performer, and that the consequences of performers being isolated from support are damaging” (p.344).
The relationships, which are significant in an athlete’s development, are likely to change over time. According to Wylleman and Lavallee’s (2004) model, the stages at the social level of development are delineated by the key providers of social support (as perceived by the athletes) in each of the respective stages, based on the notion that an athlete’s social network changes as the athlete develops. The family and peer group are thought to be important primarily in the earlier stages, while the coach’s importance increases as the athlete progresses. As an athlete reaches the mastery stage other relationships, significant to the athlete, such as romantic relationships (i.e., marital, partner) are also likely to play an important role. This is further supported by Furman and Buhrmester (1985) who indicated that as children grow older, ratings of intimacy with friends and other people in their social environment markedly increase, whereas for parents they remain stable or even decrease. Despite this adaptation, athletes have reported to perceive parental involvement as a prominent factor in their development (Wylleman et al., 1997).

1.2. Interpersonal relationships within the athletic triangle

As illustrated in figure 1, an athlete’s social network generally consists of coaches, parents and peers and the majority of social support that they receive throughout their athletic career is likely to come from one or more of these members. A great number of studies have indicated that the quality of an athlete’s relationships, particularly with their parents and coach determines, to some extent, whether they will reach elite level (Vanden Auweele, 1988, 1992; Wylleman, De Knop, & Sillen, 1998). This network of relationships between athletes, parents and coaches has become known as the athletic triangle (Smoll & Smith, 1989) or as the primary family of sport (Scanlan & Lewthwaite, 1988).

The quality of the interpersonal relationships in this triangle has been evidenced to be a major influencing factor for an athlete’s development by Carlsson (1988). In this study of Swedish tennis players the quality of these relationships was found to determine...
whether a young athlete attained world-class level. The role of these relationships within the context of an athlete’s development will now be discussed and evaluated in detail.

1.2.1. The parent – athlete relationship

Parents have a great part to play in a child’s development, whether the child is involved in an achievement environment (e.g., sport) or not. Csikszentmihalyi, Rathunde, and Whalen (1993), investigated talented adolescents in different fields of expertise, including, sports, mathematics and music, and concluded that a child’s development is bound to their social environment, in accordance with Brofenbrenner’s ecological model of child development (1979). Combining elements of sociology and developmental psychology, Brofenbrenner considered that the relationships between individuals and their environments are “mutually shaping” and defined four levels in which an individual’s development occurred.

- The micro-system, which represents the interpersonal interactions between a child and their immediate social network i.e., the family.
- The meso-system, which represents the interrelationships between the various settings in which an individual develops such as the home, the school, the sport. Bronfenbrenner posited that the stronger and more diverse the links between the settings the more powerful their influence on a child’s development will be.
- The exo-system, which represents the interrelationships between the settings the child participates in and settings in which the child does not participate in, but influence the child’s setting nonetheless (i.e., a parent’s workplace).
- The macro-system, which represents the interrelationships between the meso and exo systems and the influence of over-arching social forces on their quality. For example, an economic recession may elicit changes at this level.

Brofenbrenner posits that in order to understand human development it is crucial research closely examines each of the aforementioned systems, and further, examine the interaction between them.
In their study, Csikszentmihalyi and colleagues (1993) investigated talent development at the micro and meso-system level and found that parents not only assumed an instructional role but also a social support role. Furthermore, they introduced the notion of the *complex family*, which describes families that were both integrated (i.e., they constantly supported their children) and differentiated (i.e., they encouraged their children to develop other interests independently). Talented teenagers in this type of family were more likely to be happier, energetic and determined, and though Csikszentmihalyi, Rathunde, and Whalen (1993), noted that talent did develop in other types of families, these family characteristics increased a child’s chance of developing their talent.

The importance of a supportive family was previously identified by Bloom (1985) who provided empirical evidence on the amount of resource investment required to foster a talented athlete. The old saying that “talent will out”, inferring that no support is required for individuals showing promise in sport or any other achievement domain, holds water only if placed in the correct social environment that will nurture and promote this. In Bloom’s work, the parents were shown to be the primary investors of the resources required to do this, with coaches a close second.

The recognition of parents’ instrumental role in developing and nurturing sport talent also stems from a steady stream of anecdotal evidence that support the existence of a positive relationship between parental involvement and psycho-social responses to sport participation (including performance outcomes). Many exceptional sport performers have publicly expressed the important role their parents played in developing their talent, and supporting them through challenging times. For example, Lance Armstrong, seven times winner of the Tour-De-France passionately describes the role his mother played during the early stages of his sporting career: “My mother had become my best friend and most loyal ally. She was my organiser and my motivator, a dynamo [emphasis added]” (Armstrong & Jenkins, 2000, p. 30).
Hemery (1986) interviewed 63 world-class performers in sport and concluded that the majority of the athletes reported that their parents supported them and encouraged them, thus providing a stable environment for them, without pushing them. Hemery, highlighted that parental involvement and participation is an essential ingredient in their child’s progress and development.

Empirically findings support the importance of the parents’ role:

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)

According to Rowley, (1986) a parent fulfils two distinct yet interdependent roles: (a) socialisation into sport and the ethos characterising sport participation and (b) supporting the athlete throughout their involvement in sport. These roles were further highlighted by Cote (1999) who investigated the influence of family on talented athletes throughout their career in sport. In this study, Cote, similarly to Bloom (1985), identified three distinct phases of talent development: (a) the sampling years, (b) the specialising years and (c) the investment years. During each of these phases the parents’ role changes in response to the athlete’s development. It was noted that whilst the athlete was still at an initial stage parents had assumed a leadership role, by which they initiated the child’s interest and socialised them into sport by enabling the child to sample a wide range of sporting activities. Parents tried to provide their children with opportunities to have fun and develop FUNdamental movement skills. Cote (1999) illustrated that as the child becomes more involved in sport (e.g., the specialising years), the parents’ role shifts to that of a committed supporter and follower. As committed supporters, parents, and indeed other family members (e.g., siblings) invest greatly and sacrifice aspects of their own personal lives in a bid to create optimal training conditions
(Cote & Hay, 2002; Kay, 2000). In turn as the athlete develops and progresses through
sport, he or she may seek independence from the family and therefore take a central
role in forging his or her own sporting career (Jowett, 2008; Stambulova, 1999).

Research into youth sport participation (e.g., Brustad, Babkes, & Smith, 2001;
Greendorfer, Lewko, & Rosengren, 1996; Rowley, 1986; Woolger, & Power, 1993), has
emphasised the important role played by parents in socialising their children into sport.
Rowley (1986) interviewed forty parents of athletes participating at an elite level and
found that parents were indeed critical in initiating their child’s involvement in sport,
albeit for different reasons, such as parent or child motivation.

The importance of the role of the parents, and the wider family milieu, during the early
stages of an athlete’s career is principally a function of the large proportion of time that
young athletes spend with their families at this age, and thereby the plethora of
opportunities for parents to become involved (Fredericks & Eccles, 2004). During
childhood, parental influence has been found to have a greater effect on children’s
described the significance of the parental role at the childhood stage as “the most
important influence in athlete’s life” (p.117).

As discussed earlier in the chapter, parents have been found to be particularly influential
on children’s sport participation, mainly at the early and middle childhood stages
(Jambor, 1999; Jowett, & Cockerill, 2002; Lewko, & Greendorfer, 1988). Whilst most
authors appear to be in agreement that the parents are the primary instigators in an
athlete’s sport socialisation, with regards to the moderating influence of a parent’s own
sporting background, the evidence appears to be contradictory. For example, Rowley
(1986) found parents of young athletes had been themselves involved in sport, whereas
Jambor (1999) found no evidence to suggest a link between a parent’s own participation
in sport and the nature and level of their support to their children. Furthermore,
Jambor’s study suggests that sport socialisation of children is far more complex than originally thought. Results from this study indicated that although parents were supportive they were not necessarily role models for their children with regards to participating in sport. Jambor argues that the key factor is the perceived benefits of sport participation for their children, with parents of participating children perceiving greater benefits. Harrington (2003) also supports the notion that if and how a parent encourages their child in sport is directly linked to their own views on sport and its place within their own family context. This study demonstrated that for lower income families, sport was regarded as a vehicle for fostering family relationships, and therefore if sport participation required a child or parent to stay away from the family it was not well received. In contrast middle-income families ascribed greater value on sport and its associated benefits, even though they felt at times sport participation constrained family time. Interestingly children from lower income families were more likely to engage in sport within the school setting, whereas children from middle-income families appeared more likely to engage in sport outside of school and attend clubs.

Generally, research into parental involvement at the initiation stage (Bloom, 1985) or sampling years (Cote, 1999) has focused primarily on the impact that parents have on their children’s socialisation and attitudes and behaviours to sport (Power, & Woolger, 1993). Babkes and Weiss (1999) attempted to expand on this by investigating children’s perceptions of their parents influence and how it impacted on their psychosocial response to competitive sport. Results from this study highlighted the critical role parents play and how they influence their children’s expressions of positive emotions, such as self-confidence, self-efficacy and intrinsic motivation. Indeed, following regressive analysis it was revealed that parents who were perceived as positive exercise role models, who were perceived to have more positive beliefs about their child’s aptitude, and who were perceived to give recurrent positive responses that were independent of performance outcomes, were positively associated with athletes who had higher levels of intrinsic motivation, self-efficacy and enjoyment.
The relationship between parents and young athletes is indeed very important for an athlete’s development both in sport and out. Wylleman et al. (1997) concluded that the role fulfilled by parents was strongly associated with both intrapersonal (e.g., enjoyment, satisfaction, self-efficacy) and interpersonal (e.g., social skill development, coach-athlete relationship) factors of a child’s development. A study by Bloom (1985) with successful tennis players and Olympic level swimmers, further revealed the importance that athletes ascribe to the emotional support that they receive from adults in their social network, particularly from their parents.

Given the reported importance of parents on an athlete’s development in sport, it is not surprising to note that equally negative parental behaviours are also strongly associated, albeit negatively, with an athlete’s development (Petlichkoff, 1994). Indeed the literature documents how negative parental involvement can lead to poor sport performance, increase stress and perceived pressure and can ultimately lead to discontinuation in sport (Donnelly, 1983; Petlichkoff, 1994; Ryan, 1999; Scanlan, 1982).

Ryan (1999) suggested that parental involvement and more specifically the form that parental involvement takes, is largely dependent on knowledge. She noted that parents who had a clear understanding about the demands of high level training and competition were more able to maintain focus on their child’s welfare. Parents lacking in that knowledge can become immersed in the deviant and anomalous lifestyle of elite sports and focus only on the performance outcome, irrespective of the effect this may have on their child’s welfare. Ryan (1999) however, acknowledges that behind every successful child there is a parent who has sacrificed a great deal. Parents act as drivers, nutritionists, nurses, supporters, masseurs, maids and politicians. Ryan (1999) warns though, that this immense sacrifice may lead the parent to extremes; abusing their child physically or verbally for not performing or in some very extreme cases even giving up their love for their child, by giving up custody to the coach. Parents can become so immersed in their child’s sport and dream that it becomes their own. The following quote
from Carrol Stack, mother to elite United States gymnast Chelle Stack illustrates the
involvement a parent can have: “When my daughter made the Olympic team, I told her:
“You didn’t make the Olympic team, I did!” (Ryan, 1999; p.132)

Smoll and Cumming (2006) echo Ryan’s findings. They acknowledge that all parents,
although intuitively they act in ways that they feel are best for their children, there are
times when parents begin to define themselves with reference to the successes (or
failures) of their children. This process, known as ‘reversed-dependency trap’, has the
parents personally identifying with their children and consequently placing an excessive
amount of pressure on children to perform and achieve. Such an extreme level of
pressure can increase an athlete’s anxiety, thus resulting in poor performances and
reduced enjoyment (Scanlan & Lewthwaite, 1988).

Lee and Maclean (1997) found that the strongest predictor of pressure on a child wasn’t
the intensity of the perceived pressure but rather the type of parental behaviour. Results
showed that behaviour that aims to direct or even control an athlete’s experience affects
a young athlete’s perceived level of pressure. For example, no matter how much praise a
parent gives their child in support of their activity, if the parent is perceived as
attempting to take control, then it is perceived as pressure. However, the study also
showed that individual differences were at play. Results indicated that the athletes
responded differently to various types and intensities of pressure, thus inferring that the
children had varying levels of tolerance to pressure. Although the results of this study
were inconclusive, they do nonetheless offer a valuable insight into the underlying
mechanisms at play.

The aforementioned study gives further support to Hellstedt’s (1987) description of
parental behaviour. He described parental behaviour as falling on a continuum ranging
from under involved, to moderately involved to over involved. Under involved defines the
parents who do not provide any type of support for their child, whether it is emotional,
financial or functional. Moderately involved parents are defined by their firm direction, which is yet flexible enough to enable the athlete to play a significant role in decision-making. Over involved parents are defined by their excessive involvement in their child’s sport. These parents identify with their children and realise their own dreams and satisfy their own needs from the success of their children.

In a subsequent study Hellstedt (1990) documented the amount of motivational influence a parent exerts on the child-athlete to compete in sports and attain a set level of performance, as it was perceived by the athletes. Although the results of the study were equivocal and inconclusive due to difficulties in quantifying and measuring the variable, they nonetheless reinforce other research that warns parents from applying excessive pressure as it may generate a negative response and lead to conflict with the child.

The comments that parents make, whilst assuming the role of the spectator can also be a source of added stress and anxiety for the youth athlete (Kidman, McKenzie & McKenzie, 1999). Scanlan and Lewthwaite (1988) in their study with young wrestlers found that athletes’ enjoyment of sport was higher if they perceived that their parents and coaches were satisfied with their performance. Similarly, Kidman et al. (1999) observed a total of 250 parents over 147 competitions from a variety of sports, and concluded that how athletes interpreted and perceived the comments made was a significant motivational and enjoyment factor.

More recently Holt and colleagues (2008) examined parental involvement in a competitive youth sport setting as a function of their [parents’] verbal reactions to their children’s performance. Parents’ comments were placed on a continuum progressing from supportive to controlling and were categorised as praise/encouragement, performance contingent feedback, instruction, striking a balance, negative and finally derogatory comments. Results suggested, in line with previous research (e.g., Lee &
Maclean, 1997) that in terms of viewing parental involvement as support Vs control, parents should aim to provide and engage primarily in more supportive and less controlling behaviours.

Further research investigating child and adolescent perceptions of parents’ behaviour found that adolescent soccer players who perceived their parents to be either under or over involved in their sport reported lower levels of self-esteem than did their adolescent counterparts that reported being satisfied with their parents’ involvement. Other studies that have also examined parental involvement based on the athlete’s perceptions found that parental support was consistently linked to enjoyment and negatively related to performance anxiety (Anderson, Funk, Elliot, & Smith, 2003). However, perceived parental pressure was negatively related to enjoyment in sport and indeed continued participation in the activity. Wuerth, Lee and Alfremann, (2004) reported that lower levels of perceived pressure, coupled with higher levels of perceived praise and understanding predicted athletic success. In a similar vein, Bowker (2006) reported a significant positive association between athletes’ perceptions of parental support and their self-esteem, and a significant negative association between athletes’ perceptions of parental pressure and their self-esteem, as well as body image satisfaction.

However, as explored earlier in this chapter, parental involvement research has also evidenced that parents’ support is indeed vital with regards to young athletes continued participation and engagement in sport (Coackley, 2001; Hemery, 1986; Kay, 2000). Moreover, evidence has also shown that parental support can in fact moderate and buffer the effects of stress experienced by a young athlete (Van Yperen, 1995). A series of longitudinal studies by Van Yperen (1995; 1998) further underlined the fundamental and vital role of sport parents in the development of young athletes. In this study set within the context of youth soccer, results illustrate a buffering effect of parental support. When performance is not of the expected standard this can bring about negative feelings and consequently cause an increase in perceived pressure. "As there is
little one can do to change an outcome, it is better to try and change, to control or to manage the emotional response with the help of the parents” (Van Yperen, 1995; p.237).

It can therefore be inferred that the primary vehicle by which parents influence and impact on a young athlete’s sport experience is through involvement in the experience itself. However, simply examining the involvement level is not sufficient enough in order to clarify the underlying mechanism of how parental involvement impacts on a child’s sporting experience. Furthermore, simply labelling parental involvement as positive or negative will not suffice. As Lee and Maclean (1997) found, individual differences are also at play. For example, while one athlete views his or her highly involved parents as optimally involved, another may view a similarly high level of parental involvement as excessive. By the same token, while one athlete may view his or her parents’ low level of involvement as optimal, another athlete may view the same level as insufficient and unsupportive. Similarly a study by Stein, Raedeke, and Glenn (1999) found that the relationship between a parent’s degree of involvement and an athlete’s stress level demonstrated a U-shaped relationship (i.e. athlete’s stress is low at a moderate degree of parental involvement), whereas the relationship between a parent’s degree of involvement and an athlete’s level of enjoyment demonstrated an inverted U-shaped relationship (i.e. athlete’s enjoyment is high at a moderate degree of parental involvement).

The above findings are further supported by Weiss and Hayashi (1995) who alluded to the notion that parents can indeed be highly involved without being overly involved. Findings from this study revealed that young athletes perceived behaviours and expectations from their parents as positive and simultaneously parents considered the outcomes as positive both for themselves, but for the entire family as a direct result of the young athlete’s participation in sport.
However, in considering the findings in the literature discussed above, it is important to take into account a key distinction regarding the samples used in this research. Lee and Maclean (1997) argued that the differences in research results regarding parental involvement in sport and the influence of it on an athlete’s development and experience in sport, lie in the fact that the research has explored these issues by interviewing athletes who had been successful at a high level of sporting involvement. However, it would be worthy of investigation to explore how parental involvement manifests itself and what its impact was for athletes that discontinued their participation in sport altogether or were not successful at a senior level of participation.

In a study by Gould and Lauer (2004) coaches of young elite tennis players shared their views and experiences of parental involvement. The coaches explained that the parents who they characterised as the most demanding were those who, as perceived by the coaches, expected some return from the investment (both in terms of money and time) they made for their child’s sport participation. Parents who were also described as demanding and created problems for the coaches were the ones that became more actively involved by coaching their own children. Data from this study also highlights the link between parents own experience of the sport, however results were inconclusive as to whether there was a positive or negative association between a parents’ past experience in sport as a participant and their involvement as a parent in their child’s participation. In the study by Gould and Lauer (2004) some coaches explained that they felt parents with no experience were problematic due to a lack of knowledge and understanding about the game – similar to Ryan’s (1999) assertion that knowledge is the key determining factor with regards to the nature of a parent’s involvement. For other coaches however in the Gould and Lauer study, it was indeed the parents that had some experience, albeit at a low level of tennis that created the most problems for the coaches. So on the one hand knowledge and experience gave parents a platform by which to get involved, but on the other lack of knowledge and experience also created problems.
As in the case of many amateur sports that rely heavily on a volunteer base it is not unusual for parents to become coaches themselves. Indeed evidence from the UK Coach Tracking Study (Timson-Katchis & North, 2008) identified coaching as a means of parental involvement in sport. In their study tracking the development of 1264 UK coaches in terms of their learning and development as well as their career pathways, they found that a staggering 20% of the sample (n=250) became coaches in order to help their children with their sport participation.

Barber et al. (1999) investigated the effect parent-coaches had on young athletes’ motivation and level of anxiety during competitions. Interestingly, results indicated no significant differences in anxiety levels between athletes coached by their parents and athletes who were not, as both these groups reported low cognitive and somatic anxiety, coupled with moderate self-confidence. The authors concluded that although children engaged in sport for a variety of reasons, the most important one was noted as being fun and enjoyment. However beyond that, rankings of motives for participation differed between the two groups with regards to skill acquisition. Athletes coached by their parents rated skill improvement, challenge and team-work within their top ten reasons, whereas athletes not coached by their parents focused more on learning new skills, being physically fit and getting exercise. The authors argued that this difference may be attributed to a perception by parent-coached children, that they [athletes] already have the necessary skill and ability and being coached will simply refine those skills. Barber et al. (1999) further note that the similarity between the two groups of athletes regarding their primary reason for participation, could be a result that the parent-coaches had become coaches as a result of their children’s participation, rather than the children becoming involved because of their parents coaching involvement.

