

**Parental involvement in sport:
Perceptions of competitive adolescent swimmers**

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Throughout our lives we are all subject to the needs and wishes of other people. This may be especially true for children, who have less control over their own lives than adults do. Children usually make the decision to participate intensively in sport, but that decision is closely tied to an awareness of alternatives and rewards shaped by important adults in their lives (Coakley, Donnelly & Landry, 1993; Lee, 1993). According to Anderson, Funk, Elliot and Smith (2003), findings suggest that parents can play an important role in the child's affective experience of extracurricular activities.

Children who get involved in sport often find that there are pressures on them from many different sources. This happens particularly to very able children who find that many different groups want their services and they sometimes have to make difficult choices (Lee, 1993). This leads to the reality of having to meet the needs of a school team, be a coach's pathway to success, represent their parent's hopes for achievement, and perhaps even be considered as future international stars. With these demands being placed upon them it is not surprising that their own wishes are sometimes secondary, and that they occasionally wonder who they are doing it for. Although all of these demands may certainly be important, the role of the parents' expectations in sport is often most significant. It is parents' attitudes, beliefs, and behaviour, which undoubtedly affect the child's experiences in sport (Byrne, 1993).

Evidence indicates that a complex array of determinants, which includes peers, community members, coaches/teachers, school friends, media and the family, are involved when children's physical activity is examined (Sallis & Nader, 1988; Kimiecik, Horn & Shurin, 1996).

Teachers, officials, spectators, coaches and parents all affect the nature of the sports experience and to a large extent determine whether or not this experience is a positive one. However, of all the adults involved in this "circle of influence", the coach and the parents are perhaps the most important. Although the task of the coach as professional aid may certainly be noteworthy, the informal role of the family is most significant. First of all, most children remain in the family environment for several years, which provides ample opportunity for parental influence. Secondly, research has shown that parental influence is critical for children in establishing health norms and in learning to make health- and sport-related decisions (Petchers, Hirsch & Bloch, 1987).

Scanlan and Lewthwaite (1988) point out that if parents are not involved, as in the case of parents who do not attend events, they are often sorely missed. One might, however, expect that the young athlete's sport experience is important to parents and coaches alike. After all, parents and coaches put their time, money, energy and sometimes more than a little ego into the activity.

Gilroy (1993) agrees with these views and concludes that children's sport should be for the children, not for the coaches to gain glory or to make a name for themselves, and also not for parents to relive their lost sporting past through the lives of their children.

The topic of parental involvement in sport comprises recurring themes such as parental support and encouragement that suggest a positive contribution, and on the other hand, pressure, which has negative connotations.

The total sport experience and enjoyment of sport are also themes that are connected significantly with parental involvement in the study.

For the purpose of this study an extended literature review was undertaken, which will be discussed in Chapters 2 and 3. Although many issues were in need of further exploration, the above-mentioned themes were focused upon. Parental involvement in sport plays a considerable role in children's total sport experience, supporting Scanlan and Lewthwaite's (1988) statement that the young athlete's parents are the most personally involved in his/her sport experience.

1.2 Problem Statement

It is apparent that the ways in which parents support, encourage and become involved is fundamental to their children's participation and success in sport, whether beneficial or detrimental (Brustad, 1993). Hoyle and Leff (1997) point out that parents often assume the roles of motivator, facilitator, and even coach in the life of the young athlete. In these roles parents can provide financial, emotional, and physical support. Barnes and Ramsay (2001:9) add the following statement to emphasise the role parents' play in children's sport: "Supportive parents spend plenty of time and money to help their youngsters develop and enjoy sport. But when enthusiasm turns to obsession, then it is time to ask: are parents getting too involved in their children's sporting careers?"

Recently, concern has been expressed about the adverse effect the overzealous or intrusive adult has on children's competitive sport, a concern which suggests that parents are overstepping their role or function. There is considerable anecdotal evidence for the existence of the so-called "pushy parents" who drive their children on to performance success, set unrealistic objectives and force them to participate (Rowley, 1986).

In a newspaper article “The down side of pushy parenting” the following is stated: “Parents want the best for their children. And most of us are prepared to do whatever it takes to ensure that they are given every opportunity to develop into responsible adults. It’s just that sometimes we try to hard” (Palmer, 2002:7).

Wessels (1997), commenting on the announcement of a junior provincial sports team, states that adolescents are already subjected to stress, and that it would have been a lot simpler if (at that age) they could still give it their best and play for fun. He elaborates on the issue of children playing sport for their parents and not for themselves. “They carry the burden of fulfilling someone else’s ambitions. Imagine the pressure. Doing it not because you want to, but because you are forced to. The fear of failure in this situation is immense. The trepidation in going home and saying: “I didn’t make it”. Carrying not only personal disappointment, but parental aspirations as well, is not an easy thing to do” (Wessels, 1997:29).

Hoyle and Leff (1997) suggest that parents may apply pressure to the young athlete in the interests of excellence and success. Unfortunately, in every field in which there is reward for precocious achievement by children, there are parents: from the indifferent through the calmly encouraging to the insanely ambitious. This is not just in sport: every child who ever took an exam knows about parental pressure and the lure of vicarious achievement. Sport, however, demonstrates the most dramatic examples of bizarre parenting (Barnes & Ramsay, 2001). This has become an increasingly alarming problem which is illustrated by several disconcerting headlines in newspapers such as: “Weight of parents’ expectations puts youngsters under enormous pressure” (Wessels, 1997:29); “When sport parents help - or hinder” (Barnes & Ramsay, 2001:9); “Pressure not fair on boys” (Lune, 2004:22) and “Red card for job parents” (Gangaram, 2004:1), to mention but a few.

Anderson et al. (2003) point out that as parental pressure increases, children's reported enjoyment decreases. Parents may begin with good intentions, trying to introduce their children to sport activities that may ultimately bring them success; they may believe that expressing disappointment in a child's poor performance will provide the motivation for improvement; but from the child's perspective, even well meant parental pressure can backfire and may contribute to a child's lowered enjoyment and motivation.

Anderson et al. (2003) explain that perceived parental pressure could influence a child's extracurricular enjoyment negatively, regardless of the intention the parents may have. The dilemma is that excessive pressure may result in parent-child conflict and/or youth sport withdrawal. Wuerth, Lee and Alferman (2003) add that while it may seem that the effects of parental involvement in a child's sporting career depend primarily upon the degree of attention paid to it by the parents, it should be emphasised that it is also the quality of parent-child interaction that is important. Certain questions arise: for example, at what stage does parental involvement become a problem, or more likely, when does support and encouragement become negative pressure? That is a question that remains to be answered by the adolescents themselves, as their perceptions of their parent's involvement usually have a direct effect on their performance (Brustad, 1993), and on the sporting experience as a whole.

1.3 Aim of the study and research questions

The purpose of this research is to examine how a group of competitive adolescent swimmers perceive parental involvement and how it affects their total sporting experience.

Consequently, the aim of the research is to discover answers to the specific research questions:

- How do swimmers perceive their parents' involvement and behaviour regarding their swimming?
- How do swimmers perceive the directive behaviour of their parents?
- How do swimmers experience/perceive praise and understanding from their parents?
- How actively involved are parents in the clubs of which their children are members?
- Do swimmers perceive pressure from their parents at all?
- Does perceived pressure affect their level of enjoyment?
- How does parental involvement and behaviour affect their total swimming experience?

Coakley et al. (1993) suggest that once children become intensively involved in sport, their perception of the sporting experience depends on three major factors: a) the way sport programmes are organised, b) the way sport experiences are mediated by the important social relationships in the child's life, and c) the way sport experiences are defined and integrated into the rest of the child's life. Although all the above-mentioned factors certainly play a role in the way the adolescent swimmers experience their sport, the manner in which social relationships intervene with the sporting experience will receive special attention, in particular parental involvement.

1.4 Demarcation of the study field

The perceptions of a group of competitive adolescent swimmers towards parental involvement form the focus of this study. Within the framework of Human Movement Science, parental involvement in sport is the central focal point.

Parental involvement includes the behaviour of parents towards the adolescents' sporting experience, in terms of active involvement, support, encouragement, praise, directive behaviour and pressure. This will be researched from the viewpoint of competitive adolescent swimmers, as it is their perceptions of their parent's behaviour, which is of importance.

1.5 Methodology

The research was carried out by means of a field survey using a questionnaire, the Parental Involvement in Sport Questionnaire (PISQ), as designed by Lee and MacLean (1997). The 33-item questionnaire focused on the perceptions of the participants regarding the behaviour of parents in terms of their (the adolescent swimmers) swimming activities. The instrument used and the procedures followed will be discussed in detail in Chapter 4. A second questionnaire was designed and distributed to measure the extent to which the respondents enjoyed the total swimming experience.

The respondents were drawn from four swimming clubs in Bloemfontein, Free State Province. These clubs attract their members from suburban populations. The respondents were adolescent male and female competitive swimmers. All respondents participated competitively at levels from interschool and interclub, to national championships. They train for an average 5 to 8 hours a week.

They all receive professional coaching in swimming before and/or after normal school hours. A random sample of 93 swimmers completed the questionnaire.

1.6 Necessity and value of the study

Lee and MacLean (1997) suggest that there is evidence, to support the fact that although parental input is critical, the extent to which parents attempt to take control is a strong source of pressure and is moderated by the individual child's tolerance for it. This once again emphasises the need for both parents and coaches to know and understand the needs of each of the children they are trying to help.

Hence, Lee and MacLean (1997) find that the interest displayed initially as support may develop into pressure when the recipients perceive that they need to "pay their way" and that levels of involvement are beyond those with which they feel comfortable. Despite their good intentions, parents may not appreciate this effect and may inadvertently transgress what Ryan (1995) considers a fine line between encouragement and pressure. Thus, it is necessary to investigate how children perceive parental involvement and whether it has an effect on the enjoyment of their sport.

Although parents provide support in many ways, they may also apply pressure to the young athlete in the interests of excellence and success (Hoyle & Leff, 1997; Cratty, 1974). Hellstedt, Rooks and Watson (1988) state that casual observations of many coaches and sport scientists suggest that the degree of parental pressure varies from positive support on one end of a continuum to excessive pressure on the other. A certain degree of pressure may be desirable. Excessive parental pressure, however, may result in competitive anxiety and parent-child conflict. If this persists, the result may be discouragement, burnout, and eventual withdrawal from the competitive environment. Following this, Hellstedt (1990) suggests that the issue of parental pressure needs further research.

The association of young tournament tennis players' perceptions of parental support and parental pressure with their enjoyment of tennis was examined by Leff and Hoyle (1995). Their research indicate that additional research is needed to investigate the role of parental support and pressure among athletes in other individual and team sports. They also suggest that a focus on these issues is likely to produce valuable information that should contribute to a healthier sport experience for young athletes and their families. This highlights the obligation upon parents to understand the critical role they play in their children's sporting experiences.

The value of this study might ultimately be to draw parents' attention to the role they play in their children's sport, as well as to the influence their behaviour may have on the way the children experience sport. Parents should become aware of the fact that children perceive and interpret parental involvement in different ways, and that consequently, they have a desire for involvement in a way they perceive positively.

Unfortunately, there is no instruction manual for "sport parenting". There are, however, two books by the American Sport Education Program, "Sport parent Survival Guide" (1994), a shortened version of " Sport Parent" (1994), a textbook, which provides basic guidelines for the parent. The researcher would like to suggest that greater awareness by parents and recommendations regarding parental conduct could lead to positive involvement by the parents and greater enjoyment of the sport by parents and participants. Therefore, applicable and relevant recommendations will be made for optimal parental involvement. It must be remembered that the final question that remains to be answered, is: "Whose sport is it anyway?" (Gilroy, 1993).

1.7 Structural layout of the study

Chapters 2 and 3 will comprise the theoretical framework of the study. Chapter 2 will address the concept of parental involvement, as well as the different aspects of parental involvement such as support, encouragement and pressure. Considering that the study focuses on the perceptions of adolescent competitive swimmers regarding parental involvement, the sport experience of the adolescent swimmer will be examined in Chapter 3. The perceptions of adolescents in terms of their own experiences and the effects of competition will be discussed.

Chapter 4 will focus on the research design and methodology of the study.

Chapter 5 will cover the statistical analysis of the data. Presentation of the results of the fieldwork, as well as interpretation of the findings, will be discussed.

Chapter 6 will attempt to reach conclusions regarding the main findings that were obtained by the research. The results, relevance of the study and implications will be discussed. Recommendations for further research will also be made.

1.8 Conceptual Clarification

1.8.1 Sport

The word sport is derived from the Latin verb “disportare” meaning “to relax or entertain”. The word was widely used in terms of play, or carefree pastimes (Postma, 1972:188). Later a shortened form of the word, sport, was accepted and the meaning attached to it was that of recreation, and especially movement in the outdoors. Several meanings for the word sport have evolved over time; however, most are associated with three constituent elements: play, physical exercise, and competition (Zakrajsek, 1991). According to Snyder and Spreitzer (1983:12) it is interesting to note that “the term sport, derives from the Middle English verb sporten, ... sport is historically associated with a sense of “turning aside”, “distraction”, - amusement and giving pleasure”. The idea of competition in sport was not as important as it is nowadays (Gerber & Morgan, 1979:82).