Few researchers have examined the nature of the parent-athlete relationship when the parent is also the coach of the athlete. Weiss and Fretwell (2003) explored this relationship within the context of youth soccer and considered the views of both the
parent-coach and the child-athlete. From the child-athlete’s point of view being coached by their parent (in this case the father) was regarded on the whole as positive, however negative issues were also present, such as perceived unfair behaviours, conflict and lack of empathy. From the point of view of the parent-coaches again the relationship was regarded to be positive as indeed they commented on how the coach-athlete relationship had given them a chance to interact more than perhaps they would have if they didn’t share the athletic relationship. For the parent-coaches the negative issues related to the difficulty of separating the two distinct relationships, which resulted in increased expectations and differential treatment.

More recently, Jowett, Timson-Katchis, and Adams (2007) pursued a similar investigation of the dual role relationship between parent/coaches and child/athletes adopting a narrative approach. In this study the authors emphasised the importance of understanding the two separate roles that each person has to fulfil so that they can effectively negotiate these in a manner that meets the expectations and needs of both individuals. Furthermore this study also highlighted the existence of a clear link between performance achievement and relationship quality, as relationships where a mutual dependency was present in conjunction with an absence of perceived power and control, were reportedly more successful in terms of performance attainment.

In another single case examination of a parent/coach-child/athlete relationship, Jowett (2008) explored the content and quality of the relationship based on the 3Cs conceptualisation of the coach-athlete relationship (Jowett, 2007). This purports that coaches and athletes’ feelings, thoughts and behaviours are causally interconnected and is expressed in three constructs: (a) closeness, (b) commitment and (c) complementarity. This case study on the whole demonstrated a positive relationship across all relationship elements (i.e. closeness, commitment and complementarity), however relationship conflict was also found to be present and was primarily a result of the athlete’s increased need for independence from the parent. It transpired from the
interview with the 15 year old athlete in question that one of the reasons she was engaged in sport was as a means of seeking more independence from the family and autonomy, which is an important aspect of a young person’s psychological development. The existence therefore of the parent in the role of the coach added an increased layer of complication to the athlete’s endeavour for increased autonomy.

Parental involvement has also been investigated from the perspective of parenting style and its subsequent effect on the young athlete (Gribble et al., 1993; Lee & Maclean, 1997). Recently Holt and colleagues (2009) examined parenting styles and practices within the youth sport setting and confirmed the complexity of youth sport parenting. Some parents were found to be highly involved and supportive without being controlling, thereby fostering autonomy, whereas other parents who were found to be equally involved where perceived to be controlling, as they did very little to foster their child's autonomy. Furthermore, this study highlighted the reciprocal nature of influence between children and their parents. Similar to findings by Weiss and Hayashi (1995) parents reported that they had invested a large amount of time and indeed financial support for their children’s sport participation and that this participation has in turn positively influenced their [parents’] attendance at meets, their reading of sport related literature, and their wider engagement with sport and physical activity (e.g., watching sport on TV and actively engaging in sport as a participant). In a previous study, Holt, Tamminen, Black, Sehn, and Wall (2008) found that parents’ verbal reactions during soccer games changed in response to aspects of their children’s performances. Parents experienced empathy through sharing the emotions their children felt in sport, and these emotions appeared to change in relation to dynamic game and contextual circumstances. The findings from this research further emphasises the bi-directional nature of influence between children and their parents.
1.2.2. The coach – athlete relationship

There can be little doubt that the coach – athlete relationship has been accorded increased attention in recent years, both within the field of sport psychology research (see Jowett and colleagues) but also at the policy level (sports coach UK, 2008). This has largely resulted from the growing amount of theoretical, anecdotal and empirical evidence, which suggests that coaching, has an important influence on athlete development (Bloom, 1996; Hemery, 1986; Jowett, & Cockerill, 2002). The demand for coaching research is therefore likely to continue to expand as key stakeholders such as sports coach UK (2008) have suggested that:

Sports coaching is central to developing, sustaining and increasing participation in sport. It drives better performances and increases success as well as supporting key social and economic objectives throughout the UK. At all levels of society, coaches guide improvement in technical, tactical, physical, mental and lifestyle skills, contributing to personal and social development (p.1).

As illustrated in the quote above, taken from the UK Coaching Framework (sports coach UK, 2008) coaching has the potential to have a positive impact on a number of factors, both at an individual level but also at a wider system level.

At the individual level research has highlighted the impact of coaching on an athlete’s continued engagement and achievement in sport (Gould et al., 2002; Durand-Bush & Salmela, 2002; Gould, Guinan, Greenlead, & Medbery, 1999; Greenleaf, Gould, & Dieffenbach, 2001), as well as their overall personal and psychological development (Gould, Collins, Lauer, & Chung, 2007; Chelladurai, & Riemer, 1998; Smith & Smoll, 1990). Clearly the role of the coach goes beyond that of a purely technical nature (Armour et al., 2000; Lyle, 1999) and impacts on not just the athlete but also the person.
Initial research into coach-athlete relationships adopted a leadership approach and investigated athlete’s perceptions and preferences of coaching leadership (e.g., Dwyer & Fisher, 1990), as well as examining patterns of coaches’ behaviours towards their athletes and the impact of these on athlete’s intrapersonal factors such as satisfaction (e.g., Riemer & Chelladurai, 1995). For example, Salminen and Liukkonen (1996) examined the actual, required and preferred coaching behaviours of 68 coaches and 100 of their athletes, adopting a multi-method approach. Results highlighted a discrepancy between coaches’ perceptions of their own behaviours and the perceptions of the coaches’ behaviours by the athletes, with coaches describing their behaviour in a more positive light than did the athletes. In a further study, Liukkonen (1999) supported the above findings and concluded that how a coach’s behaviour is perceived depends on the perspective by which it is being viewed (i.e. from the point of view of the coach, or the athlete or a third party). Results from these two studies confirm earlier findings from Smith et al. (1978) who found that athletes’ perceptions of their coaches’ behaviours were more highly correlated with the perceptions of an independent observer, rather than with the coach’s perceptions of their own behaviour. Results from the aforementioned studies combined seem to suggest that indeed coaches may not be fully aware of their coaching behaviours and may consequently also be unaware of their influence on their athletes and their development.

In a quantitative study with both athletes from individual and team sports, Chelladurai (1984) compared the athletes’ perceptions of their coaches’ behaviours with their preferred coaching behaviours and note a negative association between the discrepancy between perceived and preferred behaviours and athletes’ satisfaction with their performance and their coach. The more a coach was perceived to behave in a way that the athlete preferred (or close to how an athlete preferred) the higher the level of satisfaction reported by the athletes regarding their performance and the coach’s leadership.
The above discussed research, despite offering some initial insight into the interaction between coaches and athletes, has been criticised for its failure to capture the dynamic nature of the coach-athlete relationship (Poczwardowski et al., 2002) and has been further criticised for focusing on just the behavioural aspect of the relationship at the expense of other salient factors (Vergeer, 2000). Furthermore, by simply focusing on a specific behaviour, the situational and interpersonal context of that behaviour is not considered (Gilbert & Trudel, 2000). Relationship researchers have therefore advocated a shift away from this uni-directional and one-dimensional perspective, in which the focus is on the behaviours of just one relationship member, instead urging for a bi-directional approach which considers the dyadic nature of relationships (Jowett, 2005b; Vergeer, 2000).

Indeed coaching researchers have emphasised that at the heart of the coaching process is the interpersonal relationship between the coach and the athlete (Jones, 1997; Lyle, 1999). Jowett (2005a) has further argued that:

> The coach-athlete relationship is not an add-on, or bi-product of the coaching process...instead it is the foundation of coaching...it is embedded in the dynamic and complex coaching process and provides the means by which coaches’ and athletes’ needs are expressed and fulfilled (p.412)

In recent years a series of studies by Jowett and colleagues (Jowett, 2008; Jowett & Meek, 2000; Jowett & Cockerill, 2002; Jowett & Timson-Katchis, 2005) examined the nature of the coach-athlete relationship and found it be of an interdependent nature where both relationship members are aware of each other’s aspirations and goals and work together in a complementary fashion in order to achieve those goals. Specifically, Jowett and Meek (2000), examined the relationship in a marital coach-athlete relationship (where the coach and athlete were also husband and wife), and found that common goals sustained an effective working relationship. The manner by which coaches
and athletes relate to each other is dynamic and is a two-way process; a process which significantly impacts on the relationship as a whole and consequently affects an athlete’s performance, satisfaction and other intrapersonal factors (e.g., self-esteem, self-confidence, motivation).

In a subsequent study of twelve Olympic medallists (Jowett & Cockerill, 2002) further support was given for the dynamic nature of the coach-athlete relationship. Results from this study confirmed that the notion that describes the coach-athlete relationship at the elite level as impersonal, authoritarian and dependent on competition and performance outcomes is not true. The athletes disclosed that frequent and good quality communication with their coaches facilitated the development and maintenance of common goals within the coach-athlete relationship, which in turn was regarded by the athletes as a critical factor for their Olympic performance.

Further research by Philippe and Seiler (2006) also underlined the interdependent nature of the coach-athlete relationship. In this study, conducted within the context of elite swimming in Switzerland, all athletes described the relationship with their respective coaches as respectful, appreciate, with complementary roles and behaviours, as well as establishing and sharing common goals.

Poczwardowski and colleagues (2002a, 2002b) further highlighted the interdependent nature of the coach-athlete relationship based on in-depth interviews they conducted with successful gymnasts and their coaches. The results from this study, in line with previous research (Jowett, & Timson-Katchis, 2005; Jowett, 2008), demonstrated that the coach-athlete relationship is a very dynamic, multifaceted interpersonal phenomenon, where not only did the coaches have an impact on an athlete’s growth and development, but also the athletes had an equally significant effect on their coaches through their formed relationships. This suggests that awareness of each other’s goals
and needs, and a contribution to the process of attaining them, plays an instrumental role in the development of successful athletic partnerships.

A study by Gould, Guinan, Greenleaf, Medbery and Peterson (1999) emphasised the importance of effective coach–athlete relationships. Results from this study demonstrated that issues such as lack of trust, support, communication and respect between coaches and athletes affected the athlete’s preparation for the 1996 Atlanta Olympic Games. The implicit trust, which has been shown to be an essential ingredient to a successful sporting partnership (Jowett & Meek, 2000; Jowett, 2008; Poczwardowski et al., 2002) is further emphasised and supported by the results of a study investigating the psychosocial characteristics of Olympic track and field athletes (Vernacchia, McGuire, Reardon & Templin, 2000). Data collected from this study identified various factors that athletes perceived to be important in their growth and development. The most frequently cited factor was the influence of their coaches. In fact, several athletes acknowledged the impact that the relationships with their coaches had on their development. Comments such as the following clearly illustrate this:

I would have to say a good coach...he developed me...I think having a strong coach. A mentally and physically strong coach...I think one of the most important things is that I always believed in my coach...You have to believe in your coach...You have to say your coach knows what he is doing... (p.12)

A study conducted with expert tennis players and swimmers (Bloom, 1985) found that athletes reported, albeit retrospectively, that coaches were instrumental in helping them reach the pinnacle of their chosen sports. In a subsequent study, Bloom and colleagues (1998) demonstrated that mentoring is an invaluable process in sport. Just as the mentor–protégé relationship requires trust and respect so does the coach-athlete relationship. Results from these studies unreservedly attest the fact that coaches,
specifically those of individual sports, are involved in all facets of an athlete’s life and thus help the athlete in developing a vast repertoire of both sport and life skills.

A coach’s efforts to develop athletes are greatly facilitated if the coach adopts an individualized and supportive coaching style (Chelladurai, 2007). A coach fulfils this mentoring-like role by establishing a close working relationship with his / her athlete(s); which is in turn achieved by careful consideration of an athlete’s needs, expressing appreciation, providing feedback and instruction but also communicating with the athlete in an empathetic and caring manner (Bass, 1985; Rafferty & Griffin, 2004). Indeed several researchers support the view that the quality and nature of the coach-athlete relationship is a major contributing factor to an athlete’s development in sport (Jowett & Cockerill, 2002; Seiler, Kevesligeti, & Valley, 1999). In their study of 265 young athletes, Wylleman et al. (1997) revealed a strong association between an athlete’s level of enjoyment, their perceived performance attainment and their satisfaction with the coach-athlete relationship.

An in-depth qualitative study by Pummel (2008), adopting an instrumental case study approach involving one retrospective and four prospective interviews with a male junior athlete transitioning into senior level participation, highlighted the important role of the coach-athlete relationship in facilitating an athlete’s successful transition from one athletic level to the next. Pummel’s study revealed that the athlete had developed a close relationship with their coach, which intensified over the course of the transition as a result of the increased amount of time they spent together. The coach fulfilled a mentoring role, offered guidance and support to the athlete in terms of his overall development (i.e. in terms of emotional, psychological and social). The athlete in this study reported that, although he was supported by a wider team, including a sport psychologist, the coach fulfilled a crucial role and often acted as an intermediary between the athlete and the rest of the support team. This study highlights the importance of the coach-athlete relationship during an athlete’s transition period, which
as previously discussed is usually a key point in time when talent loss may occur (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004).

A previous study by Mageau and Vallerand (2003) also offers support for the findings of Pummel’s evidence, as it identified the link between an athlete’s motivation and development with the quality of the coach-athlete relationship. Indeed research shows that athletes ascribe importance to their coaches adopting a holistic approach and facilitating the athlete’s development beyond the athletic level (e.g., Balague, 1999).

Balague (1999) further stressed the importance of the coach’s role, especially at the elite level as sometimes “a coach can be a mother or a father figure, particularly for young athletes” (p.95). Balague (1999) went on to explain how the identity of elite female athletes can be misunderstood by coaches, thus leading to frustration and other negative feelings, which will undoubtedly impact on the relationship. One such athlete reported: “People see me as a pair of legs and think that this is all that I am, I need a coach who will see me as a whole person” (p.93). Such negative feelings can directly impact on an athlete’s motivation and commitment and may ultimately bring about withdrawal from the sport or dissolution of the relationship.

Ryan (1999) in her study of elite gymnasts and figure skaters reported that many coaches adopted an authoritative, negative approach to coaching, which gradually lead athletes to burn out. Some coaches are described as abusive, “as physical and spiritual alchemists” (p.200) that focus on winning and push hard without nurturing. Ryan (1999) documents however the destructive spiralling effect that this has on young athletes, which denies them a happy childhood thus impinging on their growth and development. These results (Ryan, 1999) illustrate the importance of the coach-athlete relationship to the development of the athlete as a person first and an athlete second. Coaches should not only aim to produce sport performers (Lyle, 2002; Jowett & Cockerill, 2002) because
doing so will risk them betraying the trust that is unquestionably implicit in the coach-athlete relationship.

In order for coaches and athletes to maintain an effective athletic partnership it is crucial that communication channels between the two are maintained so that any possible issues are resolved quickly. However as Jowett (2003) discovered in her qualitative investigation of a single coach-athlete relationship, lack of communication compounded problems the dyad faced after the athlete was successful at an Olympic games and had won a medal. Although the interviews revealed that some positive relational characteristics were present, (e.g., trust, respect, cooperation) these appeared to be far out-weighed by negative interpersonal factors. The study revealed that the coach and athlete, who had been working together for approximately 4 years, experienced a relationship shift from an initial ‘progressive spiral’ (p.457) to a regressive spiral. The relationship was characterised by lack of closeness, disagreements and lack of common goals and a presence of anti-complementarity (e.g., inequality of influence). Lack of communication and an increasing frequency of negative interactions ultimately led the coach to terminate the relationship (Jowett, 2003). The author explains that in the absence of trust, relationships with high levels of interdependence and self-disclosure, have a potential for conflict, and therefore common goals and a willingness to make sacrifices are necessary if effective relationships between coaches and athletes are to develop (Jowett, 2003).

An earlier study by Jowett and Meek (2000) highlighted the potentially negative consequences of a coach-athlete relationship. In this study, which investigated the quality and nature of an atypical marital coach-athlete relationship, in which the coach and athlete were also husband and wife, revealed that conflict potential arose from an inherent difficulty in distinguishing between two dual roles. In-depth interviews with 4 atypical dyads found that the coach-athlete relationship impacted on the marital relationship, which in turn resulted in conflicting interactions within the home.
Lashuk (1992) argued that conflict between a coach and an athlete, particularly during an athlete’s early development, may be a result of a “win at all costs” approach to sport participation. At this stage an emphasis on competition and winning, places high, even excessive demands, on an athlete for a high levels of performance, which if an athlete has not had an opportunity to experience sport as an intrinsically fun and playful activity may lead to resentment of the activity itself (Lashuk, 1992). The author argues that a coach with an athlete’s interest at heart would focus their coaching on the athlete’s development, rather than winning. However, particularly in a youth sport context, a coach often needs to be in control and display an autocratic coaching style (Cushion & Jones, 2001; De Martelaer et al., 1999). In an investigation with swimmers, De Martelaer et al. (1999) found that swimmers saw the coach as the key figure in the athletic development, and although they did not like being yelled at by their coaches, they in fact commented that they expected their coach to adopt a strict, albeit friendly coaching style. In a subsequent quantitative study, this group of investigators (De Martelaer et al., 1999) confirmed their conclusions, as results highlighted that committed swimmers described their coaches’ style as friendly and autocratic.

In recent years, investigations into the coach-athlete relationship have sought to explore the role of individual, relational and environmental factors, on the quality and content of the relationship. For example, Jowett and Don-Carolis (2003) examined the links between athletes’ level of satisfaction and their perceptions of the quality of their relationship with their coaches. The study indicated significant correlations between athletes’ level of satisfaction and their perceived level of commitment and complementarity present in the coach-athlete relationship. Perceptions of relationship quality have also been significantly correlated with an athlete’s physical self-concept. In a quantitative study with 303 elite adolescent athletes, aged between 12 and 18, Jowett (2008b) found that particularly in the case of more established and developed coach-athlete relationships, the quality of the relationship was a strong predictor of an athlete’s physical self-concept.
An earlier study by Jowett and Gale (2002) also highlighted that the length of the coach-athlete relationship was a significant relational factor that impacts on the quality and content of the relationship. In this study the authors administered the Coach-Athlete Relationship Questionnaire (CART-Q), developed and validated by Jowett and Ntoumanis (2004) to 34 athletes and 19 coaches engaged in national level sport. Results illustrated that coaches and athletes who had been working together for a period of over 4 years, reported higher levels of commitment, in comparison to coaches and athletes who had been working together for a period less than 3 years.

One of the few longitudinal studies that have focused on perceptions of the coach-athlete relationship (Olympiou, 2006) has also demonstrated the dynamic nature of the relationship and its potential to change over time. In this study, the CART-Q was administered to a total of 114 athletes, competing at university level, at 3 distinct time points over a competitive season. Results highlighted a gradual decrease in the quality of the coach-athlete relationship over the time it was investigated, suggesting that the athletes’ believed and perceived that the coach had become less committed and complementary to them over the course of the season.

The nature of the coach-athlete relationship has been shown to change over time, particularly at times of key transition points in an athlete’s development (Pummell, 2008). In her study tracking a male tennis player as he progressed from a junior to a senior level of competition, Pummell (2008) noted the existence of a strong relationship between the athlete and the coach throughout the transitional phase. However, the leadership and control dynamic during and following the transition appeared to shift towards the athlete. Therefore results demonstrate that in response to an athlete’s increased maturity and desire for independence, a coach granted the athlete a greater level of autonomy, which gradually increased over the course of the junior-to-senior transition.
Research on coach-athlete relationships has also explored the interactions between the relationship and the wider social and environmental context in which they are played out. For example, research has been conducted to examine how athletes’ perceptions of the quality of their relationship with their coach are moderated by the coach-created motivational climate (Olympiou et al., in press). This study, guided by the notion promulgated by Deci and Ryan (2000) that a coach can facilitate an autonomy or control based environment depending on their own motivation, highlighted the association between the coach-created motivational climate and the quality of the coach-athlete relationship.