In addition to the above-mentioned definitions, McPherson, Curtis and Loy (1989:15) define modern sport as “a structured, goal-oriented, competitive, contest-based, ludic physical activity”.

To understand this definition fully, it may be analysed as follows:

“Sport is structured: This definition implies that sport takes place in an orderly manner that is maintained by a set of rules and a code of conduct. Usually there are guidelines to determine aspects such as duration of play, and venue, as well as numbers and gender of participants.

Sport is goal-oriented: All forms of sport are directed towards attaining a goal. In most cases to win or to be the best performer is what individuals or teams are striving towards.

Sport is competitive: One of the dynamics involved in sport is to win against a competitor. This may be one individual against another, such as in swimming or tennis. The competition can sometimes be between teams, as is the case in sports like rugby, hockey or soccer. It may also be between team members challenging each other. This occurs, for example, when an individual tries to swim the fastest time within his own team.

Sport is contest-based: This relates to the honour of winning a contest, or a medal, or to be the highest ranked individual/team.

Sport is a ludic physical activity: The concept ludic implies an uncertain outcome and a display of physical prowess that usually occurs in sport. There is usually an element of sustained suspense until the end of the sporting physical activity. The uncertain outcome provides the opportunity for participants to demonstrate their physical skills and prowess. Furthermore, the suspense also adds to the excitement and enjoyment of game” (McPherson et al., 1989:17).

It is important to note that sport is a social activity and that skills and competitive competence may play a role in the adolescent athlete’s self-esteem. In Chapter 3, these aspects will be discussed.

1.8.2 Swimming

Swimming is the method by which humans (or other animals) move themselves through water. Swimming is a popular recreational activity, particularly in hot countries and in areas with natural watercourses. Swimming may also be a competitive sport. Competitive swimming is swimming with the goal of maximising performance, usually the speed of swimming. Competitive swimming became popular in the 19th century, and is a recognised event at the Summer Olympic Games. The governing body for competitive swimming is FINA, and this body regulates four swimming disciplines, swum over different distances.

The styles are freestyle (which refers to “any style”, although almost all freestyle events are swum using front crawl), butterfly, breaststroke and backstroke (Biography, s.a.).

1.8.3 Adolescence

Papalia and Olds (1986) describe adolescence as the span of years between childhood and adulthood. In Western societies it begins at about age 12 or 13 and ends in the late teens or early twenties. The biological changes that signal the end of childhood and the beginning of adolescence result in rapid growth in height and weight, changes in bodily proportions and the attainment of sexual maturity and the ability to reproduce. Adolescence is a more difficult period to define in terms of chronological age because of the variations in the time of its onset and termination. The World Health Organisation defines the age of the adolescence as between 10 and 18 years, but the age ranges 8 to 19 years in girls and 10 to 22 years in boys are more appropriate as limits for normal variation in the onset and termination of adolescence (Malina, Bouchard & Bar-or, 2004).

Secular trends in biological maturation over the past hundred years have dramatically lowered the average age of puberty. However, economic and socio-cultural trends over that same period have dramatically extended the average age of adolescence beyond the “teen” years. Whereas adolescence used to span the years from about 13 to 18, sexual maturation now begins as early as age 8 and economic dependency may extend until age 20 or beyond (Gallahue & Ozmun, 2002).

Although adolescence may span a ten-year period, most social scientists recognise that so much psychological and social growth takes place during this decade, that it makes more sense to view the adolescent years as composed of a series of phases than as one homogeneous stage.

Social scientists who study adolescence usually differentiate between early adolescence, which covers the period from about age 11 through age 14, middle adolescence, from about age 15 through age 18, and late adolescence, from about age 18 through age 21 (Steinberg, 1993).

For the purpose of this study the differentiation that will be used, will be that of Steinberg (1993). Sport, competition and the self-worth of the adolescent will receive more attention in Chapter 3.

1.8.4 Competition

Competition is a social process whereby individuals or groups compare themselves with others using some agreed-upon criteria for evaluation. The environment in which a child competes - the social context as described by Sherif (1976) - determines whether the effect of the events encountered during the competitive process is positive or negative. Thus, depending on the circumstances, competition may result in either desirable or undesirable outcomes (Martens, 1978).

Sport provides young people an opportunity to learn how to compete and how to cooperate with teammates and opponents. Sport especially provides children an opportunity to learn how to cooperate within a competitive context. That is, to be successful in sport, young players must learn how to cooperate not only with teammates but also with the opposing players and the rule structure of the contest, in order for the competition to be optimal. Sport is most challenging when children understand that competitors are not the enemy but are individuals who provide an opportunity for them to challenge themselves in striving towards excellence (Martens, 1993).

1.8.5 Perception

To perceive is to “observe, notice or spot, detect or discover” (Reader’s Digest Dictionary, 1988:1057).

Formally defined, social evaluation is the information about one’s ability that is received from other people. Developmental literature indicates that social evaluation received from significant adults and peers plays an important role in shaping children’s perceptions of their own ability (Scanlan, 1982).

Taking a test or competing in sports may produce an arousal response in most children, but those who perceive the situation as non-threatening may respond with feelings of excitement while others who perceive threat may have feelings of anxiety and fear. Adults and peers evaluate children extensively in youth sports. This evaluation is readily transmitted by numerous verbal and nonverbal cues (e.g., praise and criticism, facial expressions, designation as a starter or substitute) and is important because it conveys substantial amounts of information to children about their ability (Passer, 1982).

1.8.6. Parental Involvement

The Concise Oxford Dictionary (Fowler &Fowler, 1975:641) explains the word involve in the following way: “include, comprise, entangled”. Parents are “entangled” in their children’s lives, in more than one way, and even more so in their sporting activities. As mentioned earlier, parents appear to have a dual role in youth sport, which can be generally defined under the headings of “socialisation” and “support”. The socialisation function of the parents includes their role in encouraging involvement in sport and the introduction of the child to the values and attitudes associated with sports participation (Rowley, 1986).

Consequently, the different types of parental involvement, and in particular facilitation and control of children's sporting activities, will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 2.

1.8.7 Parental support

Support is explained as being an "aid, to assist, subsidise, back" (Reader's Digest Dictionary, 1988:1213) and to "provide, encourage" (Concise Oxford Dictionary, 1975:1298).

Such is the increasing need for support in the form of provision of transport, equipment, professional coaching, dietary control, laundry, and adherence to training, that family life may become centred around the needs of the young athlete to the detriment of other family activities (Donnelly, 1993).

It is therefore apparent that the ways in which parents support, encourage and become involved is fundamental to their children's participation and success in sport, whether beneficial or detrimental (Brustad, 1993). Parents often assume the role of motivator, facilitator, even coach in the life of a young athlete. In these roles parents can provide financial, emotional and physical support. Children's enjoyment and anxiety experienced during participation are related to perceived parental support (Anderson et al., 2003).

1.8.8 Encouragement

To encourage means: "to cheer on; sustain; give support to; urge on, to stimulate" (Reader's Digest Dictionary, 1988:824).

Anderson et al. (2003) suggest that parents can play an important role in the child's affective experience of extracurricular activities. Parents should encourage their children's extracurricular involvement, while allowing them to make some of their own decisions regarding activities in which to participate and extent of involvement. Encouragement can contribute to children enjoying their activities,

and enjoyment of participation is probably an important motivator for participation. Children who do not enjoy their extracurricular activities may also be less likely to reap other associated benefits, such as skill development and positive peer interaction.

1.8.9. Parental Pressure

Pressure can be described as “a demand, force, to urge on, insistence, emotional force”(Reader’s Digest Dictionary, 1988:1083).

Pressure is an emotional state that reflects an imbalance between situational demands and personal capacity to respond. It is not simply a feature of environmental demands but rather an imbalance between the demands of the situation, or other people, and one’s own needs. Young athletes experience pressure from parents when there is an imbalance between the amount of encouragement which they experience and that which they desire (Lee & MacLean, 1997).

Hellstedt (1990) defines parental pressure as the amount of motivational influence the parent exerts on the child athlete to compete in sports, perform at a certain level, and continue sport participation. The most potent source of pressure lies in parent’s behaviour, which has the effect of taking control of, or directing their children’s sporting experience and progress.

This leads to parental involvement and the different aspects of which it consists, which are support, encouragement and pressure. These aspects are interrelated and complement each other. The following chapter will include a detailed description of the concept of parental involvement as well as the aspects it encompasses.

Chapter 2

Parental involvement in sport

2.1 Introduction

Even during the early years of a child's life, parents exert subtle influences upon the child's attitudes about physical activity, about sports in general, and about participation in specific sports. Parents not only transmit attitudes about physical activity and sport to their children, they also provide, to varying degrees, kinds of inherited tendencies and traits relative to physical ability (Cratty, 1974).

As far back as 1978, Martens made a valuable contribution towards parental influence on children's sport in his book *Joy and sadness in children's sport*. The important truths to be found in this book are still relevant in what we experience at present. Therefore, Martens' inputs will be cited throughout this study where it seems appropriate to clarify certain aspects. Martens (1978) points out that parents ought to be the first to expose their children to sport. The author claims that research has shown that in homes where parents have favourable attitudes toward sport, where parents participate in sport, where they give their children some basic instruction in sporting skills, and where they provide the equipment needed to play, children are much more likely to develop an intrinsic interest in sport. What parents must be alert to, however, is the sometimes subtle differences between creating a positive atmosphere for sport participation and pressuring or pushing their children into sport. Parents should provide a supportive atmosphere that is conducive to their children's participation.

While the exact mechanisms are still unclear, some research has begun to identify certain variables by which parents influence their children's participation in sport. One such mechanism is attitude formation. McElroy and Kirkendall (1981) found evidence that parents are the primary "significant other" in the formation of children's attitudes toward winning and skill development. Closely related to attitude formation and perhaps a component of it, are the expectations that parents have for their children's continued sport participation. Another mechanism that contributes to parental influence is that of performance evaluation.

Based upon the findings of previous studies, two major factors within the child's family environment appear to be directly related to the attraction to or avoidance of sports participation: the significant role models which are available to the child, and the extent of family reinforcement for the child's participation in sporting activities (Rowley, 1986). Lewko and Greendorfer (1982) affirm that usually the initial involvement in sporting activities is a function of the parents' own sports participation, although they also suggest that within the family it is the father who has the most significant role in determining both the extent and appropriateness of a child's participation in sport, regardless of the child's gender.

Rowley (1986) states that the parent provides a number of important functions in youth sport. When questioned, however, many parents were unclear as to the exact nature of their role. Parents naturally identify with their children to some degree and want them to be successful. However, whether or not this involvement becomes maladaptive seems to depend very much on the level of communication and understanding between the athlete, parent and coach. Wuerth et al. (2003) affirm this level of involvement and communication by adding that in order to encourage without pressuring, parents need to refrain from becoming so involved with the adolescent child's sport that they take on responsibility for, or interfere with, the training of the young athlete.

Parents must be educated, therefore, not to see their children's sports participation solely in terms of winning and losing; they can also help them to develop a sense of autonomy and independence from their participation in sports activities by allowing them to think for themselves (Rowley, 1986).

Lee and MacLean (1997) state that the respective roles of parents and coaches may sometimes become confused and the actions of pro-active parents may conflict with the actions and advice of coaches. Rowley (1986) adds that it is clear that parents are as much in need of guidance and recognition, particularly in the early stages, as the children are. Therefore, parents should be educated and involved in such a way that they, like their children, can enjoy youth sport. Alienating them from the sporting environment would deny many parents a considerable source of pride and enjoyment, and deprive youth sport of an important resource, necessary if children's sport is to flourish. Rowley (1986) elaborates on the contribution parents make towards their children's sporting experiences, stating that some sporting organisations are now endeavouring to maximise this contribution by preparing guides for the parents.

It is clear that parental involvement is of the utmost importance to parents and children alike. Therefore, attention will be given to the different aspects of parental involvement and the influence this has on the adolescent child participating in sport.

2.2 Parental Involvement

For many parents and coaches the young athlete may be a source of vicarious enjoyment and success (Rowley, 1993). Parents report feeling “great pride” and “living out (their) own fantasy” through their child’s sporting endeavours. Alternatively, observers of youth sport have proposed that when adults become involved in their adolescent child’s sport they have a tendency to place unreasonable demands on the young athlete, following ambitions of their own and placing an excessive emphasis upon winning. With regard to intent and motives of parents, Perreira (2005) adds that many parents try, through their children, to achieve goals that they missed out on in their own childhood. Under these circumstances young athletes learn to fear evaluation from their parents who “watch them like a hawk”, or videotape the whole performance for later analysis. This can result in some young athletes developing unrealistic hopes as feelings of personal worth become equated with success in sport, and a fear of failure or rejection may result if parental love is perceived to be contingent upon winning (Rowley, 1993).

Parents’ commitment to their children’s sport has its foundations in the identity derived from the family membership, which may be evidenced by pride in the performance of their offspring, and their response to the demands made on the family’s time and economic resources. The effect of social identity is evident not only in parents recognition of their children’s requirements but also in projection of personal ambitions onto those children, who may be expected to aspire to achievements which they themselves were unable to attain. In some cases the adolescent may also become a prospective asset to the family income as well as a substitute for parental aspirations. The commitment of family resources, financial and otherwise, may result in a demand, however unspoken, for competitive success and an evaluation of return on the investment (Donnelly, 1993).

Rowley (1986) agrees that the family is undoubtedly one of the key elements in the child's involvement in sport. Lee (1993) highlights the role of the family in the sporting endeavours of children by suggesting that the family is initially the most important influence on children. Parents, brothers and sisters are all closely concerned with each other and continually give messages about the competence and worth of growing children. Hellstedt (1990) also affirms the role of the family by remarking that all too often family arrangements will have to be made around the child's commitments. Hence, a family's commitment to a child's sporting career may have profound effects upon its members (Donnelly, 1993).

Apart from the fact that the whole family becomes involved when children engage in competitive sport, parental involvement seems to have the most effect on the way adolescent children experience sport. Brustad (1993) supports this statement by pointing out that it is apparent that the ways in which parents support, encourage and become involved is fundamental to their children's participation and success in sport, whether beneficial or detrimental.

A study by Anderson et al. (2003) examined children's perceptions of their parent's involvement in their extracurricular activities. The study indicated that children perceive two conceptually different types of parental involvement: one that represents parental facilitation of the children's activity participation and affords them choices, and one that suggests parental control of the child's activity participation and imposes performance standards.

There is no doubt that parents may play a highly facilitative and positive role in children's sporting career development. Whereas moderate involvement seems to facilitate a sport career, both under-involved, disinterested parents and, at the opposite extreme, overly-engaged parents, may play a disruptive role (Hellstedt, 1987). However, without the assistance of their parents to smooth the progress of their sport experiences, adolescents will struggle immensely to keep up with the demands of a competitive sport.

Martens (1978) maintains that parents have an enormous responsibility to help their children develop realistic expectancies of their capabilities in sports. This, of course, requires that the parents have realistic expectancies about their children, something that parents do not always have. Even though they may err occasionally, most parents have the best interests of their children at heart. They try to help, they offer encouragement, they control their emotions, and most importantly, they show their children that they care. When parents make mistakes, it is often because they are not certain of their responsibilities with respect to their children's involvement in sports.

On the other hand, parental involvement that implies control rather than facilitation may cause many problems for the adolescent. Therefore it is not strange if adolescents in sport often wonder whether they are in control of their own lives, or for whom they are doing it. Thomas, Gallagher and Thomas (1982) remark that although parents and coaches try to lead adolescents to greater independence through sport, it still happens that adults control most of the adolescent's experiences in sport. General lack of control over their own sporting experience could be responsible, or could at least be an important factor in children "dropping out" of sports. Perhaps Grupe (1988:10) illustrates the control of children's sport best by stating that "Children would never think on their own accord of subjecting themselves to an organized form of sport aimed at long-term performance, and to organization of their daily, weekly and yearly schedules as is required by the preparation to achieve top performance".

Wuerth et al. (2003) state that the influence of mothers and fathers in youth sport appears to be benign in the eyes of the involved parent and the recipient athletes. At the same time the self- perception of mothers and fathers is different: mothers see themselves as giving more positive support and being more actively involved in the athlete's sporting activity than fathers do. This might be due to the fact that mothers still feel more responsible for family life and childcare than fathers do.

Fathers tend to be more concerned with giving sport-specific advice to their adolescent children (e.g. pointing out what was bad or telling them how to improve) and push them to train harder and give their best (Wuerth et al., 2003).

Parents can also become emotionally involved, and in some cases, lose proper perspective when they begin to see their young athlete as an investment. According to Murphy (1999), instead of regarding sport as a potentially fun or healthy activity for their children, some parents view it as a means of achieving fame, glory or material rewards. In many instances, the goal may be a scholarship or a professional contract.

Another related element, which contributes to parents' emotional involvement in their child's athletic career, is a process that sport psychologists call identification - the intense bond between parent and offspring. Parents who "live vicariously through their children" are guilty of over-identification. They fail to see the importance and value of allowing the child to experience sport on his/her own terms, for his/her own sake. Moreover, the parents' self worth is linked to the child's athletic success (Heinzman, 2002).

Byrne (1993) describes the points of view of coaches on the issue of parental involvement. He claims that discussions with numerous coaches from a wide variety of sports indicate that three distinct points of view exist when it comes to parents and their involvement in sport.

First, there are those who welcome and encourage parental involvement. Parents are accepted as a vital element in the coaching process. They are seen as an important human resource capable of reinforcing the views of the coach. Second, there are those who view parental involvement as an inevitable yet at times unnecessary aspect of working with children. Parents are at best an inconvenience, something to be tolerated but certainly not encouraged.

Lastly, and by no means least, there are those coaches who believe parents should be excluded from the sporting arena altogether. For these coaches, parents are more trouble than they are worth. The pressure parents exert on their children, and the abuse they give coaches, officials and other parents, may well be why coaches feel this way (Byrne, 1993).

Anderson et al. (2003) suggest that when parental involvement is perceived as pressure, sports enjoyment may be adversely affected, and when enjoyment is low, children may not benefit from involvement. While parents may have good intentions, they must consider how their adolescent children perceive their behaviour. Individual personality differences come into play. One child may be encouraged by his/her mother's or father's continuous coaching from the sidelines, while another may be embarrassed or feel criticised.

Thus, parents must be aware of how their intentions translate into involvement behaviour. They must also be sensitive to their children's responses and be willing to modify their own behaviour. Niednagel (1992) describes parents as ranging from quiet and encouraging to loud-mouthed and highly critical. Unfortunately, a number of young athletes have poor adult models in parents and coaches, who instil or tolerate unacceptable behaviour. This behaviour may cause problems at a later stage.

Parents need to be aware of their own behaviour, but also need to exercise extra effort and wisdom regarding their children's behaviour, as this will be unique for every child. Parents and coaches need to identify those children who are overly intense, and to channel that determination into positive experiences and sportsmanlike behaviour. Depending upon their brain types, some children are more difficult to raise or coach than others (Niednagel, 1992). Lee (1993) recognises this and adds that the more accepting, warm and interested parents are towards their children the more confident and positive they will become.

Hellstedt (1987) suggests that the involvement of parents in their children's sporting career falls on a continuum ranging from under-involvement to over-involvement.

The type of parenting style could also play a major role in the way the adolescent perceives involvement. Therefore, a discussion of parenting styles will follow in an attempt to clarify the parental involvement continuum that Hellstedt (1987) has suggested and Byrne (1993) has affirmed.

2.2.1 Parenting styles

2.2.1.1 Under-involvement

2.2.1.1.1 Disinterested parents

Some parents are heavily involved in the social activities of the local community. In such cases, a child's sporting involvement may be beneficial to the parents. They just drop the children off at their sports activities and leave the rest to the coaches. This tendency was highlighted in a study done by Byrne (1993), where 32% of the respondents participated in sport because their parents wanted them to. At the present time there is an increasing trend for mothers to have an occupation and share in the financial responsibilities of the family, and this mounts to the problem of children being forced to take part in sport. In such case, there is a very good chance that the experience will be both unenjoyable and stressful. Children should take part because they want to, not because they have to.

2.2.1.1.2 Misinformed parents

In an attempt to ensure that they don't detract from their children's enjoyment of sport, some parents decide not to get involved. Children want to please their parents and show them what they can do. Sport offers a wonderful environment for this. It allows the children to display the new skills they have learned, to demonstrate effort and to show commitment.

The smiling face of a parent to share in success and a hug to console in defeat goes for a long way toward making sport an enjoyable experience (Byrne, 1993).

2.2.1.2 Over-involvement

Although under-involvement may present difficulties, it is over-involvement, which is the most noticeable problem.

The reasons for this problem differ and to highlight this it is helpful to classify over-involved parents into two categories: the excitable and the fanatical.

2.2.1.2.1 Excitable parents

Byrne (1993) remarks that excitable parents tend to be very supportive of the coach and attend practices and games without interfering in the coaching process. Unfortunately, they often get caught up in the heat of the moment. Excitable parents are often as tired as their children are, having lived every moment of the game. The sheer excitement in the heat of the moment, mostly when pressure is mounting, could turn them into screaming spectators who use abusive language. Parents in this category do not realise that what they are doing is wrong. They don't recognise that their behaviour is embarrassing to their children and that they are setting a bad example.

2.2.1.2.2 Fanatical parents

Without doubt the most problematic parent is the fanatic. This type of parent may have been either extremely successful or unsuccessful in sport. The one factor all fanatical parents have in common, however, is the desire for their child to be a sporting hero or heroine (Byrne, 1993). Parents often celebrate a successful performance of the child. These celebrations are accompanied by minute analysis and suggestions for improvement. Fanatical parents are never quite satisfied.

A poor performance or, worse still, a loss, will result in a long flow of criticism aimed at everyone but especially the child whose performance is a clear reflection of his or her parent's worth. The coach also receives advice/ criticism irrespective of whether he or she wants it (American Sport Education Program, 1994).

The intense pressure placed on the children shows on their faces and in their performance. They often argue with officials because they know their parents expect it. Quite often children whose parents fall into this category have trouble sleeping and eating prior to competition. Byrne (1993) maintains that when attempts are made to experience the success which is missing in their adult lives, or which eluded them in their own sporting careers, parents are imposing on their child's participation in sport. When parents push their children to achieve the same, or greater, success in sport than they themselves did, they are imposing their own motives on them.

Steinberg (2001) advocates an authoritative parenting style, which is perhaps the ideal style.

2.2.1.3 Authoritative parenting style

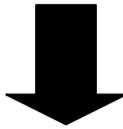
With regard to sport involvement, authoritative parents would be more likely to encourage sport participation, participate in their child's sport (e.g. attend games and practices, reinforce positive participation and practice), and be supportive of environments that require disciplined practice, commitment, fair play and sportsmanship. In addition, authoritative parents are also more likely to set appropriate development goals for their child's sporting performance (Steinberg, 2001; American Sport Education Program, 1994). This is effective because it leads to three effects: 1) nurturance and parent involvement creates an environment more receptive to parental influence; 2) a balance of support and structure facilitates the development of self-regulatory skills in the child; and 3) the verbal give-and-take characteristic of parent-child exchanges fosters cognitive and

social competence in the child. The result is a responsible, competent child who engages in consistent behaviour (American Sport Education Program, 1994).

It seems that the above-mentioned parenting style may be the most effective and positive, and the style parents should strive towards. Children want to share their experiences in sports with their parents: they want their support (Martens, 1978).

Consequently, parental involvement includes behaviour of parents such as support, encouragement and pressure. The interrelatedness of the different aspects of parental involvement is illustrated in Figure 2.1.

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT



FACILITATION AND CONTROL



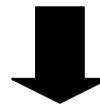
PARENTAL SUPPORT

- Emotional
- Financial
- Physical



PARENTAL ENCOURAGEMENT

- Praise
- Support
- Contribute to enjoyment of sport



PARENTAL PRESSURE

- A certain degree of pressure perceived as positive
- Excessive pressure perceived as negative

2.3 *Parental Support*

Leff and Hoyle (1995) define parental support as behaviours by parents perceived by their children as facilitating athletic participation and performance. Two aspects of this definition merit elaboration. First, it is most likely that children's perception of their parents' support contributes to the emotional and athletic adjustment of the child. Avid parental support that is not apparent to the child is not likely to be as effective as minimal parental support that is acknowledged and appreciated by the child. Second, parental support affects children's participation and their performance in sport (Scanlan & Lewthwaite, 1986). In this context, participation means their continued enjoyment of and loyalty to the sport, and performance means the level of accomplishment they are able to attain (Hoyle & Leff, 1997).

Anderson et al. (2003) reason that children's enjoyment and anxiety experienced during participation were also related to perceived parental support. These results further imply that parents should encourage their children's extracurricular involvement, while allowing them to make some of their own decisions regarding activities in which to participate and the extent of involvement.

In terms of supporting roles, parental responses could be divided into three areas: (1) emotional, (2) financial, and (3) provisional or physical (Rowley, 1986; Anderson et al., 2003). Obviously, all three areas mentioned are related and complementary to each other. One could also not exclude any one of these areas. According to Greendorfer, Lewko and Rosengren (1996) one must acknowledge that parental support and encouragement can take on various forms. Andy Martin, *Youth Sport's Trust* Sport Director of the UK (Perreira, 2005), suggests that the degree of support parents can give may vary from consoling a child who is not selected for a school or club team (emotional support), to accompanying him of

her to the national finals of a competition (physical support), or from transporting the child week in, week out to training sessions, to helping raise funds for the club (financial support).

On the basis of the above-mentioned, the three supporting roles or areas of support needed from parents will be discussed.