In seeking to examine the interaction between the coach-athlete relationship and the social network within which it exists, Jowett and Timson-Katchis (2005) interviewed five youth athletes, their coaches, and one of their parents, which the athlete had identified as the most engaged with the athlete’s sport. The study illustrated the potential influence that a parent, as a social network member, can have on the quality and nature of the coach-athlete relationship. Specifically, the parent was found to provide the coach-athlete dyad with the opportunities necessary to establish and develop a strong partnership, as well as with informational, practical and emotional support. Providing opportunities were primarily directed towards the athletes that enabled them to participate in sport and therefore be part of the coach-athlete relationship. Informational support referred primarily to the communication element of the relationship the parents established with the coach and of-course the athlete. Parents proved to be a valuable source of information for the coaches regarding the athlete, which enabled them to adapt and modify training accordingly if required and therefore strengthen the coach-athlete relationship. For example, parents provided the coach with crucial information on the athlete’s recovery from and response to training, as well as information regarding their general well-being. Parents provided emotional support by acting like a sounding board for the athlete’s concerns and providing them with the necessary praise and encouragement during challenging times. Results from this study concluded that indeed
the social network within which the coach-athlete relationship exists, in this case the parents, could have a significant influence on the quality and nature of the coach–athlete relationship.

It is undeniable, as discussed in the preceding review, that both parents and coaches play a key role in a young athlete’s development and enjoyment of sport. Not only are these two figures the most significant individuals in the athlete’s life but also they are undoubtedly the most personally involved (Scanlan & Lethwaite, 1988). This emphasises the need for parents and coaches to work together, in a harmonious and complementary manner in order to create an optimal training environment for the young athlete. Indeed few would argue with Vanden Auweele (1999) and Smoll and Cumming (2006) who emphasise the importance of effective interpersonal relationships between coaches and parents so that the athlete’s experience and development in sport is enhanced. In their study Vanden Auweele (1999) noted that in the case of conflict between coaches and parents, a negative effect was noted for the athletes in terms of their motivation and continued involvement in sport, as coaches and parents lose sight of the athlete’s needs and focus on the resolution of that conflict. Interestingly however, this study also reported a positive association between the frequency of coach-parent interactions and the quality of those interactions.

The above findings are somewhat contradictory to research conducted by Strean (1995) who found evidence suggesting that the less parents knew about the sport their child engaged in, the less likely they were to interfere and therefore clash with the coach. In this study Strean, identified four factors that ultimately affected the developmental experience of youth athletes: (a) the parents, (b) spectator location, (c) rules and (d) time. Of these four factors the parents were highlighted as being the most significant, as evidence showed how a group of swimming parents seeking to influence a club program ultimately led to the dismissal of the head coach. Strean concluded that although separating coaches and parents could elicit a positive result, effective communications
with parents are vital for enhancing relationships. The need for enhancing coach-parent relationships was also identified by Smoll (2001). Coaches serve as valuable resources and thus are able to answer parents’ questions. Effective communication however, is a two-way process, and coaches should also identify that parents can indeed be a valuable resource for the coaches.

1.3. Methodological considerations

The scientific study of relationships in sport, both the parent-athlete and coach-athlete relationship has undergone a number of changes throughout the last two decades or so. This section of the review will discuss the various theoretical approaches that have been adopted for the study of these relationships, before presenting the chosen theoretical framework adopted for this study.

1.3.1. Parental Involvement in Sport

Within sport psychology one of the most enduring conceptualisations of parental involvement is that provided by Hellstedt (1987). Informed by theoretical concepts of family systems theory, such as boundaries and triangulation, Hellstedt put forward three categories for describing parents as a function of their involvement in their child’s athletic participation and success. The concept of boundaries refers to the level of psychological separation between two people, in this case the coach and the athlete. This separation level can vary from enmeshment, describing two individuals locked in a tight relationship that think and act as one person, to disengagement (Hellstedt, 1987). The concept of triangulation, as described by Bowen (1978) is based on the premise that when a dyadic relationship is experiencing instability, the presence of the third person, in this case the parents, can re-stabilise the relationship. Hellstedt’s model therefore, describes parental involvement in sport as falling on a continuum, ranging from under-involved, to moderately involved to over-involved. Under involved defines the parents who do not provide any type of support for their child, whether it is emotional, financial or functional. Moderately involved parents are defined by their firm direction, which is
yet flexible enough to enable the athlete to play a significant role in decision-making. Over-involved parents are defined by their excessive involvement in their child’s sport. These parents identify with their children and realise their own dreams and satisfy their own needs through the success of their children.

Despite its initial practical usefulness, Hellstedt’s conceptualisation has been criticised for failing to account for subtle process of parental involvement, which could include parents acting as role models for observational learning, providing emotional support and indeed by way of general parenting practices (Bass, 2008; Power & Woolger, 1994; Rowley, 1986). Indeed in her study of the athletic triangle within age-group swimming in the UK, Bass (2008) noted that certain parents who were described by coaches and athletes as apparently under-involved, in terms of their attendance at galas and training events for example, were in fact far from disinterested. Bass explained that it was how parents interpreted what it meant to be a supportive parent that was the crucial factor. These parents’ support and involvement was described as being principally ‘behind the scenes’ (p.196) within the home environment rather than the sport setting. Such a broad definition of parental involvement, such as that offered by Hellstedt (1987) makes it very difficult to capture, operationalize and ultimately measure the phenomenon.

Grolnick (2003) further argues that the term “over involvement” is a confusing term, as it attaches negative connotations to the term involvement, which traditionally has positive undertones. Furthermore, she argues that a simplistic view, such as the one purported by Hellstedt, fails to consider the role of social and interpersonal relationships in understanding the amount (intensity, level) and type of parental involvement. Adopting a contextual perspective, Grolnick suggested three concepts of parenting which influence a child’s well being and motivation to engage in various activities: (a) autonomy support versus control, (b) structure and (c) involvement. Autonomy support versus control describes the degree to which the environment set up by the parents enables the children to initiate their own actions and behaviours, instead of feeling that
they are forced to engage these by their parents. Parents that adopt an autonomy support approach involve their children in decision-making and enable them to make their own choices (Grolnick & Ryan, 1989). On the other hand parents that adopt a controlling approach exert pressure on their children to behave in a certain way that they regard as appropriate and desirable. Structure refers to the degree to which children feel they have clear and consistent guidelines, regarding their expected behaviours. Though this can be confused with control, it is possible to set structures (i.e. rules and boundaries) within an autonomy-supportive context. For example, parents can set boundaries within which children are expected to behave, however, how the children behave within those is a decision that a child is allowed to make. Finally involvement has been defined as the extent to which parents show an active interest and are knowledgeable about their child’s life (Grolnick & Ryan, 1989). However Grolnick (2003) argues that how the child perceives a parent’s involvement is greatly dependent upon the approach that the parent adopts, in terms of autonomy support or control. She argues that controlling parenting practices, such as motivating children through bribes, practices that usually describe over-involvement, undermine children’s motivation and autonomy, and ultimately the parent-child relationship, despite the good intentions that may be driving these. This argument offers support for Lee and Maclean’s (1997) proposal that it was more directive behaviour or taking control rather than the intensity (level) of involvement, which was perceived as pressure.

More recent research from sport psychology has investigated the phenomenon of parental involvement in terms of perceived support and pressure (Anderson, Funk, Elliot & Smith, 2003; Hoyle & Leff, 1997; Lee & MacLean, 1997). Parental support has been defined as parental behaviours perceived as facilitative and encouraging, whereas parental pressure denotes behaviours perceived to be indicating unachievable expectation levels; and has been found to be negatively correlated with female athlete’s enjoyment (Leff & Hoyle, 1995). However to simply investigate this phenomenon
framed within a support-pressure dichotomy significantly undermines the multidimensional nature of social relations (Wellman, 1981).

Despite this abundance of empirical and anecdotal research on the nature and effects of parental involvement researchers have yet to define parental involvement in a universally accepted way. As discussed earlier parental involvement in sport has been investigated through different conceptualisations, for example in terms of over Vs under involvement (Hellstedt, 1987), autonomy support Vs control (Grolnik, 2003; Holt et al., 2009), and support Vs pressure (Lee & Maclean, 1997). This has hampered systematic study of the topic, despite the observed consistency regarding examination of the issue as a function of its effect on an athlete’s development, as perceived by the athletes and the coaches. These theoretical variations, coupled with the subsequent methodological limitations, have therefore resulted in a body of literature that provides at best an arbitrary one-dimensional view of parental involvement, and at worst paints a limited and incomplete picture of a complex and multidimensional social phenomenon.

Researchers investigating parental involvement within a similar achievement environment, namely education, have argued that in order to better understand the multidimensional nature of parental involvement, variables influencing parents’ decisions about getting involved, as well as the processes by which they do so need to be explored (see e.g., Grolnick, 2003; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995; Catsambis, 2001; Georgiou, 1996; Muller, 1995; Simon, 2004). Whilst there are many distinct differences between the academic and sport contexts, parental involvement is a salient factor in successful development in both these achievement environments (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995; Power & Woolger, 1994). This research emphasises that the impact of differing parenting practices on children is influenced by individual differences (e.g., age, gender), as well as environmental and social differences (e.g., socio-economic status, family situation) (Epstein, 1992). Other influential factors of parental involvement concern the educational and developmental needs of children. Steinberg (1998) and
others (e.g., Williams, 2003) have explained that during adolescence parental involvement changes in order to cater for the growing child’s specific needs such as the need for increased independence. Consequently, parents’ role changes from an initial didactic nature (instructive - dominant) to a supportive one (accommodating and encouraging – submissive) (Simon, 2004). These observations run in parallel with sport psychology findings which highlight changes of the parent’s role as a child grows and develops and pursues excellence in sport (e.g., Bloom, 1985; Côté, 1999). As the child/athlete enters adolescence and becomes more involved and committed to sport, the parent’s role shifts from a leadership role to that of a committed supporter and follower (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004).

Research from educational and social psychology suggests that in order to examine and understand parents’ motivations, decisions and processes of involvement it is critical to first consider and explore their role perceptions (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995, 1997). Indeed, Forsyth (1999) proposed that an individual’s understanding of their roles is essential to the effective performance of the social groups to which they belong, (e.g., families, schools, workplace).

Research on social roles has been extensive and diverse, adopting three different theoretical perspective, which include structuralism, interactionism, and finally behavioural. The basic tenet of the structuralist perspective is that the wider social structure (e.g., society) has prescriptive rules – norms – for the behaviour and characteristics of people in specific social categories or positions, such as for example wife or mother (Linton, 1936). According to this perspective roles are standardised across all people holding a particular position (i.e. all parents, all spouses). However this approach has been criticised for its sole focus on the behavioural element of roles, at the expense of affective and cognitive elements, as well as its distinct separation of individuals from the role they perform. Furthermore, this perspective also fails to
examine actual role performance, instead focusing on the existence of behavioural norms that define roles and therefore providing an incomplete role analysis.

The interactionism perspective purports that people create and negotiate the roles they fulfil through social interaction, and do not simply act out culturally pre-determined roles (Stryker, 1980). Although this approach acknowledges the existence of cultural norms for behaviour, it notes that these are all too often inconsistent and vague and therefore cannot be solely relied upon to guide social interaction. Supporters of this perspective place greater emphasis on the importance of an individual’s cognitive understanding, of the social interaction they engage in. In other words, through the vehicle of social interaction, individuals develop a conception of their own individual role as well as those of others around them. For example, there are many different ways that a relationship between a child and their parent evolves and plays out; each individual dyad through their interaction establishes its own unique pattern. Interactionists thus focus on the active process of “role-negotiation” (Biddle, 1986). This concept refers to the active and collaborative development of a role, taking into consideration demands, resources and barriers of the role between the members of the role set (i.e. role holder and social network). Role negotiation is a pivotal process, as roles are embedded in a dynamic social system, which requires adaptability; as circumstances and expectations change so too will the enactment of a role (Biddle, 1979). The interactionist perspective however has been criticised for its primary focus on the cognitive element of roles, neglecting therefore the affective and behavioural element. Furthermore, its focus on cognitive role negotiation does not allow an examination of their causal origins.

The third behavioural perspective defines roles in terms of observable behaviour patterns, a major proponent of which is Biddle (1979). He defined roles as “those behaviour patterns characteristic of one or more persons in a context” (p.58). However, similarly with the structural approach it focuses on the behavioural element to the exclusion of affect and cognition.
More recently Peplau (2002), based on interdependence theory (Kelley et al., 1983) has used the term role, in a descriptive way to refer to consistent patterns of activities that individuals engage in (e.g., behaviour, cognition and/or affect) within the context of a social interdependent relationship. She argues that roles are influenced by personal expectations, shared goals between the relationship members, cultural norms and other individual (e.g., age, gender, beliefs), relational (e.g., type of relationship, quality of relationship) or environmental/social factors; factors that in turn create new role patterns, or change and/or maintain existing role patterns.

Furthermore, according to Peplau’s definition the individual activity, in which a person engages in as part of their role, is directly or indirectly interdependent with the other relationship member. For example, in the case of the parent-athlete relationship, the parent fulfilling the role of a sounding board by way of providing emotional support to their child, or transporting them to and from their training session, are activities directly interdependent with the child. However, the parent engaging in homemaking activities, such as for example providing a clean and safe home, is indirectly interdependent with the child, as it influences the physical environment in which the child lives.

Unlike the previously discussed perspective on social roles, (i.e. structuralism, interactionism and behavioural), that focus on one element of roles, such as the cognitive or the behavioural, Peplau (2002) argues that social roles are comprised of cognitive, behavioural and affective elements. The behavioural element, which is arguably the most visible aspect, refers to the content of what relationship members do and say, and how the activities are divided between the two. In other words, the behavioural aspect reflects the role enactment. The cognitive element represents the perception and interpretation of one’s role enactment by the other relationship member. For example, in the case of the parent-athlete relationship as previously discussed in this chapter, how an athlete perceives what a parent does or indeed says, influences whether the child perceives the parent as supportive or controlling (Lee & Maclean, 1997; Holt et
al., 2009), which in turn can affect the quality of the relationship. Finally Peplau (2002) suggests that affect (i.e. emotion) is also a key element of social roles, as it can stimulate a behavioural pattern, or mediate a cognitive evaluation of someone else’s behaviour.

Peplau (2002) further defines roles in terms of their diversity, specialisation and complementarity. Diversity represents the complexity involved in the activity patterns that roles incorporate, for example the role of a parent might be highly diverse and include within it sub roles such as: homemaker, provider, socio-emotional provider. Specialisation refers to the level of consistent differences in the role enactment of individuals in interdependent relationships. For example considering the role of parents, in one family a high degree of specialisation may exist in terms of the division of labor, with the wife always taking on the housework and childcare duties and the husband being the sole provider (Kluwer et al., 2000; McBride & Rane, 1997). On the other hand however, another family may carry out these tasks with only little specialisation, with both husband and wife sharing the tasks equally and thus demonstrating a greater diversity of roles. Lastly, complementarity refers to the coordination of roles and activity patterns between relationship and group members, basic premise of which is that one partner’s activities are a response to the other partner’s.

Despite the emphasised significance of understanding parental role in child achievement (e.g., education), sport psychologists have been less forthcoming than their educational and social counterparts, in exploring this further in a systematic way. To date, investigations on parental involvement have been characterised by athlete-centred approaches and focused on perceptions of support of youth athletes. Whilst there is little to argue against the importance of perception, it is important to note that athlete perceptions alone are not sufficient to highlight parental involvement as a whole. Furthermore, if major discrepancies exist between what one person does, or indeed thinks they are doing, and what the other person, perceives this to be, it will inevitably
cause tension and bring about conflict. Although it is clear that parental involvement has a major impact on the athlete, there is an apparent omission in the existing literature of the reverse relationship: how parents are affected by the demands of sporting involvement and how they themselves perceive and experience their role. There is a need therefore to examine more in-depth the social, interpersonal and personal factors that influence parents’ own experiences.

1.3.2. Coach – Athlete Relationship

In recent years there has been a growing number of researchers examining the coach-athlete relationship from a relationship perspective (e.g., Jowett, 2007; Mageau & Vallerand, 2003; Poczwardowski et al., 2002a, 2002b; Wylleman, 2000). This research aimed to address the limitations of prior research on this topic, which adopted a leadership perspective and was characterised as uni-directional, as it focused on just the actions of the coach, and uni-dimensional, as it only considered the behaviourual element of the relationship to the exclusion of affective and cognitive elements (Jowett, 2001; Vergeer, 2000; Wylleman, 2000). Researchers adopting a relationship approach to the study of coach-athlete relationships have sought to highlight the dyadic nature of relationships (Berscheid, 1999) and thus examine not only the effect the coach has on the athlete but also the influence of the athlete on the coach. Furthermore as Hinde (1997) stressed, in order to better understand relationships it is imperative that cognitive and affective elements of a relationship are studied alongside the behavioural element, as failure to include any one of those factors will result in an indefinable and incomplete picture of the relationship. In the discussion that follows models for studying the coach-athlete relationship from a relationship perspective, which have received increased attention over recent years, are presented and discussed.

Wylleman’s (2000) model of the coach-athlete relationship suggests that the interpersonal behaviours occurring within the context of the relationship have three dimensions: (a) “acceptance/rejection” which reflects each member’s attitude towards
the relationship, (b) dominance/submissiveness”, which reflects the strength of position by each of the relationship members and (c) “social/emotional”, which reflects the various social roles fulfilled by each member. The model emphasises the causal interconnection of the interaction between a coach and an athlete, whereby the actions of one directly influence the actions of the other. For example, if a coach adopts a positive (accepting) stance towards the athlete, the athlete is also likely to display similar behaviours. Whilst Wylleman’s model acknowledges the bi-directional nature of the coach-athlete relationship, it fails to consider other key elements of this interpersonal relationship, namely the affective and cognitive (Vergeer, 2000) and therefore cannot provide a complete picture of this relationship (Rhind, 2008).

In a similar vein, Poczwardowski et al. (2002) based on Social Exchange Theory, also described the coach-athlete relationship in terms of three dimensions of interaction. The first of these, Activity, refers to the various activities during which the coach and athlete interact. The second dimension, Interaction, focuses principally on the communication between a coach and an athlete, which can be described by frequency, perceived importance, content and outcome. The third and final dimension, Care, reflects the affective and cognitive component of the relationship and can be described by intensity, connotation, content and width. Employing these conceptual constructs, Poczwardowski and colleagues (2002) found that the coach – athlete relationship, just as any other social relationship was of a circular nature (i.e. the more an athlete and coach care, the more they are likely to interact and communicate, and the more they do so the more they care). They also suggest that both coaches and athletes alike interpret situations based on their personal and subjective assessment of rewards and costs of their relationship. Consequently as these personal interpretations evolve, if they did not match the other person’s, the negotiation process between the two was called upon to balance their mutual expectations and needs. This interpretation and negotiation is both a cognitive and affective process, and the inclusion of these within the model is a positive step away from a solely behavioural approach to exploring coach-athlete
relationships, as discussed earlier (e.g., Wylleman’s model). However, this model has been criticised for its primary focus on the interactions between a coach and an athlete alone, with little consideration to the social context in which coaches and athlete exist, which may or may not be common, and could still influence those interactions (Rhind, 2008).