2.3.1 Emotional support

A substantial amount of research has shown that adolescents who have supportive parents, peers, siblings, teachers, and coaches are more likely to initiate and continue their participation in sport than individuals for whom this support is much less (Lewko & Greendorfer, 1988; McPherson & Brown, 1988). The full rewards of sport are only available when adolescent children play for intrinsic rewards, not extrinsic rewards such as parental praise or love. However, some parents not only push their children into sports, they also attempt to bribe them to play well. In sport, parents have numerous opportunities to demonstrate acceptance and to provide or withhold support, thereby influencing the adolescent's self-esteem development (Brustad, 1996).

Thus, the individuals who make up the sporting environment of the adolescent have a powerful influence over participation motivation. For example, Brown (1985) found that social support from parents, teammates, and friends was positively related to adolescent female swimmers' participation status. Specifically, current swimmers reported significantly more positive reinforcement and encouragement for their involvement in swimming than did former swimmers. In a follow-up study, Brown, Frankel and Fennel (1989) found that the degree to which adolescent females maintained physical activity involvement was positively related to both the amount and type of influence received from mothers, fathers, and male and female peers.

Martens (1978) explains that when parents hold excessively high expectations for their children, they may lead them to believe that they are capable of doing more than they actually can.

Adolescents with unrealistically high expectations are often frustrated in sports, for even when they perform at their peak, their aspirations remain unfulfilled. Sometimes adolescent children have quite realistic expectations, even though their parents may have unrealistically high expectations. This situation is equally destructive to the adolescent's enjoyment of sports. Regardless of how well children perform, it never seems to be sufficient for the parents. This, too, can frustrate children and thwart their motivation to participate. It can also result in children devaluing the worth or the parent's judgment, and hence, the parents themselves (Martens, 1978).

Brustad (1996) points out that, as a consequence of children's reliance on adult sources of information in judging competence, in combination with the typically high levels of involvement of parents in their children's athletic competitions, it is logical to assume that parental behaviours and feedback significantly impact on children's self-concept development during their early years of sport participation.

2.3.2 Financial support

Rowley (1986) explains the supporting role parents play as changes in mealtimes, transportation to and from the training or competition facility, and supplying financial assistance to the extent that it may affect the availability of money for other domestic needs. Coakley (1993) adds that as expenses increase, parents paying for their children's participation are more likely to see their sponsorship as an "investment" in their children's futures.

Juba (1986) comments on the role of the swimming parent, stating that it is certainly an interesting one. Swimmers, because they train from a relatively young age, rely heavily upon their parents for support, both physically, in the form of transporting them to and from the pool, and financially.

Concurrently the parents, as a result of the peculiar nature of the average swimming timetable, revolve their lives around their swimming offspring, sacrificing a considerable amount of time in consequence. For a certain span of their lives, swimming dictates the structure of their life-style.

As a result of the importance placed upon swimming within the framework of their lives - both in terms of time and financially - an unspoken pressure is immediately placed upon the swimmer (Juba, 1986).

2.3.3 Physical support

Few children participate in sport without the financial and emotional support of their parents, but the physical or provisional support is often the most important. The need for physical support ranges from provision of transport and equipment, to professional coaching, dietary control and adherence to training to such an extent that the needs of the young athlete could be detrimental to family life (Donnelly, 1993).

Barnes and Ramsay (2001) maintain that almost everyone who has achieved anything in sport has done so with rock-solid parental support. Millions of miles are driven every year by parents of sporty children.

To conclude, support comprises many components. The following guidelines by Pill (2005) include the three supporting roles or areas, which is emotional, financial and physical support. Pill (2005) compiled a newsletter proposing guidelines for parents in order to obtain maximal positive support from them. The newsletter, "Coaching Letter for Parents" should be handed out to parents of children involved in sport at the first team meeting. Although the newsletter was prepared for the sport of soccer, it could be adapted for any sport.

Changing the wording to make it applicable to swimming has modified it in such a way that it can be used for the same reason, at the first team or parents' meeting when the swimming season starts. In this case, words like "game" have been changed to "race", or "gala" and "player" to "swimmer".

The heading of the newsletter is: "*Parental support- the key to peak performance*"(Perreira, 2005).

"The role that parents play in the life of a swimmer has a tremendous impact on their experience. With this in mind, we have taken some time to write down some helpful reminders for all of us as we approach the upcoming season.

1. *Let the coaches' coach:* Leave the coaching to the coaches. This includes motivating, psyching your child for practice, after game critiquing, setting goals, requiring additional training, etc. You have entrusted the care of your child to these coaches and they need to be free to do their job. If a swimmer has too many coaches, it is confusing for him and his performance usually declines.
2. *Support the programme:* Get involved. Volunteer. Help out with fundraisers, car-pool; anything to support the programme.
3. *Be you child's best fan:* Support your child unconditionally. Do not withdraw love when your child performs poorly. Your child should *never* have to perform to win your love.
4. *Support and root for all players on the team:* Foster teamwork. Your child's teammates *are not* the enemy. When they are swimming better than your child, your child now has a wonderful opportunity to learn.
5. *Do not bribe or offer incentives:* Your job is *not* to motivate. Leave this to the coaching staff. Bribes will distract your child from properly concentrating in practice and at competitions.

6. *Encourage your child to talk with the coaches:* If your child is having difficulties in practice or at competitions, or can't make a practice, etc., encourage him/her to speak directly to the coaches. This "responsibility taking" is a big part of becoming a big-time swimmer. By handling these tasks, your child is claiming ownership of all aspects of the sport - preparation for as well as swimming the gala.
7. *Understand and display appropriate game behaviour:* Remember, your child's self esteem and performance are at stake. Be supportive, cheer, and behave appropriately. To perform to the best of his abilities, a swimmer needs to focus on the parts of the game that he can control (his fitness, positioning, decision-making, skill, and aggressiveness, what the race is presenting). If he starts focusing on what he cannot control (the condition of the facilities, the weather, the opponent, even the outcome of the race at times), he will not swim as well as he should. If he hears a lot of people telling him what to do, it diverts his attention away from the task at hand.
8. *Monitor your child's stress level at home:* Keep an eye on your child to make sure that he is handling the stress from the various activities in his life effectively.
9. *Monitor eating and sleeping habits:* Be sure your child is eating the proper foods and getting adequate rest.
10. *Help your child keep his priorities straight:* Help your child maintain a focus on schoolwork, relationships and the other things in life besides swimming. Also, if your child has made a commitment to swimming, help him fulfil his obligation.
11. *Reality test:* If your child has lost, but he has done his best, help him to see this as a "win". Remind him that he must focus on "process" and not "results". His fun and satisfaction should be derived from "striving to win". Conversely, he should be as satisfied from success that occurs despite inadequate preparation and performance.

12. *Keep swimming in its proper perspective:* Swimming should not be larger than life for you. If your child's performance produces strong emotions in you, suppress them. Remember your relationship will continue with your children *long after* their competitive swimming days are over. Keep *your* goals and needs separate from your child's experience.
13. *Have fun:* Challenge your child to reach past his "*comfort level*" and improve himself as a swimmer, and thus, a person".

Many parents attempt to do their best for their children and try to help their children achieve their full potential. Thus, parents who are frequently (and sometimes deservedly) blamed for problems in youth sport, also sometimes find themselves in ambivalent and constraining positions.

2.4 Parental Encouragement

Tulloh (2005) suggests that when it comes to the successful coaching of young athletes, encouragement and support is the key. According to the Reader's Digest Dictionary (1988) the word "*encourage*" means: to cheer on; sustain; give support to; urge on, to stimulate.

Pereira (2005) explains that it is never too early to encourage a child in any pursuit that interests him/her, but the important thing is to recognise the difference between encouragement and pressure. Encouragement means letting children go at their own pace until they find their feet, then gently helping them set attainable goals. If a child has a particular aptitude for a sport, he/she will probably excel in it, but if he/she seem reticent, he/she should not be pushed too hard. If, at any time, a parent find him/herself getting inwardly irritated or annoyed with a child because he/she hasn't achieved what they were hoping for, they are applying pressure, which could end up in making the child feel discouraged and inadequate.

Parents would all like their children to be Olympic champions, but the worst thing they can do is to pressurise the child with their own dream of glory and then blame him/her for not realising it. At each stage in life the developing boy and girl have his/her own reasons for getting involved in sport. It may be a desire for approval, or a wish to make a mark in his or her peer group. More likely, it comes from discovering an aptitude for the sport, which brings a modicum of success. Everybody needs to find things they can do well. Self-esteem feeds on achievement, and sport at club level is an excellent way of experiencing achievement on a regular basis (Tulloh, 2005).

Anderson et al. (2003) support the view of Tulloh regarding the significance of encouragement, adding that it can contribute to adolescent children enjoying their activities, and that enjoyment of participation is probably an important motivator for participation. The mildest sort of judicious encouragement involves shared hopes, shared elation, and shared disasters by children and parents. Barnes and Ramsay (2001:9) describe sport as an “exaggerated and intensified version of normal life” and “being all about insecurities”. The best of parents offer the right zone of safety in sport’s turbulent world; the other kind only increase fears in a fearful life.

Youth sports participation can provide parents and their children with common interests. It can also lead to tension between them. By encouraging the more officious parents to praise children and to focus their attention on performance rather than outcome, many of the problems can be overcome. According to Byrne (1993) identification with one’s child is natural. It is over-identification, the taking control and manipulation of the child that lead to problems in sport.

The Youth Sports Trust’s Sport Director in the UK, Andy Martin, summarises the effect of encouragement in the following manner: “As a parent, you play an important role in promoting your child’s happiness and individual success in sport. Your expectations have a significant bearing on your child’s attitude. Positive

encouragement from you will also contribute to your child's enjoyment of sport" (Perreira, 2005).

2.5 Parental Pressure

Pressure is often referred to as a quality of the environment, such as the competitive situation. However, it may be conceived in a manner analogous to McGrath's (1970) conception of stress as an emotional state that reflects an imbalance between situational demands and personal capacity to respond.

Parental pressure has been operationalised as the discrepancy between parents and the young athlete's expectations (McElroy & Kirkendall, 1981; Smith, Zingale & Coleman, 1978). Thus parental pressure may be thought of as a feature of a child's personal experience, which is dependent upon the relationship between parental behaviour and the child's personal references. Following this argument it is proposed, broadly, that young athletes experience pressure from parents when there is an imbalance between the amount of encouragement which they experience and that which they desire (Lee and MacLean, 1997).

Hellstedt (1990:137) elaborates by referring to the "nebulous thing called pressure" and states that it has a lot to answer for. It can lead to parents and coaches becoming obsessive about the child succeeding; it can lead to the child seeing winning as being the "be all and end all", it can lead to unfair means being employed to ensure success, and it can lead to physical injury as the child competes when he/she should not, just because winning is so important.

Leff and Hoyle (1995) add to the above-mentioned characteristics by remarking that parental pressure is behaviour perceived by adolescents as indicating expectations of unlikely, even unattainable, heights of accomplishment. The emphasis falls on the perceptions of the adolescent, not the objective behaviour of the parents.

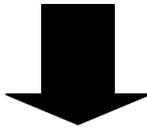
When children are ready to compete, they will normally express interest and enthusiasm for becoming involved. Parents should support their children's desire to compete when they are physically ready, but they should be careful to distinguish between support and pressure. Some parents can effectively communicate their subtle expectations that their children must participate successfully in sports as soon as they are old enough. Sports are unlikely to be enjoyed by children who feel such pressure (Morris, 1978). Parental support and interest may also yield subtle pressure, creating a sense of obligation and making it difficult for the athlete to quit, especially if extreme financial sacrifices made by parents are at the back of their mind (Donnelly, 1993). Sometimes parents provide too much support, which can place unreasonable pressure on an athlete. Yelling at the coach or offering instruction to the athlete during the competition may not be the best way to show how much you care (Davis, 2000). Juba (1986) adds to the previous authors' views, confirming that the young athlete setting out in his chosen sport will sooner or later almost certainly face parental and coach pressure.

Hence, the interest displayed originally as support may develop into pressure when the recipients perceive that they need to "pay their way" and that levels of involvement are beyond those with which they feel comfortable. Despite their good intentions, parents may not appreciate this effect and inadvertently transgress what Ryan (1995) considers to be the fine line between encouragement and pressure (Lee & MacLean, 1997). Parents may push their children into sports without recognising that they are pushing. They may want so much for their children to play, to become stars, to be extensions of their past athletic selves, that they unwittingly convey their expectations in many subtle ways.

Adolescent children easily sense these expectations, and if they feel compelled to play, it diminishes their prospects of obtaining the full benefits of the sport (Barnes and Ramsay, 2001).

Hellstedt (1990) points out that the main issue for the parents is to find the proper balance of understanding, support and encouragement for maximal effort. Parental pressure definitely plays a major role in the way adolescents perceive their sport experience. In some cases, and to a certain degree, pressure can be tolerated and might even be perceived as support and encouragement. Hellstedt et al. (1988) suggest, however, that excessive pressure may result in a myriad of negative feelings or outcomes. To summarise the effect of excessive pressure, Figure 2.2 illustrates the negative outcomes to which it may lead.