At the forefront of research on coach–athlete relationships, has been the work of Jowett and colleagues (e.g., Jowett, 2003; Jowett & Cockerill, 2003; Jowett & Meek, 2000), who employed the 3Cs (i.e. Closeness, Commitment and Complementarity) conceptualisation to investigate the quality of this interpersonal relationship. This conceptual model is based on the Interdependence theory outlined by Thibaut and Kelley (1978). This theory suggests that social interdependence is at the core of any dyadic relationship, where interdependence is defined by a mutual and causal interconnection of the relationship members’ thoughts, feelings and behaviours. Following a considered review of the relationship literature, Jowett (2001) identified three key constructs, which had been the focus of significant inquiry and could operationalized the affective, cognitive and behavioural elements of dyadic relationships. Closeness represents the affective and emotional tone of the relationship. It relates to issues such as whether a coach and an athlete like each other, trust and respect each other; issues identified by Bloom et al.’s (1998) work on mentoring, which suggested that mutual trust and respect was required for mentoring relationships to be effective. The cognitive element of the relationship is defined as Commitment and represents a coach’s and an athlete’s orientation towards the relationship, which is articulated in intentions to (a) maintain the relationship and (b) maximise it. Hinde (1997) emphasised the significance of this element in his observation that perceived commitment between relationship members impacts on the motivational climate and complementarity of the relationship. Lastly, the behavioural element of the relationship is operationalized by the construct of complementarity, which refers to the cooperative and corresponding behaviours between coaches and athletes.
An additional (+1) construct has been incorporated in the model which captures the “interconnection” present within the coach-athlete relationship. Co-orientation is defined as the co-oriented views or common ground between relationship members and has been found to consist of shared knowledge and understanding. It considers members’ views with regards to the relationship both from a direct and a meta perspective (e.g., direct focusing on how a coach/athlete feels, thinks and behaves and a meta focusing on how a coach/athlete believes their coach/athlete feels, thinks, behaves towards them).

Jowett’s (2005b, 2007) 3+1 Cs conceptualisation adheres to Bershceid’s (1999) recommendation that relationship researchers to think dyadically (p.261) and acknowledges the importance of considering all key elements of relationships (i.e. thoughts, feelings and behaviours) as advocated by Hinde (1997). Furthermore, unlike previous models presented here, this model has been adopted within a considerable amount of research inquiry, both of a qualitative (e.g., Jowett & Frost, 2008; Jowett & Timson-Katchis, 2005) and a quantitative nature (e.g., Jowett & Chaundy, 2004; Jowett & Ntoumanis, 2004), thereby generating considerable support for its validity.

1.3.3. Parents and the coach – athlete relationship

More recently, in an attempt to explore the interplay between parental involvement and the coach – athlete relationship and more specifically, the influence of parents on the quality of the coach – athlete relationship, Jowett and Timson-Katchis, (2005) proposed an integrated conceptual model. This framework is based on work by Sprecher, Felmlee, Orbuch, and Willetts (2002) suggesting that dyadic relationships are formed, developed and maintained within a wider social network, and that members from this networks (e.g., friends, parents, siblings) can both directly and indirectly impact on the quality of a dyadic relationship (e.g., Burger & Milardo, 1995; Julien & Markman, 1991; Sprecher & Felmee, 1992). As noted by the preceding review, the dyadic relationship between a coach and an athlete is at the core of athlete development and has similar characteristics such as those observed in marital relationships (e.g., affection, commitment),
friendships (e.g., trust, honesty), and work relations (e.g., instructional support) (Jowett, 2005; Jowett & Cockerill, 2003). Moreover, the coach-athlete relationship is formed, developed and maintained within a larger social network of parents and friends (e.g., Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004; Weiss & Smith, 2002).

Figure 2 presents the integrated model proposed by Jowett and Timson-Katchis (2005), which comprises of (a) the social network members and their attributes, (b) the processes by which the social network members exert their influence on the relationship and (c) the coach – athlete relationship quality. Firstly, social network members can include anyone within the coach’s or athlete’s social environment, however depending on their level of interaction, members can be categorized as belonging to a person’s psychological network (i.e. people perceived by coach or athlete as significant) or interactive network (i.e. people with whom a coach or athlete simply interacts) (cf. Surra & Milardo, 1991).

The proposed model, further described social networks in terms of their size, overlap, and density. Size is quantitatively defined in terms of number of individuals within a network, though it is important to consider whether all such individuals reside in the psychological or interactive network. Overlap describes the degree to which coaches and athletes share the same social network members, such as team members for example. Finally, density refers to the level to which the athlete’s network members have links with each other separate from the ties to the coach. An athlete’s school and family networks may be highly connected, and still completely separate to the sport network and the coach.
Figure 2. Jowett & Timson-Katchis (2005) Integrated Model of Parental Influence on the Coach-Athlete Relationship

The basic premise of the model is the processes by which parents (as the psychologically significant network members) influence the quality of the coach–athlete relationship. These processes have been described as (a) opportunity, (b) information, and (c) support. Opportunity concerns the situations with which the parents enable the dyad to initially initiate a relationship and to subsequently develop it (e.g., the parent arranges for the child to visit the sport club and meet the team and coach, and subsequently takes the child to regular training sessions). Information focuses on the various types of information which parents provide dyads with such as for example, advice, information, suggestions, and recommendations for developing an effective relationship with the coach (e.g., respect the coach). Though parents are primarily members of the athlete’s network, they can provide similar information to the coach. Lastly, support refers to the ways parents supports the coach-athlete relationship – which could simply be
displaying approval of the relationship or by providing socioemotional assistance (e.g. encouragement).

The third and final element of the proposed model is the relationship quality in the coach-athlete dyad, which changes as a function of the network attributes and processes described above and has been defined here in terms of the three interpersonal constructs closeness, commitment, and complementarity (3 Cs: Jowett, 2005; Jowett & Cockerill, 2002) discussed earlier in this report.

In sum this model proposes that the coach-athlete-parent triad is studied from a social network approach. A modified version of Sprecher et al.’s (2002) model of social networks provides an empirical foundation for exploring the nature of influences that parents exert on the quality of the coach-athlete relationship. Initial exploratory research guided by this model, has yielded support for its applicability and use within the field, and indeed highlighted the importance of social networks in influencing the quality of dyadic relationships, such as the coach-athlete relationship in youth sport (Jowett & Timson-Katchis, 2005).

1.4. Objectives and focus of this research

Social psychologists have highlighted that a great deal remains to be learnt and investigated about when, how and why personal networks operate, both in their own right and also in terms of affecting relationship development (Cochran, 1993; Cotterell, 2004). As noted earlier in this review, a dearth is apparent in studies that explore networks (e.g., parents) independently of the anchoring person (i.e. athlete) or indeed relationship (e.g., coach-athlete relationship). The key focus of this study therefore is to address this issue. In order to understand the impact and the mechanisms of parental influence on the quality of the coach-athlete relationship, it is important that the parental role is explored from the parents’ own perspective first.
Data from the present study were collected from both fathers and mothers (married couples) of youth athletes. The aim was to explore their conceptions about their role as sporting parents as they have themselves experienced it. Bradley and Corwyn (2004) noted that “very little is documented about just what they [parents] do, when and how often” (p.25). Thus, this exploratory approach represents a step beyond prior research as it allows parents to discuss their involvement as it is experienced by them, thus placing their parental role and involvement within a network of other issues, responsibilities and relationships (e.g. work, non-athlete children, marital role). By amalgamating the perceptions and experiences across a number of participants it is expected that they will provide a portrait of parental role as defined by this sample of parents.

Furthermore, this research, adopting the individualism/collectivism framework (Triandis, 1995) will explore parents’ role from a cultural perspective. Culture has been frequently viewed as a determinant of behaviour (Duda & Hayashi, 1998; Jowett & Ntoumanis, 2004) and evidence from such research illustrates the mediating effect of culture on issues such as provision of help (Miller, 1994) and social loafing (Earley, 1989). Indeed more recently, Vergeer (2000) claimed that culture influences interpersonal relationships and as such it should be further investigated within this field. This framework proposed by Triandis (1995) has been applied extensively for the purposes of researching cultural differences. Collectivism has been defined as a social pattern consisting of closely linked individuals who see themselves as part of one or more collectives (e.g., family, nation). Countries such as Greece, Cyprus, Brazil, India and Japan demonstrate traits that reflect collectivism (Triandis, 1995). Individualism on the other hand, has been defined as a social pattern that consists of loosely linked individuals who view themselves as independent of collectives (Triandis, 1995). Countries such as Great Britain, France, the United States and Germany demonstrate traits that reflect individualism.
The primary research questions driving this research were:

(a) How do parents understand their role in supporting the young athlete?
   i. What were their expectations and understanding at the initial stages and how have these changed over time?

(b) How specialised and/or diverse do parents understand their roles to be?
   i. How do they manage and coordinate the division of tasks between them in order to enhance the support they offer the athlete?

(c) How do parents view and experience their role in relation to the coach?
   i. What is their view regarding the coach-athlete relationship and their place (if any) within it?

(d) How do parents perceive and experience their role within the context of other roles they fulfil, such as those of wife/husband, employee?
   i. How does their wider sociocultural environment affect their understanding and experience of their role?

The aforementioned research objectives will be examined through the experiences of couples of parents from the Republic of Cyprus and the United Kingdom. Employing a qualitative analytical strategy, this study explores perceptions of both fathers and mothers about their own role and involvement together as couples. Thus, this exploratory approach represents an extension to research work that has been conducted because it allows both parents to discuss their involvement by placing their parental role within a network of other issues, including responsibilities, relationships and cultural background.
METHODS
2.1. Participants

Sampling in qualitative research is a topic rife with ambiguity. Qualitative research focuses primarily on small sample sizes, even single cases (Miles & Huberman, 1994). As a result sampling for qualitative research is determined by the purpose of the study. Purposeful sampling whilst it may be regarded as biased in a quantitative paradigm (Patton, 2002), with qualitative research it is a careful selection of participants that will generate rich data that are central to the issue under investigation.

2.1.1. Sample size

For the purposes of this study, a carefully selected sample of participants took part in in-depth qualitative interviews. Specifically eleven (11) couples of mothers and fathers were recruited from Cyprus and seventeen (17) couples were recruited from Britain, a total of fifty-six (56) participants; whose male or female child participated in sport at a good level (cf. 2.1.4. page 55). As Patton (2002) notes: “The validity, meaningfulness and insights generated from qualitative inquiry have more to do with the information richness of the cases selected and the observational and analytical capabilities of the researcher than with sample size” (p.245). Previous studies on parental involvement in sport have focused on various different sample sizes. Harwood and Knight (2009) in their study of stress experienced by youth sport parents recruited twenty-two parents, only eight of which represent four couples. Kristen and colleagues, (2003) interviewed twenty parents to examine their conceptions regarding their influence on their disabled children’s sport participation. Holt and colleagues (2008) and Cote (1999) focused their investigations on four families, whilst Hurst (2005) examined the impact on families of supporting sporting talent with seventeen families (including parents, child-athlete and siblings). As can be seen sample size varies and its adequacy is justified by the study itself.
2.1.2. **Gender and parental role**

In sport psychology previous studies have generally assumed gender (male-female) and role (father-mother) neutrality and often discuss findings with no distinction to these factors (see Reay, 1995; Wolfenden & Holt, 2005). Furthermore, previous studies (e.g., Jowett & Timson-Katchis, 2005; Macphail, Gorely, & Kirk, 2003) focus on one parent – usually the parent that the child or coach identifies as the significant or most involved one. This strategy provides limited information regarding parents’ roles. For this study it was deemed appropriate to include both parents in an attempt to uncover the interpersonal dynamic between mothers and fathers in relation to their roles in their child’s sport.

2.1.3. **Characteristics of the Child-Athletes: Age and Gender**

The child/athlete on which the interview with the parents was focused on, had to be between the ages of twelve (12) and eighteen (18). This specification was determined by previous research, which supports that adolescents of this age and their parents are more likely to be going through the transitional phase and thus are more likely to be locked into an intense relationship (Williams, 2003; Spring, Rosen & Matheson, 2002; Buysse, 1997). Furthermore, athletes of this age are participating at the junior level and evidence suggests that parents appear to have the most influence during these early stages of an athlete’s development (Cote, 1999; Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004; Bloom, 1985). Parents of both male and female athletes were invited to participate in this study. Specifically, in the Greek-Cypriot sample, six athletes were male and five were female, whereas for the British sample, 9 athletes were male and 8 were female.

2.1.4. **Characteristics of the Child-Athlete: Sport and Level of participation**

Social psychologists (Argyle & Henderson, 1990; Hinde, 1997) recommend that when investigating psychosocial experiences to identify and subsequently investigate individuals who are more likely to exhibit these psychosocial manifestations. Empirical evidence suggest (Kalinowski, 1985; Jowett & Timson-Katchis, 2005; Poczwardowski,
Barrot, & Henschen, 2002) that participants involved in individual sports (e.g., swimming, athletics, cycling, gymnastics) are more likely to be engaged in a relationship with their coach. Furthermore, media exposure, personal experiences and empirical data (Kalinowski, 1985) document the demanding nature of such sports and the amount of investment required (Hurst, 2005). For the reasons outlined here, this study focused on parents of athletes involved in comparable individual sports (see Table 1).

Table 1: Sports participated in by athletes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sport</th>
<th>Number of Athletes</th>
<th>Greek-Cypriot Sample</th>
<th>British Sample</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Swimming</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Athletics (track)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cycling (road)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Triathlon</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table tennis</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>11</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>17</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Furthermore, using the framework of Wylleman and Lavallee (2004) all participants were considered to be at the investment-mastery stage and met the following criteria: (1) sport participation over 5 years, (2) participating in their respective sport to either national or international level and (3) high frequency high intensity training as well as competing.

2.1.5. Family characteristics

As family circumstances affect the demands placed upon them and the resources (human and financial) that they have available to meet those demands (Kay, 2004) it was important to consider these in the study design. Most of the families were of average size, i.e. containing one or two children) with only two having more. More specifically in the Greek-Cypriot sample, of the eleven couples, one couple had one child
and two had three children, with the remaining having two. The British parents, two couples had only one child and the remaining fifteen couples had two children. The families were well positioned in the socio-economic spectrum: all couples were dual earner couples and represented a variety of professions that required specialist training or education. Research in parental involvement with two-parent dual earner families is particularly critical given the increase in the number of mothers entering the work force (Hayghe, 1990) and considering also the increase in societal expectations for fathers to be more actively involved in parenting (McBride & Rane, 1997). Furthermore, due to research suggesting that having children of pre-school age can lead to parental role conflict (Marchena, 2005), none of the families included in this research had any pre-school aged children. Also due to differing interpersonal family dynamics, all families included in this study were intact (i.e., children are living with biological parents).

2.2. Procedures

Initial contact was made with officials of corresponding national governing bodies (NGB) to raise interest for the study and to establish contacts with clubs, coaches and eligible potential participants. All identified parents (28 British couples and 21 Greek-Cypriot couples) were contacted by electronic mail, provided with a brief synopsis of the purpose and nature of the study and were invited to participate. The parents were approached, as they had been identified by coaches and club officials as parents of young athletes who fulfilled the aforementioned criteria regarding their participation level. Of the initial target pool of parents, seventeen British Couples and eleven Greek-Cypriot couples, expressed an interest to participate. These participants were then contacted by phone to discuss the study in further detail and allow them to ask any questions or queries they had regarding their participation. Interviews were then conducted at the participants’ home and lasted between 80 and 120 minutes. In order to allow for sufficient time flexibility and ensure that participants felt comfortable and relaxed, it was endeavoured that interviews were conducted at times when no other immediate commitments were
present and the children were absent from the home. All interviews were audio-taped with participants’ permission.

Interviews were conducted with both parents together as it was anticipated that parents’ experiences of their role, particularly in the case of intact families, would have manifested itself as a result of both parents coordinated views and behaviours. This would enable the capture of the real-life dynamic between the parents as they navigate and negotiate their way through their day-to-day life. As Peplau (2002) suggested, roles within close relationships (e.g., marital) “refer to a consistent pattern of individual activity that is directly or indirectly interdependent with the partner” (p. 222), thereby stressing the importance of considering the reciprocity between partners in defining their roles. Furthermore, this pragmatic approach to interviewing is advocated in several papers (Giacobbi, Poczwardowski, & Hager, 2005; Harwood & Knight, 2009; Hurst, 2005; Veroff et al.; 1993) on the condition that it is exercised cautiously and responsibly.

All interviews were conducted in the participants’ mother tongue; with the British parents this was English, whereas with the Greek-Cypriot parents, interviews were conducted in Greek. Interviews were then transcribed verbatim. The transcripts from the Greek-Cypriot interviews were then translated into English by the author who is fluent in both languages. Back translations were employed in instances where it was difficult to convey the original meaning. To ensure confidentiality names were not included on the transcripts and codes were assigned to each participant. For British parents, a capital “M” or “F” and a number was used (e.g., M1), whereas for Greek-Cypriot Parents a lower case “m” or “f” followed by a “-” a roman numeral (e.g., m-iv). The true identities of the participants are only known to the researcher.
2.3. Interview

The study aimed to explore how parents of competitive youth athletes perceive and experience their role as sport parents. A narrative interviewing approach was employed for this study, as such an approach is designed to answer questions such as: “What are the dimensions of the experience of being a parent to a youth athlete?” (cf. Morse & Richards, 2002). This type of approach has been used in previous phenomenological research exploring family processes both within sport (e.g., Cote, 1999) and in other settings (Boyatzis, 1998). Furthermore, such an approach would highlight the cultural context within which the participants’ personal experiences unfolded and the influences upon it. According to Mcleod (1997) “even when a teller is recounting a unique set of individual personal events, he or she can only do so by drawing upon story structures and genres drawn from the narrative resources of a culture” (p.94). Therefore a person’s own story is shaped and constrained by the culture in which he or she is immersed.

The focus of research is the lived experience and as such the interview process needs to go beyond general evaluations of these experiences and explore the detail. Therefore narrative interviewing means following participants down the experiential paths that they want to cover (Riessman, 2008). In order to encourage participants to talk about important experiences in their lives it is important that the researchers/interviewers provide a facilitating context, which includes the interview guides developed for the purposes of data collection. It is preferable to ask questions that open up topics and allow participants to construct their answers, in a way that is meaningful to them, in collaboration with the listeners (i.e. the interviewer) (Mischler, 1986). This does not exclude closed-questions that require answers such as ‘yes’ or ‘no’, as these, provided that the interview adopts a narrator-centred conversational approach can generate extended accounts (Riessman, 1993). Given the conversational style of this interviewing approach, rules of everyday conversation apply such as turn taking, relevancy and entrance and exit talk to transition into and return from a story. One story leads to
another as interviewer and narrator, together, explore the associations and meanings connecting them; a stance that allows greater flexibility of coverage (Kvale, 1997).

In order to establish a relaxed environment interviews were preceded with an informal non-recorded conversation about everyday matters. Emphasis in developing rapport was deemed important because a friendly and open interaction between the interviewer and interviewees is as important in data collection as the questions and answers themselves (Kvale, 1997; Rubin & Rubin, 2005). The main body of the interview was only loosely structured, based on 6 broad questions about the topic of inquiry, supplemented by probe questions, to ensure elaboration and to increase the richness and depth of the data collected (Patton, 2002).

The interview guide (see Appendix 4, page 132) itself mainly explored how parents, both mother and father, perceived and experienced their role as parents of a youth athlete and focused on the following issues:

1. Personal sport experiences and attitudes / beliefs about sport participation
   - An assumption is made that parents own history and beliefs regarding sport participation will influence, if not determine, why parents encouraged their children in sport and why in turn they as parents became involved in it.

2. Experiences as parents and structure of their family life
   - This aimed to understand how parents constructed their wider parenting role (e.g., what they do as parents? Or what they think they should be doing as parents?). An assumption is made that general parenting practices, as well as the structure of family life (i.e. the context in which parenting occurs, including relationships, resources, and constraints) will influence (a) why parents choose to become involved in their child’s sport and (b) how they get involved in it.

3. Experiences as sporting parents
   - This focused on how parents understand and enact their role as sport parents (e.g., what do they do? Or what they think they should be doing as sport
parents?), as well as examining key relationships with significant people, such as the coach, and exploring the context in which the athlete participates in sport (e.g., sport, club structure). An assumption is made that parental involvement in sport is causally interconnected to the setting, including its structures and actors, in which the athlete is participating in sport.

In order to ensure that both mothers’ and fathers’ views were expressed and to avoid just one parent dominating the responses, the interviewer posed the questions in the plural and addressed both mother and father, thereby creating a contingency for a jointly constructed upcoming talk. On the whole both mothers and fathers were forthcoming with information, which could be a reflection of the family characteristics (i.e. dual-earner intact families). On occasions where for example only the mother or father responded to a question, this was posed again, albeit reframed, at another opportunity within the interview and directed principally at the parent who had not responded earlier. On several occasions this initiated a discussion between the mothers and fathers which ultimately served to better highlight a topic. For example, on one occasion when asked to describe their experiences of confrontations with the coach, a mother simply allowed the father to reply as contact with the coach was primarily a task that the father engaged in. However, at a later stage of the interview, a question was posed as to whether there were any occasions where their division of tasks was reversed, and if so how they dealt with the “new” task. The mother then recalled an incidence when she collected the child from training and spoke to the coach about an issue, sparking a discussion between herself and the father on how contact and communication with the coach is and should be handled.

The researcher’s own experiences, values and interests may also have guided the questions asked during the interviews. Jones (1988) states, “an interview is a complicated shifting, social process occurring between... individual human beings, which can never be exactly replicated” (p.48). She also explains that interviewers use their
‘bias’ creatively and contingently to develop relationships with particular people so that they can tell them about their world and be understood. Thus, the researcher is used as a research instrument as they try to empathise with other human beings. No other research instrument can do this. Jones (1988) also emphasises that it is crucial that researchers choose their actions with a self-conscious awareness of why they are making them, what effects are likely to be placed upon that relationship and whether their own theories and values are affecting the understanding those of the respondents.

Thus in the interest of transparency, it should be noted that the researcher was previously an international athlete in Cyprus and has first-hand experience of the influence of parents on an athlete’s development and experience of sport. The researcher has witnessed controlling parents as well as supportive parents and has noted the wide differences which exist within sports and individual clubs on how parents are included (or excluded) from their child’s sport. This led her to question the effectiveness of the sport system in Cyprus initially, and the UK subsequently (where she worked as a coach), and the place of parents within that. Her experiences as athlete and coach, led her to believe that although sport welcomes the support of parents and recognises the important role they play in socialising athletes, at later stages of participant development the phrase ‘the best parent is the one that stays away’ has been all too frequently heard both in Cyprus and in the UK. It should also be noted, that at the time of conducting the research, the researcher was not a parent herself. The researcher was acutely aware of these issues and opinions during the research process and worked hard to remain objective whilst analysing the data.

2.4. Data Analysis

The interviews produced narrative reports of the participants’ experiences, which reflected their thoughts, perceptions, choices as well as accounts of life experiences, feeling and emotions. In order to highlight the personal experiences detailed in the transcripts, a three-stage narrative analysis was employed (Riessman, 2008).
The first stage in the analysis involved several close readings of the transcripts. By scrutinizing the transcripts, features of the narratives ‘jumped out’, often stimulated by prior theoretical interests. This process served to identify the thematic focus for the development of the plot of each narrative, for example the development of parental sport role was identified as a thematic focus of a narrative but at the first stage the analysis was centred on understanding the course of this development, rather than its content and the context in which it occurred.

The second stage in the analysis involved identifying the syntagmatic structure of the narratives as a whole. In other words their emplotted, temporal structure (Riessman, 2003): how they begin, what the issue is, what complications / factors influence the issue, what is the turning point which enables a resolution and finally what that resolution is. This emplotment strategy essentially involves selecting and assembling experiences and events so they can collectively contribute to the intended point of the story...why it is being told, in just this way, in just this setting (Mischler, 2000).

According to Webster and Mertova (2007) “the feature common to all stories, which gives them aptitude for illuminating real life situations is their narrative structure. It is not the material connection of happenings to one individual, but the connected unfolding that we can plot, which is important” (p.19). Similarly, Smith and Sparkes (2005, 2007, 2008) commented on the value of identifying the structure of narratives as it can tease out the type of narratives people tell, and more importantly draw upon, to guide their actions, thoughts and feelings and consequently shape their stories (lived experiences).

For the purposes of this stage of the analysis the framework proposed by Labov (1972) was adopted. This framework examines the structure of the narratives based on six elements: (1) abstract, (2) orientation, (3) complication, (4) resolution, (5) evaluation and (6) coda.

- The abstract signals the start of the narrative by providing a brief summary of what follows, usually achieved by a form of entrance talk as mentioned above.
- The orientation sets the context within which the narrative occurred, providing details of the time, place, actors and situation, which can either be given at the start of the narrative or can be embedded within the narrative.

- The complication(s) and resolution(s) are regarded as the main content of a narrative, usually consisting of a turning point, which could be an event (or even a series of events) and the outcomes. These events consist of ‘narrative clauses’ which are temporally crucial to the plot development, whereas clauses making up other elements of the narrative are termed ‘free clauses’, which can be re-ordered without changing the meaning of an account (Labov, 1972). Coates (2003) further distinguishes these clauses between ‘event clauses’ that describe a single moment in the past and ‘state clauses’ that describe a state of affairs persisting over time. Gergen (1988), however argues that three types of narrative form exist, which can be tied with, and expand upon, Labov’s notion of complication. In the ‘stability narrative’ events are reported as consistently good or consistently bad, in the ‘progressive narrative’ events get increasingly better over the course of the account and finally, in the ‘regressive narrative’ events get increasingly worse throughout the account.

- The evaluation element essentially answers the ‘so what’ question (Cortazzi, 1993) of a narrative and explains why the narrative is being shared. Finally, narratives are brought to a close with a ‘coda’.

The final stage of the analysis adopted a categorical-content approach, a process described by Lieblich and colleagues (1998). This involved a deductive, thematic categorisation of the units of analysis, in this case, quotations. Each category contained narrative subtext that reflected a common storyline or experience, a theme or a perspective. The categories were pre-defined based on the theoretical assumptions of the research and were: (a) Parental role negotiations broadly reflecting how parents constructed their parental role based on their backgrounds and personal beliefs (e.g., what a parent does / or should do? And why?); (b) Parental sport role enactment
broadly reflecting the roles that the parents assume in reference to their child’s sport involvement and the mechanisms of their involvement; and (c) Influence on parental sport role enactment broadly reflecting the mediating factors that come into play and impact on parental sport role enactment.

Researchers (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) have argued that allowing the definition of categories to emerge from the readings, rather than being pre-defined is preferable because it can provide a better understanding of a phenomenon about which little is known or main provide a fresh perspective on a familiar issue (Stern, 1995). However Linde (1993) argues that predefined, theory-based categories as opposed to empirical categories, as suggested by the text, are not as different as they seem, because researchers inevitably and unavoidably bring their theoretical assumptions to the reading of the text. Finally each category was inductively examined in terms of its breadth (i.e. level of generality), content, meaning and relationship to the other categories and indeed the narrative as a whole. Though this approach, when used alone, can be problematic as it seeks to examine individual parts of the story, when combined with the preceding holistic structural analysis, contextual factors are considered and therefore the richness and depth of the narrative can be successfully conveyed (Lieblich et al., 1998).

2.5. Trustworthiness

In assessing trustworthiness Bosk (1979) posed a crucial question: “all field work done by a single field-worker invites the question, why should we believe it?” (p.193, cited in Maxwell, 1992, p.279). In relation to narrative projects, two levels of validity are significant: (a) the story told by the research participant (i.e. the parents in this case) and (b) the validity of the interpretations (the story told by the researcher) (Riessman, 2008).

With regards to the first level of validity, the researcher sought to encourage participants to share their stories by establishing a relaxed environment, as described earlier in this
section. Furthermore, Rubin and Rubin (2005) argue that sharing common ground with participants in terms of race, ethnicity, cultural and educational background, makes the interviewer seem less threatening, and participants feel that the interviewer is more sympathetic and understanding. The author, and interviewer, was of dual nationality (Greek-Cypriot and British), fluent in both English and Greek, a former high-level athlete and coach; her cultural and sporting background allowed her to naturally establish a connection and acceptance with the participants. However, participants were encouraged at the outset and throughout interviews to share as much as they felt comfortable and not to assume the researcher was aware of issues simply because of her background.

Furthermore, a four-point criterion for establishing both aforementioned levels of validity was employed: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (see Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility was ensured through member checks (Patton, 2002; Seale, 1999) as participants were given copies of the interview transcripts prior to the data analysis commencing and were asked to report any omissions, misrepresentations or inconsistencies they noted. No such reports were made. Credibility was further ascertained during the interview process itself, by continually encouraging the participants to elaborate on their interpretations and responses (Kvale, 1997). Moreover, by conducting the interviews with both parents together, rather than separately, it enabled triangulation as the perspective of one family member (i.e. father) and the information given by them, was immediately compared and verified or disputed by the other family member (i.e. mother) so that a consistent picture was established.

Following the analysis, participants were given a summary of the results and conclusions and were invited to comment on these should they feel that inconsistencies were noted, as the credibility of the researcher’s representations can be strengthened if they are recognisable to the participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As per the transcribed interviews, participants did not report any concerns. Furthermore, the translation process in the case of the Greek interviews, also acted as verification of the
interpretations. Temple and Young (2005) have argued that adopting a researcher/translator dual role can have validity significance and can be employed as a method for checking interpretations.

In terms of transferability, Charmaz (1995) has argued that qualitative researchers should not generalise from their data to the wider world; rather, the data is related to the wider world. Thus the findings in this research do not have an explanatory power but simply provide a starting point for further studies to develop. With regards to dependability, an audit trail was created at each stage of the coding process that included memos containing developing ideas to enable other researchers to see how and why interpretations were made, which was regularly examined throughout the research process. Confirmability was established in part by the member checks, as described above, and in part by the aforementioned audit trail, as it provided the reflexive element of the study. Sparkes (2002) argues that it is almost impossible for a researcher to remain completely neutral and objective and therefore, the audit trail, enabled an understanding of the entire analytical process adopted in this study.

2.6. Ethical Considerations
The practical issues listed by the British Psychological Society’s code of conduct, ethical principles and guidelines (2000) of competence, consent, confidentiality and personal conduct were addressed as participants were informed of the nature of the research and what their participation would entail prior to agreeing to take part. Written informed consent was sought when participants were sent a detailed letter instructing them of their right to withdraw and assuring confidentiality. Permission to audiotape the interviews was requested prior to beginning and participants were reminded at the start of each interview of their right to withdraw, review the tape afterwards or request comments to be removed. All participants were given the researchers contact details and requests were invited regarding the final report prior to publication.
With regards to the worthiness and content of the research and its effect on the participants (Miles & Huberman, 1994) the researcher was clear about the aims of the research (the study of why and how parents of youth athletes at the investment mastery stage, get involved) and participants tended to agree that this was a worthwhile topic, hence why they volunteered to participate. Many felt that they were required to play a big role but their views were often overlooked in favour of those by athletes and the coach and were glad of the opportunity to share their experiences. Although participants were made aware of the purpose of the research it was impossible to forewarn them about the content of the interviews as this could not be anticipated. Trust issues (Miles & Huberman, 1994) were addressed, as the researcher was open about her background and professional interests.

Furthermore Riessman (2008) argues that taking work back to the participants themselves, as per the member checking procedures described earlier, is an important practice in terms of establishing an ethical research relationship with participants. Individual participants can then check whether their identities had been adequately disguised, and informed consent can therefore be re-confirmed, including permission to use particular quotes from the transcriptions.

Finally this study sought the approval of the University’s Ethical Advisory Committee.
RESULTS
Results revealed that parents’ narratives are predominantly of a relational nature. Their stories evolved principally in the interpersonal rather the intrapersonal realm, constantly referring to others, for example the coaches, the child-athlete, and other family members. Narratives highlighted the breadth and content of the parents’ portfolio of roles that they developed over time, as a function of their child-athletes’ sport involvement and the process by which they were negotiated. Three narrative types were identified based on the coda element, which centred on the effective (or ineffective) negotiation of those roles: (a) the balanced narrative – “we are a well-oiled machine”, (b) the seesaw narrative – “we are managing, just about“ and finally (c) the unbalanced narrative – “it’s as if we are trying to co-ordinate the uncoordinated” (Table 2).

Table 2: Identified Narratives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Complicating Action 1</th>
<th>Balanced Narrative</th>
<th>Seesaw Narrative</th>
<th>Unbalanced Narrative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Transition into sport</td>
<td>Smooth</td>
<td>Minor issues balancing existing and new demands</td>
<td>Already struggling to balance work and family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resolution 1</td>
<td>Responding to initial demands</td>
<td>Focus on opportunity provision</td>
<td>Focus on opportunity provision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complicating Action 2</td>
<td>Transition into higher participation</td>
<td>Identifying new sport role</td>
<td>Not adequately prepared</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resolution 2</td>
<td>Caring for Athlete</td>
<td>Caring for the child</td>
<td>Caring for the child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Caring for child</td>
<td>Providing Practical Support</td>
<td>Providing practical support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Providing Emotional support</td>
<td>Providing Emotional Support</td>
<td>Providing emotional support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Facilitating coach-athlete relationship</td>
<td>Facilitating coach-athlete relationship</td>
<td>Providing emotional support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Facilitating intra-familial relationships</td>
<td>Looking after family unit</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation</td>
<td>Pro-active engagement, high role awareness</td>
<td>Passive approach to clarifying role</td>
<td>Role overload and role conflict</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coda</td>
<td>“We are a well-oiled machine”</td>
<td>“We are managing...just about”</td>
<td>It’s as if we are trying to co-ordinate the uncoordinated</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.1. The Balanced Narrative: “...We are a well-oiled machine...” (7 British couples; 4 Greek-Cypriot couples)

Complicating Action One. The primary complicating action around which these parents’ narratives evolved concerned the athletes’ transition into sport and how they negotiated their parental role as a result. Parents talked about how their children came to participate in sport, which was primarily as a function of their own (parents’) experiences in, and their views, about sport. On the whole, parents in this group reflected favourable attitudes toward sport participation. All the parents in this group, both mothers and fathers had experienced competitive sport, at least within the school setting and had actively encouraged their children from a very young age to engage in sport and physical activity, and scoped out local sport provision early on.

Getting into sport, was fairly natural to be honest, we always said we wanted him to develop interests... and it came as no surprise really that we turned to sport for that...I love sport, it was a big part of my life growing up, I always said it didn’t matter what sport my children got into, as long as they did some sport (F4)

Though the athletes’ transition into sport was a key focus for the narratives, parents explained how at this initial stage they did not experience a significant change in the demands placed on them and consequently how they as parents negotiated their parental role. As illustrated in the following quotes, the reason for this lies primarily in the high value ascribed to creative and physical activities by these parents and how these had been embedded in their family life prior to the athletes entering organised sport.

You could say life was simpler before she got into sport, but to be honest, if you really think about it, at least at that stage anyway, it wasn’t. There was nothing different about it, if it wasn’t sport it would have been something else... I don’t know any parent with children under ten that wouldn’t testify to how demanding children can be and how challenging it is to manage family life with a professional life (M9)
It’s like when you first have kids and you find yourself wondering what you did with your free time before you had them, but you always find ways to fill your time don’t you? And it’s the same with us now... Before she started sport, it was about looking after them on a day-to-day basis, you know doing all the boring stuff parents do, shopping, cooking, laundry, it’s all about doing what’s best for them, nurturing them, encouraging them to develop their interests...and if you think about it, it’s was no different when she started sport, we still did those things, but the focus shifted on to sport, before it was lots of things really, she was trying things on for size, and eventually she settled on sport (F17)

We were always what you would call an active family, from a very young age we did lots of things together...even when they were tiny babies we still went to baby classes for music and movement, and tumble tots and all those sorts of things, so getting into organised sport was just another activity for us...that’s just who we are...it’s important for us to do things together...we both work full time so we need that quality time and for us that’s what it means...so things didn’t really change, it was just a continuation of what we were already doing (M15)

Resolution one. As parents’ narratives progressed to their first resolution they described how they fulfilled their role in relation to their child’s sport participation. In doing so, parents discussed that in addition to the tasks they already did as parents (e.g., satisfying basic needs such as food, shelter, etc.) the primary focus was providing the child with opportunities to engage in sport and cultivate their interest and acting as positive role models that reinforce those interests.

It’s not just about providing the opportunities though, it goes beyond that, sending him to a club and essentially passing him over to the coach and then when they are home you are a couch potato for example, that means nothing! Why should they do something that you can’t be bothered to do either, it didn’t matter how much we said sport was good for you, if we didn’t do it ourselves...So it’s not just about providing the opportunities, it was important to us that we set
things up at home so that they could make the most of those opportunities... and that’s not just about sport, that goes for everything (f-i)

When you are young you always say you don’t want to be like your parents, but low and behold you grow up, you become a parent and you find yourself doing as your parents did, unless of course something they did left a really bad impression on you that you make a concerted effort not to do that... When I was growing up, mum and dad made sure I did whatever I wanted, I don’t mean that in a bad way, but if I wanted to try dance then I did, If I wanted to try music then I did...I tried so many things and it was great, but I never really stuck to anything for longer than say a year...you can put that down to just being a kid or look at it from another point of view, mum and dad worked really hard to give me the chance to do all those things, but they never did any of those themselves, we didn’t really have any common stuff that we could do together, and I guess that’s partly why we encouraged her towards sport, It’s one thing that we could do together, or at least be able to talk about and be on the same wave length. (M5)

At that age really for us it was important that she decide herself what she wanted to do, obviously with our interests being in sport then we did undoubtedly influence her that way but really we tried our best to give her a taster of things and when she settled on swimming, we scoped things out for her...She doesn’t actually go to the local club, there’s a club literally down the road from us at the local swimming baths but having looked into things we felt that the club she is at now, which is actually about 10miles away was better for her...it did make things a little bit harder for us, or less convenient actually but being there was better for her so that was that (F5).

Complicating Action Two: The second complicating action discussed at length by the parents in this type of narrative evolved around the athletes’ transition into higher levels of sport participation, with increased frequency and intensity of training. For these parents this turning point, though anticipated, had a distinct influence on their role as
parents. It was at this turning point that parents specifically talked about a new clearly defined role for them as parents in relation to their child’s sport participation. The parents described how they had to renegotiate their parent role as a whole, to allow for the increased demands placed on them by the additional sub-parental role of sport. In doing so they had to consider a number of things namely the details of the child’s sport participation, such as training and competition schedule and whether as a family they were able to deliver. To do this, the first task parents fulfilled was to establish a working relationship with the athlete’s coach and to glean as much information as they could from the coach with regards to what was required.

The big change really was when she moved up...everything just stepped up a gear, suddenly she went from training twice a week for about an hour each time, to training four times a week for about an hour and a half each time...and it went from just being one afternoon and a Saturday morning, to three afternoons and an early morning start! That meant a lot of changes for us, all of a sudden you start to feel like a taxi driver, but between two careers, a house to look after and another child with his own interests, it’s quite a balancing act, we had to look at things carefully and plan, we used to have a normal calendar in the kitchen, but that was no good after a while, we had to get one of those weekly planners instead that has everyone’s activities on so we could coordinate things...(M9)

You know there’s this saying that if you fail to prepare, then you should prepare to fail, and that’s what we had to do...we had to prepare, which meant finding out all we needed to know, which mainly came from speaking to the coach, we had to know what was on the cards...getting him to and from training was one thing, but to succeed in sport it takes a lot more...(F10)

Really we had to reassess things for our family as a whole, could we do this? Could we really support her in doing this properly, there’s no point doing it half-heartedly, what’s the benefit in that? so we did, we had to think about all the ferrying around we would have to do, what that meant for our free time as a
family and time to do the basics such as the housework for example, did we have the time? (M15)

It was a big ask, but when it comes to your kids, you make the time, you find the money, you manage things...for us there was only one question, we knew we could do this, we knew we could commit to this, you know forewarned is forearmed, and we’d already been in contact with the coach to establish what the change meant, but there was only one question and that was whether she was prepared for the commitment of it all (F17)

Resolution Two: As the narratives progressed towards their resolution parents reflected on how they fulfilled their newly defined sport parent role. Parents identified that their role primarily involved five elements: (a) Caring for the athlete, (b) Caring for the child, (c) Providing emotional support, (d) Facilitating the coach-athlete relationship and (e) facilitating intra-familial relationships.