EXCESSIVE PRESSURE



MAY RESULT IN

- **Anxiety**
- **Stress**
- **Parent-child conflict**

MAY LEAD TO:



- **Dissatisfaction**
- **Discouragement**
- **Attrition**
- **Competitive anxiety**
- **Lowered enjoyment**
- **Lowered motivation**
- **Fear of failure**
- **Burnout**
- **Withdrawal**

FIGURE 2.2: EXCESSIVE PRESSURE IN SPORT

2.5.1 Anxiety

One of the outcomes excessive pressure may lead to, is that of anxiety (concern, fearfulness). Generalised anxiety describes worries or fears which are not isolated to any one situation or event but which are generalised to cover a wide range of future events. Performance anxiety can occur when the child is called upon to take a test, speak in front of others in the classroom, or compete against someone in sport (Rowley, 1993).

Perhaps the most universal and potentially most disruptive emotion found amongst adolescents taking part in competitive youth sport is anxiety. The effect this emotion has upon an adolescent child's behaviour and performance varies considerably, as do the things that make them anxious; and much depends upon the youngster's ability to cope with the threat and uncertainty posed by particular situations within sport. Many adolescents report feeling worried or anxious if expected to win. The setting of unrealistic objectives can cause problems particularly if sustained by a coach or parent. The high achieving athlete may also develop emotional difficulties (Rowley, 1993).

Research done by Gould, Petlichkoff, Simons and Vevera (1987) suggests that anxiety has a negative influence on sport or competition outcomes. Different situations or circumstances within the sport milieu can cause different forms of anxiety, which may be experienced by the young athlete (cf. Kenow & Williams, 1992; Hume, Hopkins, Robinson & Hollings, 1993).

There are three major causes of anxiety in children's sport: the attitudes and motivations of parents and coaches, the attitude of the athlete him or herself, and over-training or staleness. Anxiety can range from mild arousal, characterised by "butterflies in the stomach" and anticipation of the tournament, match or competition, to extreme fearfulness, panic and occasionally, avoidance of the performance situation.

Rowley (1996) further explains that the physiological effects of anxiety are many and varied. They include, for example, increased heart rate and blood pressure, sweating and stimulation of metabolism. One important effect involves a change in muscle tension. Anxiety increases muscular tension in the body, which may reduce the effectiveness of certain muscle groups, particularly in sports that involve repeated or dynamic muscular effort such as soccer, swimming or athletics. Sustained muscular tension also leads to an accumulation of lactic acid, which causes pain, stiffness and fatigue. Characteristically the sensations of anxiety include psychological, physiological and behavioural components such as a loss of concentration, worry, rapid heart rate, nausea, stomach-ache, fidgeting, restlessness and fatigue.

An equally effective cause of performance anxiety is for an athlete to “catch” it from a parent or coach. A parent or coach who becomes overly anxious before competition, can often transfer this apprehension and worry to the athlete. Children may be affected as much by the attitude and mental state of a parent as by any pressure caused by the sports environment (Rowley, 1993).

2.5.2. Stress

Pressure can lead to stress, which can often, although not always, be harmful, and although sport psychologists are able to help with techniques to reduce stress the problem still remains. It remains because the pressure comes largely from outside the individual, from the way in which sport and competition are valued in society (Gilroy, 1993).

Medline Plus (Goldenring, 2004) describes stress as a response to any situation or factor that creates a negative emotional or physical change or combination of both emotional and physical changes (the most typical scenario). Stress is an unavoidable aspect of life. People of all ages can experience stress.

Some stress can be helpful because it provides motivation. However, excessive stress can interfere with life, activities, and health. Stress can affect the way people think, act, and feel.

All people have natural responses to stress (such as increased vigilance, aggressiveness, blocking out pain) that allow them to survive while the body recognises and responds to severe stresses. Children learn to respond to stress by personal experience and by observation. Most stresses experienced by children may seem insignificant to adults, but because they have few previous experiences from which to learn, even situations that require small changes can have an enormous impact on a child's feelings of safety and security (Goldenring, 2004).

Scanlan and Lewthwaite (1988) agree that parents who pressure their children to participate in sport may contribute to the level of stress the children experience prior to competition and may also be involved in other more indirect ways in this stress. It is important to note that in an examination by the authors concerning adult influences on young wrestlers, it was found that competitors who perceived greater parental pressure to participate in wrestling reported greater pre-match stress than did those boys who perceived little parental pressure. Martens (1978) implies that overzealous parents create numerous other problems besides misbehaving as spectators. They are often guilty of pressuring their children into sports and of continuing to push/pressurise once their children begin participating. Gilroy (1993) maintains that parents who push, and who constantly evaluate their children's behaviour, place great stress on their children.

Adults "need to acquire the skill to identify children who are at risk of excessive stress. Children most susceptible to perceiving the sport environment as threatening are those who have a low self-esteem, which is often caused by frequent failure in the past, unrealistic expectations about their abilities, and frequent criticism from others" (Martens, 1993:11).

Often parents impose their own standards of performance on children, expecting them to meet their criteria of excellence rather than helping children to develop their own standards (Gilroy, 1993).

2.5.3 Parent- child conflict

Research by Donnelly (1993) that involved in-depth interviews with 45 recently retired Canadian high-performance athletes, suggests that although some athletes reported excellent relationships with parents during their competitive careers, the general impression was of greater adolescent-parent problems than the norm. Even where athletes reported good relationships, they sometimes felt guilty about the time and money parents had devoted to their sport involvement. Parents that took an unhealthy interest resulted in severe pressure on the athlete.

Thus, excessive parental pressure may result in competitive anxiety, and consequently, parent-child conflict (Hellstedt et al., 1988).

2.5.4 Consequences of excessive pressure

The most potent source of pressure lies in the parent's behaviour, which has the effect of taking control of, or directing their children's sporting experience and progress. A perception of such behaviour was widely held by the swimmers in the study done by Lee and McLean (1997). Parents who pressure their children to participate in sport may contribute to the level of stress the children experience prior to competition and may add to this stress in other more indirect ways.

Gould, Horn and Spreeman (1983) agree that the more involved the child becomes and the better he/she becomes, the more the pressure grows, not only on them but also on their parents.

Rowley (1993) remarks that there has been considerable concern that in those sports which take up large amounts of the athlete's time, if coach and parent are not careful, the sport may assume such a central role in the child's life that achievement or failure to achieve major goals set in the sport become associated with feelings of self-worth in life.

This has been documented in games like tennis in which precocious youngsters who have been successful as juniors begin to judge themselves and see others as judging them in terms of sport success to the extent that they dare not lose or they fail as a person (Rowley, 1993). Gould et al. (1983) fully agree with this viewpoint and indicate a major stressor in sport to be the young athletes' fear of failure. While this fear of failure can emanate from different sources (self, peer, coach) a major source appears to be the young athlete's parents. An ambitious parent who sees no limits to his child's capabilities compounds this. It could be called "parental projection: "I feel that in swimming the pressure often comes from parents who see their children as extensions of their own "perfect" selves" (Juba, 1986:177). As in all sports, fear of failure may sometimes (frequently) lead to poor performances, and the majority of people involved in sport do not appear to be equipped to teach children how to handle their fear of failure either before or after the race in which they are swimming.

Byrne (1993) reasons that external pressure from adults for children to take part in sport, to win at all costs, to be number one, will de-motivate them and turn play into work. The stress of having to perform to adult expectations and achieve adult set goals will take a heavy toll on a child. Undoubtedly, the fear will lead to dissatisfaction and ultimately attrition.

Stress and anxiety may eventually lead to discouragement, burnout, and eventual withdrawal from the competitive environment (Hellstedt et al., 1988).

Burnout within the sport milieu is conceptualised by Raedeke (1997:397) as “a reaction to stress of athletic competition that can be characterized by feelings of emotional exhaustion or negative attitude toward those the athlete associates with, and a resulting decreased athletic performance. Athletes become fed up with what they are doing and feel fatigued and frustrated.” Smith (1986:3) states that “burnout results from an increase in stress-induced costs ... [It] involves a psychological, emotional, and sometimes a physical withdrawal from an activity in response to excessive stress ... When burnout occurs, a previously enjoyable activity becomes an aversive source of stress ... Burnout is a complex phenomenon ... One element common to all definitions, however, is an emphasis on burnout as a response to chronic stress”.

A contributing factor to the withdrawal of sport participation by the adolescent is the experiencing of stress as a result of the over-emphasising of the competition element. Research by McPherson, Marteniuk, Tihanyi and Clarck (1980) indicate that adolescents who withdraw from sport do so as a result of “too much pressure”, conflict with coaches and low success rate in a certain sport (cf. Gould, Feltz, Horn & Weiss, 1982 and Burton & Martens, 1986).

To conclude, one can assume that parental pressure definitely plays a major role in the way adolescents perceive their sport experience. In some cases, or to a certain degree, pressure can be tolerated and might even be perceived as support. Though not documented through existing research data, casual observations of many coaches and sport scientists suggest that the degree of parental pressure varies from positive support on one end of a continuum to excessive pressure on the other. A certain amount of pressure may be desirable (Hellstedt et al., 1988). How much pressure is considered as “desirable” or positive, however, is a question that remains to be answered.

According to Lee and MacLean (1997) different children can tolerate different degrees of direction by their parents. Thus, the importance of individual differences would more likely be the most significant factor in regard to the desirable amount of pressure for each adolescent involved in sport.

The adolescent's sport experience will be discussed in Chapter 3.

Chapter 3

The Adolescent's Sport Experience

3.1 Introduction

Sport is practised for varying reasons, all of which give meaning to the participant. Values and benefits find their source in amusement, education, recreation, health, social relationships, biological development, freedom of expression, and testing oneself against others. In sum, sport is a vehicle for experiencing aspects of humanness. Sport is an expression of the body that gives definition to human experience (Zakrajsek, 1991).

Research generally shows that children participate in sport in order to have fun, improve skills, belong to a group, be successful and gain recognition, get fitter, and find excitement (Gilroy, 1993). Reasons for withdrawing from sport include having other things to do, boredom, lack of success, too much pressure, loss of interest, friends leaving, expense, injury, work, and problems with facilities or support. Adolescents practise a variety of sports. The sport they become occupied with may vary from going to relatively low key activities such as swimming classes, gym club or soccer practice during the day, to the more highly pressured activities such as going to the pool every morning before school for swimming training. The variety of activities available to the youth, and consequently the adolescent, is extensive, but only if the parents are able to support them with transport, equipment and entry fees (Gilroy, 1993).

Adolescents involved in competitive sport surely experience sport in a different way from those who are involved in low-key activities for mainly the social and health benefits. Grupe (1988) reasons that in top-level sport the young athlete must be taught to act independently and not just according to the orders of others. Self-determination is an important goal of education. This also entails the athlete learning how to handle failures that are especially unavoidable in top-level sport and how to evaluate the corresponding success. Joy in sport must be maintained and must not be suffocated by external pressures to achieve. Adolescent children must be protected from attention-seeking parents, ambitious coaches, and egotistic officials, as well as the pressure of public expectation.

Consequently, it is essential to elaborate on the sport experience of the adolescent. Thus, the adolescence period will be discussed briefly to give an overview of the changes that occur and the influence these may have on the adolescent's sport experience. Following this, there will be a discussion of perceptions in sport by the adolescent, the sport experience and subsequently an overview of the role of competition and enjoyment in sport.

3.2 Adolescence

Adolescence is characterised by dramatic physical, cognitive, social, and emotional changes. Adolescents are in transition from the dependency of childhood to the independence and responsibility of early adulthood. As adolescence progresses through early, middle, and late adolescence, self-esteem, mood, body image, cognitive development, family relationships, interactions at school and with peers, and participation in health-risk behaviours are critical developmental considerations (Adolescence, 2005). Developmental psychologists display a tendency toward describing adolescence as a difficult period to establish, as there are many determinants to consider, which have an influence on the onset and termination of the period.

Santrock (1983) distinguishes between two stages of adolescence: early adolescence (10-15 years) and late adolescence (16-20 years), whereas several other authors (Boshoff, 1982; Engelbrecht, Kok & van Biljon, 1986; and Vrey, 1991) differentiate between early adolescence (junior secondary years, 12-15 years), middle adolescence (senior secondary years, 15-18 years) and late adolescence (18-22 years).

Steinberg (1993) suggests a differentiation similar to those of the above-mentioned authors, although there are small differences in the age group classification of the three stages. He differentiates between early adolescence, which covers the period from about age 11 through age 14, middle adolescence, from about age 15 through age 18, and late adolescence, from about age 18 through age 21. For the purpose of this study the differentiation that will be used, will be that of Steinberg (1993), as mentioned before in Chapter 1 (1.9 Conceptual clarification).

The *early adolescence* period is largely characterised by a rapid growth spurt and by physical and sexual maturation (Boshoff, 1982). Although there are pubertal changes, certain cognitive changes also occur, like the development of abstract thoughts (Adolescence, 2005).