As part of caring for the athlete parents talked about the importance of supporting the coaching process and “not undoing what the coach and athlete work hard for in training”(M17) such as “Getting their nutrition spot on is crucial for them and it can be a challenge, it’s time consuming sometimes and it’s definitely added to the weekly shopping bill” (m-iv) and “The sport needs specific clothing, shorts and a t-shirt simply will not do, and with training being so frequent we needed to buy a few of each just in case something doesn’t get washed and dried in time” (M4). Also described as part of this, parents talked about attending sporting events, investing the necessary financial resources, helping with schoolwork and assisting the athletes in balancing school and sport.

The key difference between caring for the athlete and caring for the child was the association to the sport. Caring for the athlete involved directly supporting the coaching process with secondary tasks, whereas caring for the child did not consider the coaching process.
process directly. In discussing their role as *caring for the child*, their role descriptions often included activities and behaviours synonymous with those of general parenting. Activities such as cooking for, doing laundry for, cleaning up after, taking care of and engaging in activities with their children were discussed: “Being there and doing things that parents do. Getting them clothes and food and those sorts of things. Providing for them and at times teaching them as well” (f-i) and “As their parent yeah I am there to help and support them through their sport, but I am a parent nonetheless, that doesn’t change because of sport and I will still discipline them when I have to” (F5) and “I am a parent first and then a sport parent. I do what I have to, and support them with sport, but I am no different to other parents. The sport simply adds to parenting, it takes nothing away” (F10).

*Providing emotional support* was frequently mentioned, particularly by the mothers. This was accomplished by offering suggestions, but not directions and by being aware that their support, specifically that relating to the sport, came secondary to that of the coach. In this respect parents were like support staff to the coach: “We don’t know the sport inside out to the extent that they [athlete and coach] do. I ask if he [athlete] needs advice, I try not to offer advice unsolicited, I listen without telling him what to do” (M4) and “I don’t tell her that she can’t do this or can’t do that, I try and make suggestions. When it comes to the sport, it’s best to run things by the coach as well” (m-xi).

Parents also discussed their role as it refers to the relationship that their child/athletes formed and established with their coaches. Some parents perceived that at times the relationships that the coaches had with their children were incongruent, particularly in terms of communication, which sometimes they felt was ineffective. This led parents to act as *facilitators of the coach-athlete relationship*. One mother spoke about her daughter’s experience in trying to relate with the coach after an extended period of injury rehabilitation,
It was difficult for both of them, she was at a peak and suddenly it all came crashing down, everything they worked for went down the pan and they were both upset and angry not at each other, but it seemed to be that way at times so we tried to keep the momentum going by talking to both of them separately, keep them in touch with each other (M5)

Furthermore, because parents did not want to be seen as interfering, as it tended to elicit negative responses, parents enabled the coach and the child/athlete to direct their own relationship. Parents actively resisted infringing on the coach-athlete relationship through daily role negotiation:

If there were something I thought that the coach needed to know and deal with I would say: “Have you talked to your coach about that?” And try to help him to do that...it’s difficult because I always feel that I am walking a line there. You know part of me wants to take over and fix things for him by talking to the coach direct, which I will do if needed, but I try to urge him to do that himself, It's something that we have to negotiate with him (F11)

In addition to roles described that focused on the child-athlete, parents discussed other roles that were focused on others’ needs and reactions namely their spouse and the other children. Parents described how they communicated and arranged the logistics of catering for all the children’s needs, and not merely focusing on the needs of the child/athlete. As part of this role parents focused their efforts and attention on each individual child separately, on their requirements and their wants, independently of those of their siblings. In doing so, the role served to facilitate intra-familial relationships which, interestingly this role was one identified principally by the mothers of this study, as this was a special concern for them. They offered recommendations, talked with children and explained things to them, emphasising that they were important. As facilitators they made it clear to the children that their presence was important in the
family. Their objective was to firstly to safeguard and secondly to help improve child/athlete-children relationships.

Life is very much arranged around the sport and it’s important that the other kids don’t feel that they take a back seat, that they feel that they are as important as the athlete and that’s down to us [parents] to make sure it doesn’t happen, but when it doesn’t they automatically point the finger of blame at their brother, we’ve tried to make sure that [athlete] knows that the sport is important and we will support him but not at the expense of neglecting his sister... It’s a real balancing act cause at the same time [athlete] mustn’t feel that their sport is suffering because we have to pay attention to his sister (M11)

I do worry about them, she spends so much time in training and she still has to allow for study time as well, I just want to make sure that as siblings they have quality time together to bond ... It’s all well and good telling the other kids they are important too and doing stuff with them as well, but it’s important that things are done as a family and not just as spending time with one child here and another there (m-v)

Issues also emerged with respect to the parents’ marital relationship, including those regarding family support and more specifically support for each other. Parents spoke passionately about the importance of leading a balanced life and making time for their spouse;

Work can sometimes be crazy and family life is also busy that unless we prioritise it will become a constant rush from one thing to the next...so we take the time to talk things through and make sense of it all ... It would be easy to get caught up in it all if we weren’t careful and organised, but at the end of the day we are not just parents, we are not just sporting parents, I am also a wife, it’s part of who I am and it’s important that I don’t lose sight of that (M4)

For me it’s stress relief in a way, I cope with the daily pace of life through our relationship...at night when we have that little time to ourselves, just us when the
kids are asleep, that’s our time to talk and chill out recharge for the next day. It’s not always easy to find the time but we have to for our sakes and the kids (f-xi)

**Evaluation.** A degree of reflective evaluation was evident throughout the narratives. While discussing their involvement as sport parents, parents described themselves, the relationships they had with others, and simultaneously interpreted their role and experiences (how and why). Parents engaged in a very careful consideration of all the resources at their disposal, against all the demands placed on them by their family life (including caring for their marital relationship, their other children and the relationships between the siblings). Parents’ understanding of what “sport parenting” is all about, and indeed what general parenting is, dominated how they perceived and enacted their roles. In figuring out their roles parents had to consider those around them, for example the coach, as they felt they should not infringe on their role [coach’s] and threaten the coach’s professional expertise in any way. They found that their relationship with their child’s coach faced enduring issues of boundary negotiation. The existence of the child/athlete “who in one respect belongs to both” obligates them to come into contact with the coach and establish a close working relationship with them.

It’s funny you know, sometimes it feels that the coach is the number one adult in her life and it’s not easy to just accept sometimes, she is my daughter and she is his athlete, we have to learn to share her and work together for her sake...at the end of the day, he is the coach and without coaching she wouldn’t be able to develop as much in sport, having a coach also gives us a bit more piece of mind, I’d much prefer her to do her sport with the coach there to help her and keep her safe, rather than her just trying and going it alone...and it’s important that the coach knows that we appreciate what he does for her, so that he then in turn appreciates us and respects us too, it may well be all about them (coach and athlete) but we prop them up (F9)
Parents felt that their role was crucial in positively affecting the development of their child in sport and the relationship their child develops with the coach. Their expressed concern of doing what is best for their child, and doing it well, without compromising their ability to deliver against other demands placed on them by their other roles (e.g., professional, spousal, parental to other children) was linked with their ability to freely and pro-actively engage with the sporting environment in which their child participated in. In doing so parents were empowered and able to clearly establish the demands placed on them. Consequently they maintained control by clearly defining the new sport dimension to their parental role.

I know it sounds a bit too clinical in a way but sometimes you have to take a business-like look at your life...you know in work you plan things, you try and be as methodical and systematic as you can to make sure you deliver against the goals set by yourself, by your line manager, by the business needs...and that’s the key here, we want to give them everything, to have the chances we didn’t have, to be the best they can be, but there are only so many hours in the day, there’s only so much we can do ourselves, if we don’t adopt this approach, then it will be chaos...(f-i)

*Coda.* On the whole these narratives reflected a high level of role awareness. Parents acknowledged the interdependency inherent between all their assumed roles (i.e., the parental role, the spousal role, the homemaker role, the sport parent role and their professional role) and relied on clarity of role to be able to successfully fulfil those roles and cope with the multiple demands placed on them. For these parents, their narratives evolved around shared resources and suggest the importance of parents clear and interactional role negotiation and subsequent role enactment. This has been developed over time and with mutual engagement with the local context, in this case their family and the sport setting in which the athletes participates in sport. From this point of view the parents can be said to have formed a community of practice consisting of a shared
repertoire of various resources, which as described in their narratives can be negotiated and strategically deployed to support each other in fulfilling their respective role.

We are a well-oiled machine in this family, everything has to run like clockwork, we are juggling lots of things at once, and it’s what we want don’t get me wrong, we made a choice, an informed decision, to do this, but we have a clear understanding of what it is we have to do, who does what and when, it’s the only way to manage things, and it works for us, we still have our free time as individuals, as a family, it’s a delicate operation but its great...keep us on our toes that’s for sure, but I wouldn’t have it any other way...some people might look at us and think: oh my god, it’s madness...but there’s method in our madness (m-iv)

3.2. The seesaw narrative: “...We are managing, just about...” (6 British couples, 3 Greek-Cypriot couples)

Complicating Action One. Similarly to the balanced narrative described above, the initial complicating action centred on the athletes’ initial transition into sport. The parents described how their children came to participate in their chosen sports, which was primarily driven by the parents themselves. As with the parents in the balanced narratives, these parents’ views regarding sport participation were positive, and parents felt that providing their children with opportunities to engage in sport, would “stand them in good stead” as they grew up and “teach them valuable life skills”. Though not all parents in these narratives experienced competitive sport themselves, particularly the mothers (none of the 3 Greek-Cypriot mothers and only 2 of the 6 British mothers), they still conveyed approving and positive views of sport. Their narratives highlighted that they actively encouraged their children to engage in sport (and other extra-curricular activities) by providing opportunities to do so which for them was a key element of “being a good parent”.

I did loads of sport growing up, throughout school and uni too, and I love it...and though I probably couldn’t recognise other benefits to it when I was younger, it did teach me a lot...and as a parent you want to make sure your child gets to
experience those things…It’s what being a parent is all about, giving them chances to experience new things, and let’s face it, when I was a kid, if I didn’t go to the local footie team, I could still have a kick-about on the street with my mates, so I still got to play and be competitive, maybe not in a formally organised way, but believe me us kids were organised…these days though kids don’t have that chance, how many kids do you see playing on the streets these days, aside from the safety issue, people just don’t like to see that, people don’t like that to happen on the doorstep…and I’ll put my hand up I’m one of them…so as a parent we need to make sure now more than ever that we give them those opportunities…what kind of a parent are we if we don’t try to give them that? (F8)

Parenting is the biggest test any person has to go through…and it’s the one thing we can’t afford to fail at…and for us that is very important…to do right by them and be good parents and give them a good start, and giving them the chance to do sport or ballet or drama or whatever it is they want to do, is a key part of that…we can’t as parents teach them all these things, we can only give them a small taster of a few things…but to get a proper feel of something and decide if they want to get stuck in, which is really when they get the benefits, then it’s up to us to give them the chance (M6)

Parents reported that their children’s participation in sport increased the demands placed on them, even at the early stages, however this was mainly with respect to managing their time and providing transport to and from the sessions, which usually occurred at the end of the school day.

It wasn’t a big deal back then, it meant more taxi runs…because you do end up feeling like a taxi driver, three days a week, you had to pick them up after school, drive them across town for their session, which lasted only 45 minutes, which meant really it was pointless even trying to go home at that point, so you had to hang around while they were training, and wait for them to get changed which always took ages, cause they had to catch up with friends and then it was
straight home to cook dinner and make sure they still had time for homework and a bit of chilling out time. Really if you think about it, it wasn’t the transport per se, it was really the hanging around at the session that did it, but then again it was nice to be there and watch them and see how they did...plus you got to know other parents too which was good...but it took some coordination between the two of us...(M12)

The big issue really, the main problem that complicates things is that school and work don’t mix...what I mean is, that school is from 9am until 3:30pm, but work is 9-5! I don’t see how any parent can manage that without compromising somewhere, somehow...all the other things you have to do are doable, but the timings really mess things up (F16)

In the case of the Greek-Cypriot parents, the issue of work was particularly difficult for parents to negotiate.

It’s very hard...school starts at 7:30 in the morning, we have to be at work for 8:30...that works great, but school finishes at 13:30...then what? If it’s summer time, it’s not so bad, you’ve got the obligatory midday break, between 13:00 and 16:00, so you can pick them up from school, take them home, sort them with lunch, they can choose to have a rest or do their homework and then when you need to head back out to work, you drop them off on the way...winter time though, means no midday break so work goes through until 16:30 but school still ends at 13:30...that is a killer...They are a bit older now, so they can walk to and from school with their friends, there’s a group of 8 of them in the neighbourhood so they all walk together, but even so, even if you don’t have to pick them up you still need to be home for them for lunch...and you still need to drop them off to their session and it’s not as if you can rely on public transport, it’s so unreliable it might as well be non-existent (m-ii)

I’m sure if you surveyed all the kids that do sport outside of school on a regular basis they must have either one parent that doesn’t work, or rely on extended
family members or friends for help, or have a parent with an extremely understanding boss...cause really if you can’t physically get to the session, then that’s it! It’s all about the transport, that is the number one factor to consider... and though arguably simple it is surprisingly complicated (f-ix)

Resolution one. As parents’ narratives progressed, the parents explained how they enacted their role in supporting their children’s participation in sport at this early stage. As with comments made earlier in their narrations, parents talked about the provision of transport, as the essential means by which opportunities were provided. Other issues that parents reflected upon were the financial support, which was noted as being comparatively lower to later stages of sport participation.

Complicating action two: When athletes reached a higher level of engagement in sport, reflected in higher frequency of training, and longer training sessions, it signified a turning point in parents’ level of involvement. Parents explained that at this stage greater commitment was required by the athletes, which meant more, longer and harder training sessions every week. Though the parents explained that they expected this change, they admitted that they hadn’t considered the implications of such changes until they were faced with them.

We’ve both done sport, we both knew that sooner or later, the way things were going, that he would move up on to the next group, but until it happened really we didn’t really think about it much...I remember we had our annual pre-season meeting with the coach and he gave us the training schedule and a competition calendar and suddenly we thought Oh s***! (M16)

We knew what was coming, but until it actually came to that point we didn’t really consider it...I mean there was no question of whether we would be able to or not, it was simply just a case of reassessing things and figuring things out, you know who does what, who has what on what day...which one of us can do more runs things like that...(F12)
However, in addition to the expected increase in time commitment, particularly as it pertained to provision of transport, parents found themselves with a change in the nature of the demands placed on them. For example, parents referred to the additional requirements for careful consideration of the athletes’ nutrition and the consideration of training and competition schedules when planning family excursions and holidays. Mothers in particular spoke passionately about the increased pressure on their time in terms of increased housework demands, which invariably were duties that mothers took on:

Things certainly changed...things were more important now, it wasn’t just about getting her to training, it was making sure she was able to do the training, and that meant thinking about her nutrition and not just about what she was going to eat but when she was going to eat as well! The extra sessions, meant extra housework too...sounds ridiculous but more sessions meant more laundry, which meant more ironing...which meant less free time to chill out...it’s like a chain, one thing impacts on the next...but as far as her training was concerned all the links in the chain had to be solid, otherwise it just didn’t work (M8)  

There was a lot more things to think about now, it wasn’t just about transport, it wasn’t just about showing up at the occasional competition, it was demanding now, for her, obviously but for us too...it still comes down to time management, because it just means more things need doing...but the main goal didn’t change though, it’s still about giving her the opportunity to do it, and at this stage, having the opportunity means all these new things for her and for us...(m-vi)

Parents explained how they had to carefully consider their available resources and other demands such as their careers and the family unit as a whole, in determining their role and what they each had to do. The critical moderating factor in determining how the relevant tasks were delegated between mother and father was the type of job they each had and the flexibility it allowed. However, despite parents efforts to consider all the
contributory factors, they commented on the impact of unexpected changes on their planning and hence their ability to “do what needs to be done”.

It’s really challenging, and not just when it all first changed, I think that’s probably one thing that we didn’t expect, I think we figured that ok once we figure this all out, then it will work like clockwork, but it’s a constant challenge, and no matter how much we plan, there’s always something we haven’t considered or something has changed, which usually has to do with work. It just feels like we are always playing catch up… (F8)

One reason highlighted by parents, which complicated matters and affected their planning, was their communication with their children’s coach and the athletes themselves.

It’s quite frustrating you know, we are trying our best, and so much is expected from us, and a lot of it is always hinted…it’s about what she has to do and what she can expect from the coach, but a lot of that depends on us and we need to know what that is and we don’t always do…we need more information and we take some of the blame for that ourselves, but the coach really should be more forthcoming with us and all parents really, in our case, I don’t think we ever really talked things through properly with the coach did we, we just kind of let things happen and develop, we crossed bridges when we came to them and really that’s how it’s always been (M13)

He may be only 15 but he is the one putting in all the effort he is the one competing, so we respond to his needs, just as we respond to what the other kids want. And if we don’t quite do as we are supposed to then we move on and change from there. It’s like I said before, we don’t always know what to do that’s why we need information (f-ix)

We need more information, and ok we can go and dig it out but we have a lot of things to balance, a lot of things to consider to be able to provide them with the opportunity to do the sport, cause really that’s what it’s about, so really the
information has to be forthcoming, we shouldn’t have to work hard to get it, at the end of the day we don’t know what it is we don’t know...we don’t have the time to source out all the info that we need, yet by the same token, the coach doesn’t seem to have the time for us, not that I blame him, as far as I know he is a volunteer but even so, if not the coach then the club need to deal with it... We need information as well; we need them more than anyone (F8)

It’s like sometimes they expect us to know it all, they have their own little language and code speak and they all know what they are doing, and they just assume that we do, our role constantly changes and evolves but surely that process and transition would be a lot smoother and easier for them let alone us if we got support as well (m-ii)

Resolution two: The narratives of these parents indicated that parents did reassess their role in light of the increased demands. However when discussing how this newly defined role was enacted, it transpired that this was not as smooth as parents hoped it would be. Narratives revealed that the parental role consisted of five elements: (a) caring for the child, (b) providing practical support (e.g., transport, financial) (c) providing emotional support, (d) facilitating the coach-athlete relationship and (e) looking after the family unit.

As with the ‘balanced’ narrative, parents discussed caring for their children by way of general parenting practices. Despite parents explaining that they did reassess their role in light of the increased sporting demands placed on them, their narratives revealed that in doing so, they did not distinguish between general parenting practices and sport specific parenting practises, as parents in the ‘balanced’ narrative had done. This could however, be a reflection of the difficulty they encountered in establishing what was required from the sport, as highlighted earlier.
Parents highlighted that the biggest impact on the role was noted with regards to the provision of practical support, principally in terms of transport provision. Interestingly, narratives revealed that in the case of the Greek-Cypriot parents, the fathers almost exclusively fulfilled this role, whereas in the case of the British parents mothers and fathers fulfilled the role equally.

Parents discussed providing emotional support at length, particularly in the context of transport provision. Parents explained that the most frequent opportunity for communication with their children involved the time spent in the car on the way to a training session or on the way home. They explained that the time spent in the car was particularly useful as it enabled them to engage with their children and establish if there was a need for additional support.

With teenagers it can be hard to know when they need help, they don’t always want to talk to you, as a parent you are not really the person they turn to, so when we are in the car, well it’s like having a captive audience, we just have a bit of a chit-chat and that usually tells me all I need to know and gives me a way in to talk to her and see if I can help, or give her some advice...When we are at home, there’s usually other things grabbing her attention, and mine to be fair, we are a family of four so time at home ironically enough isn’t always the best time to try and talk (M13)

Giving him support is probably the most important thing, but it’s actually the most difficult thing to give because he isn’t particularly receptive to it...I’m sure that’s not unique to him, he is at that difficult age after all, that’s why dropping him off for training gives us a bit of time to talk, find out what’s going on with him, if there is anything bothering him and if we can help. And most of the time, if there is something, it’s all about making sure he knows we are there if he needs us (f-ix)
In the case of the Greek-Cypriot mothers, who provided transport only on limited occasions, the issue of encouragement and emotional support was of great importance, and they felt that they had to make a concerted effort to find time to communicate with their children.

I do worry about that sometimes, she is at that age now when she isn’t that communicative you know as all teenagers are, that’s why it’s great when I give her a lift, but to be honest my work means that it’s usually her dad that’s the taxi so I need to make time elsewhere...so dinner time is usually a good one, or a shopping trip together always does the trick...I mean the important thing is that we know what’s going on and whether I find out or [father] finds out it doesn’t matter I guess...once we know there’s something then we work through it together (m-vi)

Parents ensured that they communicated to their children their sense of pride in their achievements and their approval of their participation.

He knows we are really happy that he is doing so well and we are very proud of him, every time he is back from training we ask how things are going, we really have to make a big effort in that respect, because our time together on a day to day basis is actually quite limited...we know he understands why that is, but sometimes it’s a bit frustrating (M12)

Facilitating athletes’ relationships with their coaches was another dimension parents discussed as part of their newly defined role. Parents explained that by way of supporting their children, they indirectly helped athletes manage their relationships with their coaches. Being able to balance the demands of school and sport, was an important issue, and though parents did not want to interfere, they did offer advice to their children in terms of how to approach their coaches or sometimes even their teachers. Unlike the parents of the balanced narratives who facilitated the coach-athlete relationship by liaising both with the athlete and the coach, for the parents in the seesaw
narrative, this facilitation was only focused towards the athletes. As highlighted earlier in their narratives, parents struggled to establish working relationships with their children’s coach and were therefore reluctant to approach the coach on issues regarding the coach-athlete relationship.

The coach is a very important person to her, and though we don’t get on as well, we know that he is important to her…and we also know that as a teenager she can be a bit difficult...the issue here is that it takes a lot of commitment to do what she is doing, it needs commitment from us, it needs commitment from her and it needs commitment from her coach...they need to have a good relationship to be able to spend that much time together in that intense an environment, so we always ask how they are getting on...We’ve always tried to stress that she needs to be respectful, not just to her coach but to everyone, manners are very important to us, so no matter what she might be like at home, when it comes to how she is with others she knows she has to behave...but at the same time we encourage her to speak her mind, so long as it’s done respectfully (F1)

He is quite shy you know...sport has brought him out of his shell a little bit but he still is shy...he will give you information if you ask for it specifically, but he doesn’t really offer it off his own back, even with us, when we chat, he can talk a lot, if you keep him talking...on his own, he might just stay quiet...we don’t have much of an opportunity to talk to the coach, we don’t have a lot of time, and to be honest neither does the coach, and we are just mindful that there are certain things that the coach must know and take into account, like when its exam time at school or if he’s not well and feeling under the weather, so we try and encourage him to talk to his coach, the coach needs that information...we would rarely interfere...they’ve been working together for about two, almost three years now, and in that time I think we’ve probably only approach the coach with something specific four times, if that...once it was because he hadn’t been well and was up sick, but felt better during the day and wanted to go training, so we let the coach know, another was after some competition when he hadn’t done
really well and he took it really badly and didn’t want to go to training for a few
days, we let the coach know and he had a chat with him and soon enough he was
back training again…things like that...(F6)

One of the principal factors that the parents had to consider as part of their daily role
negotiation was their family unit. Of primary concern for the parents was the balancing
of all children’s needs, including the maintenance of healthy family relationships.
Although both fathers and mothers identified the importance of “being there for both of
them [children]”, how this role was enacted was reported differently between mothers
and fathers. Similarly, with the parents in the balanced narrative described earlier,
fathers appeared more focused on the logistical issues involved with catering for the
needs of everyone in the family, whether individually or as a whole. For the mothers
however, the focus was primarily on the family unit as a whole, specifically as it related
to enhancing sibling relationships.

It can be really tricky and it feels like you are walking a tight rope sometimes, it
is relatively and I do mean relatively easy to make sure that all the kids have the
same opportunities and that they are all ok and I think we are pretty good at
juggling all that but for me… well for both of us, the really tricky part is making
sure that we are still a family, that we operate as a family rather than just 4
people in one house…Both kids are into sport, which is great and it gives them
some common ground, but they are into different sports so that presents a
challenge, each sport has different concerns, the culture and the lingo is different,
they move in different circles of friends, so we have to manage that, so that they,
and us to a certain extent, don’t lose sight of the fact that we are a family, that
they are brothers so we have to set time aside when we are together and talk
about things, mainly about them, but that way it shows, we hope, that they are
doing similar things and that we are there for both of them equally (M12)
Evaluation. In contrast with the ‘balanced’ narrative described earlier, that depicted parents that successfully negotiated their parental role, the ‘seesaw’ narrative highlighted how attempts by parents to meet the increased demands of their children’s sport participation head on were hampered due to lack of clarity regarding the nature of those demands. Parents reflected on the importance of their role in supporting their children but highlighted that their ability to offer that support was compromised by their level of understanding regarding the demands facing them; an issue which could stem from a rather passive approach to gaining information from key individuals such as the coach or club officials.

We are trying our best to do what’s right for her, we want her to enjoy her sport and we want her to do well, we try and manage as best we can but no matter how well we think we prepare, there’s always something that crops up that we haven’t quite considered...It is frustrating, cause it feels like we’ve cracked it one day, only to be back to square one the next day...We try and expect what we can and manage that, and prepare but sometimes it feels like we are left out of the loop and if you are not in the loop then there’s always going to be something that we miss (F16)

We know that the hard work is really the training, the hard work is really down to the coach and the athlete, they are the main player but we are there in the background, I’m sure it’s a different situation when they get older, and they don’t have to depend on us as much, but while they do, without us they cant do it...and as far as we are concerned we don’t have a choice...I mean we do have a choice but it’s not an issue, we will do whatever we can to be there for her, but not everything is under our control and that’s what frustrating...(m-vi)

Coda. In the ‘seesaw’ narrative, although parents proved to be able to support their child-athlete, the manner by which they did was relatively haphazard due to a lack of role clarity. Their attempts to coordinate their resources and harmonise their roles were
consistently hampered by the lack of clarity offered by those in the immediate relational context.

If you asked her I’m sure she would be oblivious to a lot of this, at the end of the day although we struggle, and I don’t think that’s unique to us, it hasn’t compromised our support to her, we are just a bit frantic in the way we support her but it doesn’t change the end result, and ultimately that’s what important. We are managing, just about...sometimes it feels like we are just hanging on by a thread but like we said it doesn’t change the end result...not sure if the coach would see it that way, but if we could crack that issue and work with the coach a bit more, I’m sure it would make things easier...the unexpected spanner will always be thrown in to the mix at some point or another, but we manage...(M13)

3.3. The unbalanced narrative “...it’s like trying to co-ordinate the uncoordinated...” (4 British couples, 4 Greek-Cypriot couples)

Complicating action: For these parents their narratives primarily described how they attempted to negotiate their parental role. In doing so, parents discussed the difficulties they encountered in balancing their family life with their professional careers, a theme that resonated throughout their narrations.

You know you get married and you have kids, and it’s all meant to be natural and easy...no one ever really tells you just how hard being a parent is, I don’t mean dealing with the kids themselves, the time you spend with them is great, but it’s a lot to do, and to have to do that alongside a job is very demanding...(F2)

It was a very difficult dilemma, do you stay home and look after them at home or do you go out and work, but in this day and age you feel guilty if you don’t work and there are so many things we want to give them, we want them to have opportunities and for that reason we need to work...but sometimes you feel that there’s just not enough hours in the day to do it all (M3)

What comes first? Are the two mutually exclusive? Sometimes it feels that people are watching and questioning what I’m doing. I do believe work and family can
develop in parallel, but you can’t help thinking, especially if something goes wrong that what if, I wasn’t working as much would things be different? (M7)

Interestingly, in the case of the Greek-Cypriot parents, the presence of extended family members, though offered a much needed support network, also added an additional layer of complication. Parents described at length how extended family members, usually grandparents, were at hand and requested to help with the day-to-day tasks of parenthood, but similarly increased expectations on parents.

It’s a bit of a double edge sword to be honest, there is no doubt that we would seriously struggle to cope with things if we didn’t have their help, but at the same time, they want to help, they seek it out cause it gives them a chance to get involved in their grandkids lives so it sounds like a win win situation, but sometimes when I come home from work late you do get these disapproving looks and comments, about how it was different in their day and parents should be home to sort their kids out and put them to bed...you do feel guilty but then again we need to work...(m-viii)

You are damned if you do and damned if you don’t, you are expected to go out and work to provide for your family and be able to give your children the chance to experience all these new things, but then sometimes it means unfortunately in terms of the logistics, you don’t actually have the time to take them here, there and everywhere so it’s down to someone else... (m-iii)

Interestingly, for these parents, despite the overall favourable attitudes regarding sport participation, the transition of the children into sport occurred principally as a result of actions by a third party. In particular, in the case of the Greek-Cypriot parents this was instigated by the grandparents (usually the granddad), who were the main childcare providers, whereas in the case of the British parents, the children themselves instigated it, following positive experiences within school physical education lessons.
Resolution one. As narratives moved towards their resolution parents described how they fulfilled their role at this initial stage of their children’s sport participation. For these parents, their parental role experienced very little change. Parents regarded themselves as providing their children with the opportunities to engage in sport, in terms of financial support (e.g., paying for club fees) and reinforcing their participation by showing approval and giving praise.

It’s difficult to say how things changed at that point for us…probably not much if I’m being honest with you, we had to take him to the sessions but it wasn’t a big ask, at that point it was only a couple of times a week, so between the two of us (husband and wife) we took turns so it didn’t affect our work…at that stage it was all about just giving him the opportunity to do what he wanted and explore if it was something he enjoyed and wanted to do more of…(M14)

It was really something that they did together (my dad, the grandparent and the child-athlete)...we made sure the club fees were paid and she had all her stuff that she needed for it and that was about it...we went to the occasional competition, she didn’t have that many though at the time...we were proud of her and we told her that, but really that was it...thankfully my dad did the driving her around, so that was a massive help...(f-vii)

Complicating action two: As parents narratives progressed, they discussed the second complicating action, which was, as for parents in the ‘balanced’ and ‘seesaw’ narratives, the athletes’ transition into higher levels of sport participation. For the parents in this group, this transition took them completely by surprise and was a critical turning point in their narratives. It was at this transitional time that parents first realised the true impact of their children’s sport participation and admitted to feeling unprepared for the demands.

Honestly…I don’t think we had a clue about what we were letting ourselves in for... it all seemed to happen so quickly, one day training was twice a week, the next it was up to five times a week...I remember it just so happened that in that
first week of increased training, my workload was really light so it wasn’t really an issue, but when things at work went back to normal, it was a completely different scenario...every day our breakfast conversation centres around who was going to do what...what a way to start your day eh...(F3)

We weren’t really sure about why, we just figured it was similar to school really, you grow up, you move up and you need to invest more time in it...we didn’t have any problem with it, obviously so long as it didn’t interfere with school work...he was doing really well with sport, and he seemed to love it and enjoy it, so we wanted him to carry on, so somehow we made do, we make do...(F7)

Parents were quick to list the demands placed on them by those in their various social networks (e.g., family, extended family, work). However, when prompted to discuss how they went about meeting those demands, their responses revealed that these were considered in an isolated manner. Parents’ narratives highlighted that in part this was a result of lack of information. For example with regards to their professional careers parents explained that they were quite clear of what was expected of them, they had a clear plan and structure in place. The same could not be said however of their role in supporting their child-athlete. More specifically, with regards to the athletes’ coaches, parents perceived that their involvement was not encouraged and any expectations that were communicated were often unclear and contradictory.

The coach is a perplexing issue for us...you get the impression really that he doesn’t have much time for parents, and I can understand that to a certain degree, but what’s worse is inconsistency in what he does, sometimes he will seek us out and talk to us about [athlete], whereas others you don’t even get a ‘hello’...so we don’t really know where we stand with him, sometimes I wish he talk to us more, I mean it would be good to know not necessarily what he expects from us, but what he expects from [athlete] because ultimately we are the ones that have to make sure that [athlete] is at training and on time and all that...Im
sure [athlete] must feel like she is stuck in the middle sometimes, but to be honest the same could be said for us too...(f-iii)

I do wonder about that sometimes, personally I don’t think he knew what to do with us, dealing with the kids, setting the training is what coaches do, dealing with the parents is another story...and one that usually they choose to ignore...

It’s a bit silly though isn’t it, a lot is expected of us, we are slowly finding that out for ourselves, but just think how much easier it would be for us and them too [coach and athlete] if he’d spare us a few minutes to keep us in the loop...It would seem that the only parents that coaches have time for, are the ones actually involved in the running of the club, and let’s face it not all parents will have the time to do that...(m-x)

Resolution two. As parents’ narratives moved on to their resolution, how they fulfilled their role was discussed in detail. For these parents this involved three elements (a) caring for the child, (b) providing practical support (e.g., financial, transport) and (c) providing emotional support.

As with the ‘balanced’ and ‘seesaw’ narratives caring for the child referred principally to general parenting activities. Unlike the other types of narratives however which considered the child/athletes’ two distinct yet integrated lives, sport and outside sport, these parents did not distinguish between the two. This could be a reflection of the earlier noted view that these parents considered their parental role as a whole and did not renegotiate it when the athlete increased their participation. However, this could also be a reflection of the lack of information they had access to with regards to what those additional demands were.

In discussing the provision of practical support, parents highlighted that this was in fact the most visible way that they supported their children’s sport participation and it encapsulated for them what they described as providing opportunities. As parents they
felt that this was a critical aspect of their role of provider, after satisfying other basic needs.

The parents frequently mentioned providing emotional support. This manifested itself in two ways. Firstly by parents making themselves available to the children and acting as a sounding board primarily at times when training was particularly intense and the athletes were overstretched between school and sport. Secondly, parents ensured that they actively demonstrated their approval of their children’s participation, by attending sport events, when they were able to do so, providing praise and asking after them with regards to their training.

It’s difficult at this age really, because they are not that communicative are they, plus the fact that they think we probably don’t know anything about sport doesn’t help. I know because we work a lot it sometimes seems like we don’t have a lot of time for them but we really try to always ask after them and check how things are going, and they know we are proud of them (M2)

In the case of the Greek-Cypriot parents however, where the grandparents were quite involved in the children’s sport participation, parents felt that this role was one that the grandparents fulfilled, and that they [parents] were perceived to be the impartial parties that could be called upon in a dispute.

He sees my dad more than us really, and when it comes to his sport, he talks to him more...in some ways it’s great to see them having such a close relationship at the same time as a dad there is an element of guilt and jealousy, I don’t mind to say, that it’s not a relationship he shares with me. That said though, because they seem to see us as a little bit distanced from it all, we can be a bit of neutral advisor, so in that respect at times it makes him a bit more open to receiving advice from us...(f-x)
**Evaluation:** While describing their roles and the manner by which they struggled to negotiate and fulfil them, parents commented on their emotions and their interpretations. Parents constantly tried to reconcile their family life with their professional careers.

It’s a constant battle, the modern parent is one that has to be able to successfully juggle family and career but the reality, at least for us anyway, is very different...I love my job, at the end of the day, I have to work, and I make the choice to have a career rather than just a job...going to work is actually a bit of a release and a break from the parent role...but you can’t help and feel guilty about that...but then if you have to leave work early because of a family issue, you feel guilty towards your employer, it’s just catch 22 (M14)

The conflicting demands on the parents’ time and resources, coupled with a perception of little invitations for involvement by the coach and the sport club, contributed to the parents’ inability to harmonise the two. Despite the parents reported disgruntlement by the stance of the coach and the club, and the situation as a whole, parents emphasised their commitment to continuing to provide their children with the opportunities to participate and develop further in sport.

**Coda.** The stories told by these parents demonstrated high levels of role overload and role conflict. Negotiations to resolve role conflict occurred on a day-to-day basis, taking into account factors such as: relative importance of work responsibilities on the specific day and relative flexibility of other roles on a given day. Anticipatory planning was distinctly absent from role negotiations in these narratives, a factor that contributed to role conflict. However, particularly in the case of the Greek-Cypriot parents, contingency plans were always ready for deployment in the form of other family members; a fact which also contributed to the lack of forward planning, as the safety net was always in place.
Most of the time it feels like we are treading water to be honest, we look forward to Sunday because there is nothing in the calendar that we have to do, we get to choose what we do, and that’s great, during the week it feels like we are on treadmill and we are stationary, what we do on a day-to-day basis very much depends on what’s on at work, and what activities the kids have to do…and it can be very draining…it’s as if we are trying to co-ordinate the uncoordinated (f-viii)
The results of this study represent a first step in addressing the current deficit in research concerning parental involvement in sport. The data collected have been generated by a narrative approach, providing an in-depth qualitative analysis of parents’ experiences of supporting their children into and through sport. The insight afforded is consistent with research conducted within a narrative paradigm, the basis of which is explained in suitable detail in the method section above.

A key finding of this research is that being a sport parent in reality is complex and dependent on a multitude of contextual and interpersonal factors. A parent’s role was envisaged as a never-ending, ever-evolving process. Parents were noted to accumulate various different roles, which they held simultaneously and appeared to transfer into and out of depending on the demands placed on them and the social context in which these roles need to be enacted. The process by which parents supported their children and fulfilled their needs was embedded in the dynamic and complex contexts of both family and sport. Consequently, as suggested by results in this study, the roles that parents undertake as part of their involvement can be loosely described on two interrelated dimensions: (a) social context of role (with two sub-dimensions, family and sport) and (b) role direction (with two sub-dimensions, personal and relational). These role characteristics are organised in a 2x2 taxonomy (figure 3): (1) Caring for the child (personally directed towards the child within the family), (2) Caring for the athlete (personally directed towards the athlete within the sport), (3) Coach-Athlete relationship facilitator (relationship direct towards the relationship the athlete has with the coach within the sport) and (4) Intra-familial relationship facilitator (relationship directed towards the relationship the child establishes and maintains with other family members).
Results from this study seem to suggest that parents that negotiate and enact their roles across both those dimensions are more likely to be able to fulfil their children’s needs and effectively cope with the demands placed on. Indeed parents in the balanced narratives demonstrated a high level of awareness of all the roles outlined in the above taxonomy and consequently were able to carefully consider the resources they had at their disposal and successfully balance all the different roles. In the case of the seesaw narratives however, whilst the parents displayed an awareness of the roles across both dimensions and directions, the enactment was hampered by role overload. According to role theory, role overload refers to the experience of lacking resources, namely in terms of time and energy needed to meet the demands of all the roles (Marks & MacDermid, 1996). In the case of the unbalanced narratives, parents held a one-dimensional view of their roles. Parents appeared to only negotiate the family dimension, despite the presence of demands from the sport dimension. Consequently the parents experienced a high level of role conflict, which in accordance with role theory describes an incongruity between the expectations of one role and those of another (Goode, 1960); in this case, the parents’ careers which lead to difficulties in meeting demands placed on them.