During the *middle adolescence* period the child mainly focuses on increased independence from the parents, and engaging in relationships with the opposite sex (Vrey, 1991). They are also concerned with sexual identity, experimentation, and peer groups (Adolescence, 2005).

Late adolescence usually commences as the individual finishes school and continues until personal identity is established. During this period personal and vocational decisions are made, and life goals are formulated, together with a system of values (Engelbrecht et al., 1986).

Because physical changes do not occur according to a smooth, regular schedule, adolescents may go through stages of awkwardness, both in terms of appearance and physical mobility and coordination. During adolescence, it is appropriate for youngsters to begin to separate from their parents and to establish an individual identity. In some cases, this may occur with minimal reaction on the part of all involved. As adolescents pull away from parents in a search for identity, the peer group takes on a special significance (Adolescence, 2005). The strong ties formed with the peer group have a strong influence on their values, attitudes and behaviour that may conflict with adult expectations. They also provide a major source of information by which adolescents evaluate themselves, not just by comparing physical and psychological growth, but also by testing new ideas. The development of social behaviour and the way, in which children relate to others around them, is a long and complex process, which can become particularly difficult during adolescence (Lee, 1993).

3.3. Parental influence on the sport experience

The Committee on Sports Medicine and Fitness from the American Academy of Paediatrics (2001) states that the nature of parental or adult involvement can influence the degree to which participation in organised sports is a positive experience for adolescents. Parental or adult supervision of adolescent children's activity is usually considered to be desirable. However, in organised sports, inappropriate or overzealous parental or adult influences can have negative effects. Adult involvement in adolescent sport activities may result in goals and outcome measures that are not oriented toward the young participants. Tournaments, all-star teams, most valuable player awards, trophies and awards banquets are by-products of adult influences. Despite good intentions, increased involvement of adults, and mainly parents, does not necessarily enhance the adolescent's enjoyment.

Martens (1978) claims that some parents care too much about their children's sports participation. They meddle, interfere and generally become a nuisance. They are often more than just spectators and supporters. These parents are very concerned about the organisation of programmes, the qualifications of coaches and the progress of their children's skill development. Such parents often conclude that their children's sport experiences must be carefully and thoroughly controlled. The benefits and risks of intensive training and competition in such cases are an additional concern among sport sociologists (Coakley, 1993).

At the other end of the scale, there are those parents who do not care enough. They let their children participate without any knowledge or interest in what they are doing. Unconcerned parents neither meet their obligations to their adolescent children nor support those who provide the opportunity for their children to participate, such as coaching staff and administrators (Martens, 1978).

The positive and negative effects associated with sport do not result from participation *per se* but from the nature of the sport experience. It has frequently been shown that an important feature in determining the nature of the experience is the quality of adult leadership (Byrne, 1993). The meaningful experience of movement and sport participation can be determined through the loving influential guidance within the parent-adolescent relationship where dialogue takes place. Meaningful dialogue touches on the whole personality structure and thus it will emerge in the personal, movement, culture, social interaction, and emotional life (Van Deventer & Coetzee, 1994).

Roberts and Treasure (1993) found evidence during a study that demonstrated that parents view the competitive sport experience for their children differently, depending on their goal orientation.

Parents endorsing a high competitive goal orientation emphasised normative standards when defining success, focusing on winning and being better than other children in assessing the success of their child in sport.

In contrast, parents endorsing less competitively oriented goals placed greater emphasis on their child's success in developing positive peer relations through the sport experience, focusing on getting on with others and being accepted as part of the team. It would appear that by valuing how well their child gets on with others and is accepted as part of the team, less competitive oriented parents are providing a far better framework for the development of successful peer relationships.

Weiss (1993) remarks that adults involved in youth sport programmes must ensure high quality in the interactions adolescents have with significant others such as parents, peers, and coaches. For example, the contingency of praise in response to desirable performances and criticism in response to performance errors, as well as the frequency and quality of skill-relevant feedback, are significant sources of information that adolescent children use to evaluate their physical competence.

Thus, it is imperative that adults become aware of the different sources of information children may use to judge competence and how these judgements, in turn, relate to participation behaviour. Parents and coaches, especially, need to understand the influential roles they play in the self-esteem development of youngsters and should structure their performance feedback and general communication styles to enhance children's self-esteem (Weiss, 1993).

Parents need to be aware of their roles and responsibilities within sport. This awareness can only be achieved through effective two-way communication (Byrne, 1993). Mutual acceptance, trust, respect and communication between parents and adolescents leads to empathy and forming of a conscience.

Through discussing of movement activities and sport participation, positive expectations and support, the adolescent is lead to make his/her own decisions and to discover the underlying principles of movement activities and make them his/her own (Van Deventer & Coetzee, 1994).

Parents play a critical role in their child's sport and should not be excluded. While the actions of a few parents seem to warrant extreme measures, such as severely minimising or even eliminating parent involvement, research suggests that a strategy that encourages positive parent involvement in youth sports may be more likely to succeed (Hoyle and Leff, 1997; Wuerth et al., 2003). Therefore, youth sport administrators need to send a message that they want and value positive parent input into the sport league. They need to acknowledge the important role that each parent plays and to empower parents to behave appropriately. It is important to establish a culture where the organisation, coaches, referees, players and their parents all share responsibility for creating a high-quality sport experience (Kanters, 2002).

3.4 Adolescents' perceptions of their sport experience

Thomas et al. (1982) state that the immediate exercise benefits that adolescents obtain from their sport experience is certainly valuable, but how they perceive their sport experience is even more important. Perception is ultimately the major determinant of continued participation in sport and regular exercise. Coaches and parents may be inadvertently structuring experiences that contribute to adolescents "dropping out" of sport. Compared to adults, young children do not process all available information in situations, thus affecting their perception of events. Children should not be treated as miniature adults, as they process the events in their world differently and thus have different perceptions of the causes of events.

Given an obvious cause for behaviour, both adolescents and adults will attribute their behaviour to this cause. In fact, Thomas et al. (1982) point out that four rather common causes of behaviour (ability, effort, task difficulty, and luck) are used as the basis for attribution theory.

That is, when confronted with sport competition, adolescent children assess the situation as they perceive it, evaluate their ability, the difficulty of the task and how much effort is needed, compare with past experiences, and then decide whether to attempt the particular task or not. If they decide to attempt the task, they then demonstrate the most appropriate behaviour for that task. The adolescent child then evaluates the outcome (or is helped to do so) and ascribes the results to some combination of ability, effort, task difficulty and luck. This information is then stored in memory for use in similar future circumstances (Thomas et al., 1982). Additionally, Stipek and MacIver (1989) indicate that it is important that adult praise be contingent upon task completion rather than peer comparison or adult-determined task criteria (i.e., doing the sport skill correctly).

As children grow older, feedback from parents continues to play a critical role in shaping their child's self-perception of their ability and enjoyment in sport. However, other factors, such as peer comparisons, become increasingly important (Stipek & MacIver, 1989). Parents are also responsible for helping their children interpret the experiences associated with competitive sports. They can particularly help them understand the significance of winning and losing. When parents help their children to accurately interpret the causes of events, they are helping them to develop an attitude that they are responsible for their actions and that they have control over much of their environment. For example, parents can help children to distinguish when winning and losing should be attributed to external factors or to internal causes - that is, the child's ability and effort (Martens, 1978).

If positive feedback doesn't match performance or feedback from peers, then the parents' involvement could undermine their child's perception of their sport competence. As complex as it may be, it appears to be important for parents to provide encouraging but accurate feedback about sport ability and performance when children reach adolescence (Horn & Harris, 1996).

The change in people's motor behaviour can be attributed to three sources: external information, that is, situational demands and feedback from the sports performance environment; internal feedback, proprioceptive information resulting from the specific skilled performance; and internal information that has been retained in memory from previous performance or similar situations. The ability of a person's memory system to use all of the sources of information to reinforce and/or change perceptions, decisions, and behaviour is referred to as cognitive or information processing. Thus, the use of the memory system not only affects our own perception and performance in sport and physical activity but also influences how we perceive others' behaviour and the causes of this behaviour (Thomas et al., 1982).

Adolescents differ widely in both what they perceive to be threatening in sports and in how they respond to the threat (Martens, 1978). Some adolescents in certain sport situations may be highly stressed, while others in the same situations may not be. The author suggests that it is only an extremely small percentage of adolescent children who find the stress of sports to be too great. Consequently, the author also proposes that it may be that youth sports are often more stressful for adults - the coaches and parents - than they are for the participants.

3.5 Competition

According to Boxill (1993:25) the most controversial and perhaps the most intelligible characteristic of society is that of “competition”: “Competition is seen to be driven by selfish motives and involves competitors treating others as means, as enemies to be defeated, or as obstacles thwarting one’s victory or success - all of which are to be removed by any means possible. Competition places an emphasis on winning, leading to the “win-at-all-costs syndrome”.

Elleson (1983:197) adds to the view of the above-mentioned researcher, maintaining “The evidence of an emphasis on competitiveness as the predominant mode of behaviour in our society is overwhelming. Western industrialization set the stage, and urbanization provided the impetus for competition to spread throughout the land and permeate the disparate areas of education, social life, industry, athletics, and scientific research ... The prevailing mode of competition ... continues despite convincing evidence that it is damaging to physical, spiritual, emotional, and social health.”

Adolescents who are confronted with exaggerated competition sometimes experience personal problems when they try to live up to the normative values of the competition-sport culture. These problems centre around the importance of winning, the importance of social status, the relationships with teammates, coach and opponents, and the expectations of adults (Stevenson, 1997). It is not winning *per se* that is the most problematic issue in competition sport, but when the “win-at-all-costs” idea becomes the overwhelming goal. Aitken (1992:239) confirms this viewpoint about sport by adding, “In contemporary sport we are confronted with a perverted or alienated form of winning. Today winning does not involve just the desire to demonstrate a superiority of skills which is the normal goal of any game: rather, it involves an inordinate desire to win in an absolute sense.”

Biddle (1983:133) points out that “children are not miniature adults”. They will not always think and act in the same way as adults and they should not be expected to handle success and failure in the same way. In fact, children learn the process of competition from the people around them. The author emphasises that adults should consider that children learn and copy what they see from adults: “Let’s help them learn in the best possible way by providing an environment rich in personal challenge. Let’s put into practice the “principle of priority in children’s sport.”

The key to whether children’s sports are opportunities for learning to cope with demands placed upon them is dependent on the objectives emphasised by parents, coaches and league administrators. When the predominant emphasis is on children’s physical and psychological development, on having fun, and not just on winning, the chances increase that children will not be overly stressed (Martens, 1988).

Adults can help adolescents develop healthy attitudes about competition by demonstrating that success or failure does not change their respect and affection for them as individuals. Adolescents who feel that their success in sport determines their self-worth are risking a great deal each time they compete. When they know that their worth as a person is not dependent upon their performance in sports, however, they feel confident to risk failure in pursuit of the benefit of sport participation (Martens, 1988).

Among adolescents, sport competition can have negative psychological effects if the setting is aversive or managed inappropriately. For example, the psychological stress brought about by an overemphasis on competition and winning can adversely affect the adolescent’s physical and psychological health, enjoyment of sport, and athletic performance (Passer, 1988). Further, those who are poorer performers athletically usually will be less popular among their teammates or other peers in the sport setting (Passer & Scanlan, 1980).

All competition contains some uncertainty about the outcome, and is thus potentially stressful. Yet it is this same uncertainty in competition which makes sport challenging, and which motivates youngsters to seek out competitive sport experiences. However, too much uncertainty can be very stressful. The perplexity of competitive stress is that there is a fine line between uncertainty being a challenge and uncertainty being overly stressful, and this fine line is unique to the psychological makeup of each person. Consequently, one person's challenge is another one's stress (Martens, 1978).

3.6 Enjoyment

Children have identified enjoyment or fun as a major reason for their sport participation, whereas the lack of enjoyment has been associated with children's decisions to drop out of organised sport (Scanlan & Lewthwaite, 1988). Sport enjoyment is defined as a positive emotional response to one's sport experience that reflects feelings and/or perceptions such as pleasure, liking and perceived fun. Adults may contribute to adolescent children's sport enjoyment by (a) providing positive social evaluation and recognition for their achievements, and (b) being positively involved, in general, in their sport experiences without regard to the quality of their performance achievements (Scanlan & Lewthwaite, 1986).

With regard to sport, parents typically make the initial decision to enrol their children (Howard & Madrigal, 1990) and have a significant impact on many of the positive outcomes of their child's sport participation (Horn & Harris, 1996).

For example, a child's initial perceived sport competence, a key factor for enduring involvement and enjoyment in sport for young children, is derived from two sources: successful task completion and parent perception of sport ability (Horn & Harris, 1996).

Kanters (2002) suggests that while parents play the largest role during the formative years of their child's sport involvement, long-term sport involvement may be due to the quality of the parents' experience and their interaction with the youth sport organisation.

While much of the literature suggests that a parent's satisfaction with and enduring involvement in their child's sport is dependent on their child's satisfaction with their sport experience, Green and Chalip (1997) suggest that the sport organisation serves as a more powerful socialising agent for parents. Some studies, however, have suggested that a parent's involvement in their child's sport and the outcomes realised by both parent and child may be reciprocally caused by both parents and their children (Fishwick & Greendorfer, 1987; Hasbrook, 1986; McPherson, 1986). Although Green and Chalip's (1997) study was somewhat exploratory in nature, their results do lend further support to the notion that the factors influencing the culture of youth sports are quite complex, and that interactions between parents and all facets of the youth sport organisation are significant predictors of positive outcomes, such as enjoyment.

Therefore, careful cultivation of the relationships between the coach, the child and the parent is essential if the sports experience is to be enjoyable and successful (Byrne, 1993). Hence, when parents are positively involved, children are more likely to enjoy their sport, participate longer and keep their parents happy and involved for a longer period. Scanlan and Lewthwaite (1986) found that male wrestlers who experienced positive parental performance reactions and a high level of parental involvement in the sport experienced greater enjoyment than their counterparts. Hoyle and Leff (1997) examined the direct and indirect association of parental support with tennis players' enjoyment and performance. As expected, parental support was positively associated with participants' enjoyment of tennis. This finding is consistent with a growing literature on parental involvement in youth sports (Scanlan & Lewthwaite, 1986; Wuerth et al., 2003).

If, on the other hand, extreme achievement pressures are placed on children's sport, either by organisations, parents, or instructors, both the child and the instructor are driven to situations of conflict that are not favourable to a child's development or enjoyment of sport (Telama, 1988). Lower parental pressure and lower maternal control in parenting are related to higher enjoyment in sport. (Greendorfer et al., 1996).

Research done by Anderson et al. (2003) suggests that parental pressure was a significant negative predictor of sports activity enjoyment: as parental pressure increased, children's reported enjoyment decreased. Parents may begin with good intentions, trying to introduce their children to sport activities that may ultimately bring them success. Parents may also believe that expressing disappointment in a child's poor performance will provide the motivation for improvement. However, the author found that even well-meant parental pressure can backfire and may contribute to a lowered enjoyment and motivation of the adolescent's sport experience.

Regardless of parental intent and motives, the study done by Anderson et al. (2003) indicates that perceived parental pressure could negatively influence the adolescent's extracurricular enjoyment. Furthermore, these authors maintain that adolescent children's enjoyment and anxiety experienced during participation were related to perceived parental support. Findings suggest that parents can play an important role in the child's affective experience of extracurricular activities. Parents should keep in mind that enrolling their child in an organised sport is also a commitment on their part but that they should be cautious to focus only on winning even if the child demonstrates exceptional talent for the sport. (Metlife Consumer Education Centre, 2005).

These results by Anderson et al. (2003) further suggest that parents should encourage their children's extracurricular involvement, while allowing them to make some of their own decisions regarding activities in which to participate and extent of involvement. Children, irrespective of their age, who do not enjoy their extracurricular activities, may also be less likely to reap other associated benefits, such as skill development and positive peer interaction. Adolescents need parents more than ever for support and advice in weathering the ups and downs that go along with sport, therefore parents should try to be actively involved in their child's endeavour and should maintain a positive attitude. (Metlife Consumer Education Centre, 2005).

“A child is likely to enjoy sport more if allowed to learn in a relaxed atmosphere while having fun and receiving support and encouragement from adults. Sport for youngsters should be thought of as a means of entertainment and recreation” (Metlife Consumer Education Centre, 2005:3). It is therefore apparent that sport should be a rewarding experience for children of any age. After all, enjoyment is what sport is all about.

Chapter 4

Methodology

4.1 Participant selection

Participants in the study were 93 (45 male and 48 female) adolescent swimmers between the ages of 13 and 22 years. The distribution of the respondents by age group is reflected in Table 4.1. Thirty-one of the participants (33.3%) were aged between 13 and 14 years (early adolescence). Fifty-eight of the participants (62.4%) were between the ages of 15 and 18 years (middle adolescence). The remaining participants (4.3%) were above 18 years of age and were in the late adolescence category.

Table 4.1: Distribution of respondents by age group

Age ranges	N	%
13 – 14 years	31	33.3
15 - 18 years	58	62.4
Over18 years	4	4.3
Total	93	100

Participants were members of the four swimming clubs in Bloemfontein. All clubs attract their members from suburban populations. All participants receive professional coaching at their respective clubs.

The respondents regularly participate in swimming meetings and championships held in Bloemfontein and the Free State.

Table 4.2 indicates that all respondents participated competitively at various levels from inter school, interclub to national championships. Fourteen respondents (15.1%) participated at inter-school and inter-high championship level, while 22 respondents (23.7 %) participated at inter-club level and provincial championships. The majority of respondents' (46.3%) highest level of participation was at inter provincial and national level. The remaining respondents (10.8%) participated at international level.

Table 4. 2: Distribution of respondents by competitive level

Competitive level	N	%
Interschool	4	4.3
Interhigh Championship	10	10.8
Interclub (SFS Championship)	12	12.9
Provincial (FS Championship)	10	10.8
Interprovincial (SA Championship)	25	26.9
National level	18	19.4
International level	10	10.8
Total	89	95.7

The participants in the study all received professional coaching in swimming before and/or after normal school hours during the week. Most (48.4%) have been receiving professional coaching for between 1 and 5 years, while 34.5% of the respondents have been receiving professional coaching for 6 to 9 years. The remaining group of respondents (16.2%) have been receiving professional coaching for between 9 and 15 years (see Table 4.3).

Table 4. 3: Distribution of respondents by professional coaching received in years

Professional coaching received	N	%
0-1 year	3	3.2
1-5 years	42	45.2
6-9 years	29	34.5
10-15 years	15	16.2
Total	92	98.9

According to Table 4.4, all respondents trained for at least 5 months of the year with the majority (61.3%) of respondents training for an average of 10 to 11 months in a year. The remaining respondents (9.7%) trained for 12 months of the year.

Table 4. 4: Distribution of respondents by training period per year (months in a year)

Training: months in a year	N	%
5 – 7 months	8	8.7
8 – 9 months	18	19.4
10 – 11 months	57	61.3
12 months	9	9.7
Total	92	99.1

The average time spent training during the week is reported in Table 4.5. All respondents trained for more than 4 hours per week, with 23.6% of the respondents training for 4 to 8 hours per week. The majority of respondents (48.5%) trained for an average of 9-12 hours a week, while 5.4% of the respondents trained between 20 and 25 hours a week.

Table 4.5: Distribution of respondents by average training hours per week

Average training hours per week	N	%
4 – 8 hours	22	23.6
9 – 12 hours	45	48.5
14 –17 hours	21	22.6
More than 20 hours	5	5.4
Total	93	100

With the permission and cooperation of their coaches, swimmers were contacted in their training groups during a training session and given background about the research project. Excluding participant's names from the questionnaires and assuring privacy in the environment where the questionnaires were completed assured confidentiality.

4.2 Research Instrument

The PISQ (Parental Involvement in Sport Questionnaire) designed by Lee and McLean (1997) was used. The instrument with 33 items, includes three multi-item scales and a single item regarding pressure: "In general, how much pressure do your parents put on you?" All items were also translated into Afrikaans. The 33-item questionnaire was designed to elicit responses about the behaviour of parents with regard to their children's swimming activities. Respondents identified the frequency with which certain behaviours were (a) exhibited by, and (b) desired of their parents, on a five-point scale anchored by "Always" and "Never". Children's satisfaction or dissatisfaction with any specific behaviour was represented by discrepancies between ratings of perceived and desired behaviour: Discrepancy (D) = Perceived behaviour – Desired behaviour. The range of possible discrepancies was -4 to +4. Factor analysis of the discrepancy scores was used to establish the nature of the scales in the questionnaire. Lee and MacLean (1997) carried out several screening tests to assess the techniques used (e.g. the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin test, Principal-Axis factoring with Varimax and Oblimin). Internal reliability was examined by Cronbach's alpha and as a result, three reliable scales were specified. The three scales measured Directive behaviour (DB), Active involvement (AI), and Praise and understanding (PU). A single item of Pressure (P) was included as a dependent variable.

Wuerth et al. (2004) used the PISQ in their study to examine the pattern of involvement of parents in youth sport careers. They found that with the exception of active involvement (AI), all the scales showed satisfactory internal consistency and retest reliability. The scale structures are indicated in Table 4.6. The items are indicated in the exact order as they appear in the questionnaire. The complete questionnaire (PISQ) is included as Appendix A.

The questionnaire may need further development to improve its psychometric properties. The relatively small amount of variance explained by the regression suggest that other variables, not adequately measured here, may also contribute to pressure experienced. Given the error associated with single item measures, it is desirable to develop a more reliable measure of children's perceived and desired pressure for use as a dependent variable.

Table 4. 6: Scale structures of PISQ (Lee & MacLean, 1997)

Scales	Item No.	Item (in the order as it appears in the PISQ)
I. Directive behaviour	5	After a gala do your parents tell you what they think you need to work on?
	8	After a poor race do your parents point out the things they think you did badly?
	20	Do your parents tell you how they think you can improve your technique (e.g. strokes, starts, turns etc.)?
	21	During training do your parents tell you or signal to you what you should do?
	22	Do your parents yell and cheer before a race?
	25	Do your parents push you to train harder?
	30	Do your parents get upset with you if they think your swimming is not going as well as it should be?
	14	Before a race do your parents tell you what particular things you need to work on in order to do well?
	2	Before a gala do your parents tell you how to swim your race?
	19	After a race do your parents tell you that you didn't try hard enough?
II. Praise & understanding	33	Even when you have swum a poor race do your parents praise you for the good things that you did?
	29	After a race do your parents praise you for trying hard?
	17	Do your parents show that they understand how you are feeling about your swimming?
	12	After a race do your parents praise you for where you were placed (i.e. 1st, 10th etc.)?
III. Active involvement	26	Do your parents take an active role in running your club by doing such things as teaching, being on a committee, or helping with social events?
	10	Do your parents volunteer to help at galas that you are swimming in, as officials, whips etc.?
	28	Do your parents discuss your progress with your coach?
	31	Do your parents encourage you to talk to them about any problems or worries that you have with your swimming?
	15	Do your parents change mealtimes so that you can train and go to galas?

In addition to the PISQ (Lee & MacLean, 1997), a second questionnaire was added to assess participants' enjoyment of their swimming. This questionnaire comprised three questions regarding the enjoyment of sport. Its purpose was to determine the extent to which respondents enjoyed a) their training, b) participating in competitions/galas, and c) swimming in general. Respondents were required to indicate their answers on a five-point scale anchored by "none at all" to "a lot". This questionnaire is included in Appendix A.

4.3 Data Collection

Bloemfontein has four established swimming clubs. The coaches of these clubs were approached in order to brief them on the goal and value of the research, to get their permission to distribute the questionnaires to their swimmers, as well as to explain the procedure that was going to be followed during the research process. The professional coaches of the swimming clubs agreed to participate and support the research project. They also encouraged their swimmers to give their full cooperation. The self-completion questionnaires were administered to small groups of respondents before training sessions at each club, so as to minimise disruption to the training session. This enabled the researcher to ensure that all participants adequately comprehended the items on the questionnaires.

Chapter 5

Data Analysis and Results

5.1 Correlations

The Pearson Correlation analysis was conducted to examine the association between parental involvement and pressure. Specifically, the dependant variable parental pressure (P) was correlated with the three multi-item scales of Directive behaviour (DB), Praise and understanding (PU) and Active involvement (AI).

The 90% and 95% significance levels are proposed for this study.

5.1.1 Directive behaviour

The Directive behaviour scale consists of ten items. The Directive behaviour scale indicated the extent to which parents controlled their children's behaviour in swimming.

The results of the Pearson correlation between Directive behaviour and pressure are reported in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1: Pearson correlation coefficients (r) and p-values between Directive behaviour and pressure

Directive behaviour items	r and p-values	Mother (perceived)	Mother (desired)	Father (perceived)	Father (desired)
5. After a gala do your parents tell you what they think you need to work on?	r p	-.240 .021**	-.175 .094*	-.299 .005**	-.256 .016**
8. After a poor race do your parents point out the things they think you did badly?	r p	-.278 .007**	-.039 .709	-.341 .001**	-.138 .202
20. Do your parents tell you how they think you can improve your technique (e.g. strokes, starts, turns etc.)?	r p	-.309 .003**	.053 .661	-.377 .000**	-.034 .756
21. During training do your parents tell you or signal to you what you should do?	r p	-.027 .800	.040 .706	-.076 .481	.063 .563
22. Do your parents yell and cheer before a race?	r p	.079 .454	-.117 .263	.133 .218	.078 .473
25. Do your parents push you to train harder?	r p	-.540 .000**	-.446 .000**	-.555 .000**	-.397 .000**
30. Do your parents get upset with you if they think your swimming is not going as well as it should be?	r p	-.440 .000**	-.379 .000**	-.480 .000**	-.275 .009**
14. Before a race do your parents tell you what particular things you need to work on in order to do well?	r p	-.286 .005**	-.175 .094*	-.294 .005**	-.152 .158
2. Before a gala do your parents tell you how to swim your race?	r p	-.094 .371	-.159 .130	-.312 .003**	-.147 .174
19. After a race do your parents tell you that you didn't try hard enough?	r p	-.267 .007**	-.183 .080*	-.423 .000**	-.226 .034**

*p < 0.1 **p < 0.05

5.1.1.1. Mothers

5.1.1.1.1 Perceived Directive behaviour

Seven items on the Directive behaviour (DB) scale showed a highly significant negative correlation with pressure ($p < 0.05$), while the remaining three items showed no correlation with pressure. These items were: “During training do your parents tell you or signal to you what you should do?”, “Do your parents yell and cheer before a race?”, and “Before a gala do your parents tell you how to swim your race?”