As highlighted by the parents in this study, the key to successfully negotiating their roles lies in an acute awareness and understanding of these roles, across all dimensions and towards all directions. Indeed it can be argued, though not an explicit finding of this study, that the above taxonomy can include additional dimensions such as work or school for example. In the case of the unbalanced narratives, the parents appeared to be more aware of their roles within the “work” dimension than that of sport. Their failure to
acknowledge the “sport” dimension, can be argued, ultimately led to their inability to cope with the demands placed on them from that setting, because they simply did not carefully consider them against their available resources.

The emergence of the ecological dimension parental roles (e.g., family Vs sport setting) is consistent with Epstein’s (1992) notion of the three overlapping spheres of influence. According to Epstein the overlapping spheres of influence recognise that there are three major contexts through which children are supported in their development: (a) the family, which includes the parents, (b) the school and (c) the community (or in this case, sport which also includes the coach). This model emphasises the interdependence of these spheres, which can at times be pushed together or pulled apart by various factors such as (a) the development of the child over time, (b) the characteristics and practices of the family and (c) the characteristics and practices within, in this case, sport. Changes in any one of these spheres, has an impact on the other and thereby the way by which parental roles are negotiated and enacted. The findings of this study support that the sport and the family settings appeared to be reciprocally related and that parental involvement is indeed a dynamic phenomenon influenced by both intrapersonal factors (i.e., personal attitudes and experiences) and interpersonal factors such as relationships. It was particularly evidenced that as circumstances changed, primarily in the sport setting, parents had to renegotiate their roles to correspond with the new demands.

A theme cross-cutting all types of narratives, irrespective of the degree to which parents effective and successfully negotiated their roles across the two dimensions, was the element of role complementarity (Peplau, 2002). All narratives displayed high levels of coordination between the two parents (even the unbalanced one), whereby each individual’s (mother or father) activities were a response to what the other was doing. In examining role perceptions of mothers and fathers, it was interesting that both expressed largely co-oriented views. A review of the family psychology literature
suggests that this is not surprising. Families, such as these studied here (e.g., two-parent, intact) represent a group of individuals each with their own personality. However when members (e.g. wife and husband) come together a new collective personality emerges (Fiese et al., 1995). At that point the family personality assumes an identity of its own depending on the contextual factors and elements within which the family exists. According to Sameroff and Fiese (1999) family stability and coherence is greatly determined by the level of coordinated behaviours of the family unit, a relationship that affects every domain of life, from the forming of new relationships (e.g., coach-athlete relationship, coach-parent relationship) to coping with stressors (e.g., time and financial demands of competitive sport). In the case of the participants of this study, parents were primarily focused on the needs of the family unit, which would serve to explain the level of co orientation between them noted in the interviews. As per Peplau’s (2002) suggestion that partners in close relationships tend to adopt complementary roles, the participants of this study which were from dual-earner families, both juggling work and family, with external demands placed on them, both contributed to housework and shared in the decision making. This provided parents with a means to offset the strain of having to balance multiple roles. However the degree to which they competently did so and experienced less role strain was mediated by their consideration and negotiation across both the dimensions presented in the above taxonomy.

Furthermore, interestingly findings suggest that the level of role specialisation and diversity (Peplau, 2002) are also determinants of parents’ successful role negotiation. In the case of the balanced narratives for example, a great deal of role diversity was noted, with both mothers and fathers sharing tasks equally as the situation required. However in the case of the seesaw narratives to a certain extent and more so in the unbalanced narratives, a great degree of role specialisation is noted, whereby mothers and fathers focus on specific tasks. This could consequently hamper their ability to respond to increased demands and changing situations, if they have a limited portfolio of roles.
Results for this study are in line with Hoover-Dempsey’s (2005) claim that parents envisage their role in a way that reflects their own expectations as well as those of others about what they should or shouldn’t be doing. This is also consistent with Biddle’s (1979) argument that roles are generally conceived based on personal experience and expectations in addition to the perceptions and expectations of significant others. Applied to parents’ involvement in sport, parental role perceptions and experiences in conjunction with the perceived expectations of those in their immediate social environment (e.g., child-athlete, coach) appear to define the range of activities that parents believe to be important, necessary and indeed permissible for their own engagement in their child’s sport.

Similarly and in accordance with identity theory, findings illustrate that parents reported involvement processes reflected their perceptions of their roles. Identity theory posits that identity is an "internalized set of role expectations" (Stryker, 1987, p. 90). Perhaps offering the most coherent explanation this model suggests that accompanying each role are certain social expectations (e.g., behaviours and interactions, and therefore an individuals identity is said to be constructed from the meanings which are attached to the roles adopted by that individual in any given social context (Ng & Feldman, 2007). As applied to parental identity, a person’s identity as a parent comprises all the expectations for their behavior that they have internalized as being associated with being a parent (e.g., being a provider of emotional support). If a mother or father internalise the expectations of their roles then it would be expected that their behaviour or in this case reported behaviour would be in line with those expectations. It would be interesting if future research investigated the direct connections between parents’ role identity and specific aspects of their role enactment, such as coach-athlete relationship facilitator.
Furthermore, the current study shows that in the early years, before the major transitions into higher levels of participation, if a family life was already defined by participation in similar terms, then parents are more likely to assimilate the social roles expected in the social context, as in the case of the balanced narratives. The crucial defining factor was a clear and firm commitment to the new roles, coupled with optimal preparation, following a significant amount of information gathering. This facilitated the development of the necessary knowledge for the new role(s). Preparation engenders a perception of control over the change and through contact with coaches and fostering communication with the child/athlete, parents were able to gain an insight into the world of sport. Parents place significant value in knowing the intricacies of sport and their child’s involvement, as it is vital in supporting their child’s progression. In particular the current study shows that gaining insight of the demands inherent in the next step of the child’s sport participation, enables the parents to assess their own capacity against those demands and expectations and identify areas in which further support will be required. In comparison, as illustrated by the unbalanced narratives, lack of readiness and an incongruence between the child’s readiness for transition into higher levels of sport participation and the parents readiness, resulted in parents not being able to effectively negotiate and fulfil their roles.

It was interesting to note the perceived facilitative role on the relationship that their child/athletes’ formed with their respective coaches. In line with previous research from social psychologists (e.g., Felmlee, 2001; Sprecher et al., 2002) and sport psychologists (e.g., Jowett & Timson-Katchis, 2005) results from this study allude to the notion that support from approving family members may help stabilise a close dyadic relationship, such as the coach-athlete relationship, during times of stress, by providing informational and emotional support (e.g. during injury rehabilitation, parents maintained and assisted the communication between coach and athlete).
Results from the study echo findings from previous research, conducted in western-individualistic cultures such as the British and North American context (e.g., Brustad, 1993; Cote, 1999; Kirk & MacPhail, 2003; Wolfenden & Holt, 2005). As such results from this study suggest that the quality of parental involvement does have some cross-cultural generality. It could be argued that parent-child relationships are fundamentally qualitatively similar and transcend cultural differentiation. Similarly however, results also suggest a degree of cultural specificity particularly at the operational level (i.e. the actual context in which they exist – in this case the Republic of Cyprus). Issues that parents faced with regards to the sporting structure on the island, specifically in relation to educational and work systems can be regarded as culturally specific elements. It is important therefore to consider the findings of this study within the context of the Greek-Cypriot culture and its recent history. The country gained its independence half a century ago, prior to which it was a British colony for almost a century. Although the data does indeed suggest that the Cyprus culture is characterised by collectivism, as illustrated by the reported presence and involvement of extended family members (e.g., grandparents), data did not allude to other major and distinct cultural differences. This could be attributed to the significant British influence, which to this day permeates every aspect of life on the island. Therefore the Cypriot culture could be a unique amalgamation of both individualism and collectivism.

The principal and most evident asymmetry between maternal and paternal role perceptions, which also transcended culture, referred to the “kinkeeping” role that mothers assumed and performed. This study is certainly not unique in identifying the mother as the principal family kin-keeper, as much previous research has supported this specialisation of the maternal role (Rosenthal, 1985; Wambolt & Reiss, 1989) The mothers of this study perceived themselves to be the preserver of family unity particularly in the face of the additional stress that the child/athlete’s sporting participation exerted on the family as a whole but also on its individual members (e.g., non-sporting children). This finding is in line with Deaux and Major’s (1987) interactive
model of gender in social behaviour whereby gender differences are thought to vary across situations as varying conditions elicit, alter or suppress gender effects. Mischel (1977) referred to the psychological strength of a situation as a robust predictor of the expression of gender differences. Psychological strength of a situation refers to the extent that a particular situation is uniformly encoded so that specific appropriate behaviours are expected. The stronger a situation is, the more likely that gender and individual differences will be suppressed. In this study a salient aspect of parental involvement was provision of material, emotional, moral support to the child/athlete and the family as a whole. Parents spoke passionately about the demands on their time and attention in completing all the relevant tasks, as one mother correctly encapsulated the phenomenon: "it's almost like coordinating the uncoordinated", thereby implying that this is a strong psychological situation.

**Limitations**

The present study had several limitations that warrant consideration. First, the unique characteristics of the sample (i.e., most parents were educated to higher level, couples were dual-earners) limit the ability to generalise findings to a more heterogeneous population. Second, whilst the narrative analysis combined both thematic and structural analysis and enabled an in-depth analysis, the design potentially places a limitation on the results since the data were primarily retrospective, and consequently results may have been subject to retrospective recall bias. Third, as the results elucidated events, which occurred over time, conducting one interview may not have allowed access to the intricacies of such a temporal process. Finally as the analysis relied on self-reported data, social desirability cannot fully be discounted. This study focused solely on parental perceptions. It is likely that other important social actors (e.g., coaches, athletes) could contribute significantly to the accurate depiction of parental involvement in sport. It is important to highlight that parents’ involvement, is both a multifaceted concept but more crucially it is an explicitly relational one. To better understand its nature, it is crucial that future research adopts a social networks approach and investigates the issue.
as a function of the anchoring person (e.g., the athlete, the coach or the coach-athlete relationship see Jowett & Timson-Katchis, 2005).

**Implications for policy**

Nonetheless, within these limitations, the study has several strengths as the sample included as much data for fathers as for mothers, rather than merely one or the other, as has been commonly investigated. The study highlights a significant perspective of parental involvement and can prove to be the foundation for better understanding its impact. The findings provide useful information, which could be used for designing effective family-inclusive sport development programs. Indeed one of the main goals of sport authorities is to increase numbers of children entering sport and reduce dropout rates and such educational programmes could supply important information to parents about taking positive roles and action for their children’s development in sport. This could help parents redress the balance between the demands and constraints imposed by supporting a highly talent child-athlete whilst not losing sight of the potential impact of the sport on the family as a whole. Parent education programmes should further focus on encouraging the whole family to participate in sport in an attempt to help develop and maintain a positive lifelong attitude toward sport participation. In addition, sport authorities including national governing sport bodies should find a way to empower parents by enabling them to actively and positively participate in their child’s sport development. This could be challenging for sport providers especially if the structure of the sport and the culture in which the sport is practised are complicated by such concerns as education, politics, and economics. Finally, parents will need to become skilled in discerning changing circumstances (e.g., adolescence, specialisation, new coach) and how these affect the developing athlete personally and socially.

With regards to current policy the study has several recommendations. Greater awareness is required regarding families and family support needs to be considered. Family support, such as financial and practical can alleviate a proportion of the stress
commonly experienced by parents. This is particularly important as potential talented athletes can be lost due to parents’ inability to balance family life and support for their child-athlete. A more structured level of parental education in relation to sporting involvement and a greater level of information provision is called for that will enable families to better cope with any potential upheaval due to heavy sporting involvement.

The benefits of such educational and support programs could prove uniquely consequential because as Ryan (1999) noted parents who are familiar with a host of issues related to sport participation and high-level competition are more likely to maintain their focus on their child’s welfare and development. In contrast, a parent who is not knowledgeable can become immersed in the anomalous lifestyles of elite sports and focus solely on performance outcome, irrespective of the effect this may have on their child (Murphy, 1999; Ryan, 1999). Thus, in order to optimise athletes’ support systems, educational and support programs specifically designed for parents of youth athletes and indeed non-athlete siblings could help facilitate parenting practices and, minimise the challenges that parents face.

**Final thoughts**

The topic of parental involvement in sport has to date been accorded a significant amount of research inquiry and within youth sport settings can be quite emotive. As no one person exists within a social vacuum it is imperative to consider the phenomenon within the social context it exists and in relation to the other social actors. Such as for example, the coaches and the athletes themselves, and indeed the wider sporting system (e.g., club, governing body, national sport council). All key stakeholders have now acknowledged the critical role of parents, alongside the coaches, for an athlete’s development, which has in turn renewed the dialogue on this issue and sparked further research. This thesis contributes to the drive towards better understanding the role of parents within a youth sport context and offers an insight into how it can potentially be maximised.


(Eds.), *Psychology of Motor behaviour and Sport* (pp. 3-29). Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.


Appendix 1: Letter of Introduction to Parents

Dear…..

I am a research student at Loughborough University and I am carrying out research into parental involvement in sport. The research aims to increase the understanding of what parents do in order to support their children’s sporting endeavours. I am interested in talking to parents of young athletes who are training intensively at least 3 times a week.

As you know, I have been in contact with coach........., who, with your consent, has passed on your details to me, as parents whose child trains regularly. I would very much like to talk to you about your experiences as sporting parents. Initially we could talk either in person or on the phone to discuss the study in further detail; outline the key focus of the study and explain the procedures to you, as well as answer any queries you may have about the project. If, after our brief meeting/call, you are interested and available to take part, we can arrange a time and date convenient for both of you, where we can meet to discuss the issue. I envisage that the interview will last between one and two hours.

If you are agreed, the interview will be tape-recorded to ensure accuracy, but this will be completely confidential. Taking part is completely voluntary so should you decide to take part and wish to withdraw at a later date, you are free to do so. If you have any concerns, or queries, please don’t hesitate to contact me at the details below.

I look forward to hearing from you

Yours sincerely,

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Appendix 2: Details of Research

Parental Involvement in Youth Sport

If sport is to have a positive impact on young people, it is important that we gain a thorough and complete understanding of their experience within sport, an important element of which is the relationships that athletes form with key people in their social environment, such as their coaches, their peers and their parents. This study focuses on exploring the parents, from the parent’s perspective. It aims to identify the issues faced by parents, and the factors that enable and/or hinder their ability to best support their children in sport.

It is hoped that information gained from this research, will help those involved in youth sport; other parents, coaches and of course the athletes themselves, to ensure that their experience and development in sport is a positive one.

Participation will involve an interview with both parents together. These will be relatively informal in nature and take place at a time, date and place convenient to you. Participation is completely voluntary and you can withdraw at any time. All information gathered will be treated in the strictest confidence and complete anonymity will be guaranteed. Information gathered from this study, will only be used for the purposes of this study and will not be passed on to third parties.

Melina Timson-Katchis
Appendix 3: Informed Consent Form

Parental Involvement in Youth Sport

Informed Consent Form (to be completed after initial meeting/call with researcher)

The purpose and details of this study have been explained to me.

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.

I understand that I have the right to withdraw from this study at any stage for any reason, and that I can do so without having to explain my decision.

I understand that all the information I provide will be treated in strict confidence.

I agree to participate in this study.

Name: ........................................................................................................................................

Signature: ...................................................................................................................................
Appendix 4: Interview Guide

- Demographical Information
- Background Information
- Growing up:
  - What was family life like?
  - Parents/guardians attitudes to schooling/education
  - Parents/guardians attitudes to sport
  - Education experiences
- Careers:
  - years / sector / employment status / level
  - Career aspirations / Likes / Dislikes
- Family life... How long have you been married?
  - Children: ages, genders, interests

Initial Sporting Experiences (own)
Going back as far as you can remember when was your first contact with sport?
- Was it just at school or did you get involved in sport outside school?
- What sports did you participate in?
- For what reasons did you play sports?
- How did you get into these sports?
- Enjoyment / Likes / Dislikes?
- Receiving coaching / teaching / instruction? If yes, what was relationship like?
- Competition participation? Success?
- Parental support/encouragement?

Child-Athlete Sporting Involvement
- how did it all begin?
  - Athlete age?
  - What Sport? Why that sport?
  - Which Club? Why that club?
  - What influenced your decision?
  - Circumstances?
- What motivated you to encourage your child to participate in sport? How does it benefit the athlete? How does it benefit you, the parent?
- What expectations did you have regarding your child’s participation in sport?
- At the start how often was your child participating in sport?
- As a parent did you face any challenges at this early stage of your child
• Did your child face any challenges at this stage? How did he/she overcome them?
• How did you help them to overcome them?
• What motivated you to encourage your child to receive coaching?
  o How old was your child when they first started receiving coaching?
  o How did you choose your child’s first coach?
  o What did you like about the coach?
  o How did you generally get on with this coach?
  o How did the child-athlete generally get on with the coach?
  o What expectations did you have from the coach?

Everyday Life
• Describe a typical day in the life of your family/household?
• What are the typical tasks you do? How do you decide who does what?
• What happens during training? What does the coach do? What does the athlete do?
  In what ways do you participate/engage in your child-athletes training?
• What about in competitions? What happens?

Parent-Child Relationship
• Describe the relationship you have with your child? Have there been any notable changes to this relationship? What are these changes? When did you first notice them? How did you respond to these?
• What things do you talk about? How often? How responsive is he to your advice/suggestions/comments? How responsive are you to any advice/suggestions/comments that the athlete may have?
• Have there been any incidents when you and your child have been in conflict? What happened? When did it happen? What lead to this? How did you deal with it?
• In what ways do you generally support your child-athletes involvement in sport?
• What does your child’s participation cost? Do you pay for coaching?
• How often does athlete train?
• Has the child-athlete ever considered giving up sport?
  When? For what reasons? How did you respond? What happened

Coach
• How do you support your child-athletes relationship with their coach?
• How would you describe your child-athletes relationship with their coach?
• Was there an identifiable time when your child’s relationship with the coach changed at all? What was this change? How did this change come about? How did each of them deal with this/these change(s)? How did you? Why did you do it?
• Have they, the coach and the athlete, ever faced any challenges? How did they overcome these? Did you facilitate them in any way to deal with these? Have they ever been in any conflict? What happened? How did things evolve? How did they deal with it? How did you deal with it? Did you facilitate the resolution in any way? How?
• How would you describe the relationship that you maintain with your athlete’s coach? Has there been an identifiable time when the relationship with the coach has changed? What was this change? How did it come about?
• Have you ever been in conflict with the coach? What happened? How did things evolve? How did you deal with it?
• What things do you talk about with coach? How often do you meet?

The Family
• How would you describe your relationship with your other children?
• Have there been any changes to your relationship with your other children? What are these changes? When did you first start to notice these? How did you respond?
• Have there been any particular times/incidents were you have been in conflict with other children? What happened? When? How did you deal with this?
• What things do you talk about with other children? How responsive are they to your advice/suggestions? How responsive are you to their advice/suggestions?
• How would you describe the relationship the athlete has with his/her siblings? How do they usually relate to each other? Do they participate in any activities together?
• Have there been any changes to the relationship between them? What happened? When? How did you all deal with this?

General
• How would define your role as a sporting parent? How close to this ideal do you feel you are? How closely does this reflect what the coach ad athlete may expect from you as a parent?
• How would you define the coach’s role? What sort of qualities do you believe make a good coach? How close to this ideal do you feel your child’s coach is?
• To what extent has your involvement been influenced by external factors?
  o Which factors? – coach, athlete, job, family, club, NGB etc
  o In what ways has it been influenced?
  o What sort of support, information or opportunities would you have liked?
• What advice would you give to parents who are in similar positions to yourselves, and are striving to help their children achieve their potential in sport? What would you say are the Do’s and Don’t’s of being a sporting parent?