5.1.1.1.2. Desired Directive behaviour

Two items “After a gala, do your parents tell you what they think you need to work on?” and “Before a race do your parents tell you what particular things you need to work on in order to do well?” on the DB scale showed a significant negative correlation with pressure ($p < 0.1$). Furthermore, two items showed a highly significant negative correlation. These were “Do your parents push you to train harder?” and “Do your parents get upset with you if they think your swimming is not going as well as it should be?” Finally, three of the items showed no correlation with either perceived or desired pressure. These items were: “During training do your parents tell you or signal to you what you should do?”, “Do your parents yell and cheer before a race?”, and “Before a gala do your parents tell you how to swim your race?” A further two items on the desired behaviour level showed no correlation i.e. “After a poor race do your parents point out the things they think you did badly? and “Do your parents tell you how they think you can improve your technique?”

5.1.1.2 Fathers

5.1.1.2.1 Perceived Directive behaviour

In the case of the fathers' results parental pressure showed a highly significant negative correlation with eight items on the DB scale.

The remaining two items: "During training do your parents tell you or signal to you what you should do?" and "Do your parents yell and cheer before a race?" did not correlate significantly with pressure.

5.1.1.2.2 Desired Directive behaviour

Four items on the DB scale showed a highly significant negative correlation with pressure: "After a gala do your parents tell you what they think you need to work on?", "Do your parents push you to train harder?", "Do your parents get upset with you if they think your swimming is not going as well as it should be?" and "After a race do your parents tell you that you didn't try hard enough?". However, six items showed no correlation with parental pressure.

5.1.2 Praise and understanding

The Praise and understanding scale consists of four items that measured the praise and empathy parents displayed towards their children.

The results for Praise and understanding (PU) and pressure (P) are reported in Table 5.2.

Table 5.2: Pearson correlation coefficients (r) and p-values between Praise and understanding and pressure

Praise and understanding items	r and p-values	Mother (perceived)	Mother (desired)	Father (perceived)	Father (desired)
33. Even when you have swum a poor race do your parents praise you for the good things that you did?	r p	-.312 .002**	-.243 .019**	.193 .071*	.123 .253
29. After a race do your parents praise you for trying hard?	r p	.133 .202	-.016 .878	.192 .073*	.230 .031**
17. Do your parents show that they understand how you are feeling about your swimming?	r p	.190 .068*	.027 .801	-.022 .839	-.123 .254
12. After a race do your parents praise you for where you were placed (i.e. 1st, 10th etc.)	r p	.229 .027**	.071 .497	.021 .848	.139 .195

*p < 0.1 **p < 0.05

5.1.2.1 Mothers

5.1.2.1.1. Perceived Praise and understanding

The item “Do your parents show that they understand how you are feeling about your swimming”, showed a significant positive correlation with pressure. The item “Even when you have swum a poor race, do your parents praise you for the good things that you did?” showed a highly significant negative correlation and the item “After a race do your parents praise you for where you were placed?” showed a highly significant positive correlation.

5.1.2.1.2 Desired Praise and understanding

Only one item “Even when you have swum a poor race do your parents praise you for the good things that you did?” showed a highly significant negative correlation with pressure, while the remaining four items showed no correlation.

5.1.2.2 Fathers

5.1.2.2.1 Perceived Praise and understanding

With regard to the fathers' results, two items showed a significant positive correlation with pressure: "Even if you have swum a poor race do your parents praise you for the good things that you did?" and "After a race do your parents praise you for trying hard?"

5.1.2.2.2 Desired Praise and understanding

The item "After a race do your parents praise you for trying hard?" showed a highly significant positive correlation with pressure; however the three remaining items showed no correlation with pressure.

5.1.3 Active involvement

The Active involvement scale consists of five items. Active involvement indicated the extent to which parents were active in the swimming club.

Table 5.3 displays the Pearson correlation between Active involvement (AI) and pressure (P).

Table 5.3: Pearson correlation coefficients (r) and p-values between Active involvement and pressure

Active Involvement Items	r and p-values	Mother (perceived)	Mother (desired)	Father (perceived)	Father (desired)
26. Do your parents take an active role in running your club by doing such things as teaching, being on a committee, or helping with social events?	r p	-.078 .465	-.068 .517	-.136 .205	-.023 .830
10. Do your parents volunteer to help at galas that you are swimming in, as officials, whips etc.?	r p	-.073 .485	-.020 .846	-.251 .018**	-.104 .335
28. Do your parents discuss your progress with your coach?	r p	-.145 .167	-.119 .255	-.190 .076**	-.078 .472
31. Do your parents encourage you to talk to them about any problems or worries that you have with your swimming?	r p	-.105 .315	-.200 .055**	-.078 .467	-.165 .125
15. Do your parents change mealtimes so that you can train and go to galas?	r p	-.222 .033**	-.143 .173	-.281 .008**	-.196 .067*

*p < 0.1 **p < 0.05

5.1.3.1 Mothers

5.1.3.1.1 Perceived Active involvement

One item on the Active involvement scale showed a highly significant negative correlation with pressure. This item was: “Do your parents change mealtimes so that you can train and go to galas?” The remaining four items showed no correlation.

5.1.3.1.2 Desired Active involvement

Only one item showed a highly significant negative correlation with pressure: “Do your parents encourage you to talk to them about any problems or worries that you have with your swimming?” The remaining four items showed no correlation.

5.1.3.2 Fathers

5.1.3.2.1 Perceived Active involvement

As for the fathers’ results, three items showed a highly significant negative correlation with parental pressure: “Do your parents volunteer to help at galas that you are swimming in, as officials, whips etc.?”, “Do your parents discuss your progress with your coach?” and “Do your parents change mealtimes so that you can train and go to galas?” The remaining two items showed no correlation.

5.1.3.2.2 Desired Active involvement

One item showed a significant negative correlation with pressure: “Do your parents change mealtimes so that you can train and go to galas?” The remaining four items showed no correlation.

5.1.4 Enjoyment

A Pearson correlation analysis of the dependant variable of parental pressure on the enjoyment of swimming in general was conducted.

There was no correlation between pressure and enjoyment for both mothers and fathers (see Table 5.4).

Table 5.4: Pearson correlation coefficients (r) and p-values between Enjoyment and pressure

Enjoyment	Mother	Father
r	-.010	-.048
p-value	.924	.655

*p < 0.1 **p < 0.05

5.2 Multiple Regression

Stepwise regression analysis was conducted in order to identify the key influences upon pressure experienced (see Table 5.5). The proposed model is: Pressure experienced = β_0 + β_1 (Directive Behaviour) + β_2 (Pressure Desired) + ϵ , where β_0 reflects the overall mean of the model, and β_1 and β_2 the contribution of DB and PD to the variation of pressure experienced. The error term, ϵ is also included.

Table 5.5: Regression coefficients

ANOVA	Regression coefficients			F	p-value	R ²
Source	β_0	β_1	β_2			
Mother	0.724	0.27	0.37	10.941	0.000056**	0.1995
Father	0.9159	0.49	-0.31	19.00	0.000**	0.3090

*p < 0.1 **p < 0.05

The analysis for the mothers behaviour indicated that excessive pressure, as measured by the discrepancy between perceived and desired pressure, was predicted by the discrepancy in DB and by pressure desired (PD): pressure discrepancy = 0.724 + 0.27(DB) + 0.37(PD), R² = 0.1955; F_(2,90) = 10.941, p < 0.05.

Concerning the father's behaviour, the similar equation produced the following values: pressure discrepancy = $0.9159 + 0.49(\text{DB}) - 0.31(\text{PD})$, $R^2 = 0.3090$; $F_{(2,85)} = 19.00$, $p < 0.05$. The results are highly significant. This reveals the influence of both environmental input and individual differences in determining pressure.

5.3 Levels of satisfaction

5.3.1 Scale discrepancy scores

Swimmers' satisfaction or dissatisfaction with any specific behaviour of their parents was represented by discrepancies between perceived and desired behaviour. The range of possible discrepancies was -4 to +4. Differences between perceptions of perceived behaviour and desired behaviour yield a measure of respondents' satisfaction or dissatisfaction with their experiences. Therefore, where the discrepancy between the perceived and desired behaviour is zero, it indicates absolute contentment with the parent's behaviour.

The sequences of the items in the three scales are in the identical order used by Lee and MacLean (1997). The results of the scale discrepancy scores are reported in Appendix B.

Table 5.6 displays the results of the single sample t-tests on the scale discrepancy scores.

Table 5.6: Single T-test results (Mother's and Father's behaviour)

Scale	Mother	Father	Mother	Father	Mother	Father
	\bar{x}	\bar{x}	p	p	t	t
Directive behaviour	- 0.09	0.039	0.078*	0.496	1.78	- 0.68
Praise and understanding	0.04	0.224	0.348	0.0003**	0.94	3.71
Active involvement	- 0.00	0.243	0.943	0.000**	-0.07	4.32

*p < 0.1 **p < 0.05

Single sample t-tests of the scale discrepancy scores revealed that swimmers reported insufficient Directive behaviour ($\bar{x} = -0.09$, $t_{(92)} = 1.78$, $p = 0.078$), satisfactory Praise and understanding ($\bar{x} = 0.04$, $t_{(92)} = 0.94$, $p = 0.348$), and satisfactory Active involvement ($\bar{x} = -0.00$, $t_{(93)} = -0.07$, $p = 0.943$) by their mothers.

The single sample t-tests of the scale discrepancy scores concerning the father's behaviour, on the other hand, revealed satisfactory Directive behaviour ($\bar{x} = 0.039$, $t_{(87)} = -0.68$, $p = n.s.$), excessive Praise and understanding ($\bar{x} = 0.224$, $t_{(87)} = 3.71$, $p = 0.0003^{**}$) and excessive Active involvement ($\bar{x} = 0.243$, $t_{(87)} = 4.32$, $p = 0.000^{**}$).

Similar analysis of discrepancies in the perceived and desired levels of pressure as measured by the single item variable was conducted. Table 5.7 displays the results.

Table 5.7: Levels of pressure experienced by swimmers from parents

Pressure	\bar{x}	t	p
Mothers	0.139	1.923	0.057*
Fathers	0.314	3.44	0.000**

*p < 0.1 **p < 0.05

The results indicated that swimmers experienced satisfactory levels of pressure from their mothers ($p < 0.01^*$) and excessive levels of pressure from their fathers ($p = 0.05^{**}$).

5.3.2 Enjoyment

Participants expressed their enjoyment of swimming by responding to three items. One item, which focused on training, asked respondents whether they enjoyed their training. A second item focused on competitions, and respondents had to indicate whether they enjoyed participating in galas/competitions. The third item, which focused on the general experience of swimming, asked participants whether they enjoyed swimming in general. Participants had to respond to each of these items by choosing from given categories: “not at all”, “not much”, “moderately”, “quite a lot” or “a lot”. Responses were given numeric values of 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 respectively. It is apparent from Table 5.8 that the majority of the respondents (69.88%) enjoy their training “quite a lot” to “a lot”. Most respondents (82.79%) also enjoy the competitions and galas “quite a lot” to “a lot” and the majority of respondents (92.47%) enjoyed their swimming in general “quite a lot” to “a lot”.

Table 5.8: Enjoyment levels of respondents: training, competition and swimming in general

Enjoyment categories	N	Training %	N	Competition %	N	General %
None at all		-	1	1.07		-
Not much	5	5.37	1	1.07	2	2.15
Moderately	23	24.73	14	15.05	5	5.37
Quite a lot	36	38.70	25	26.88	38	40.86
A lot	29	31.18	52	55.91	48	51.61
Total	93	100.00	93	100.00	93	100.00

Chapter 6

Discussion and Recommendations

6.1 Introduction

The literature available supports the notion that parents do play a major role in their children's sport experience and that their involvement is important to their children (Hellstedt, 1990; Lee & MacLean, 1997; Hoyle & Leff, 1997; Wuerth et al., 2003). In addition to the importance of parental involvement, literature confirms that optimal parental involvement has a positive influence on children's sporting experience (Martens, 1978; Scanlan & Lewthwaite, 1988; American Sport Education Program, 1994; Quartly, 2002; Heinzman, 2002; Metlife, 2005). Where parental involvement is mentioned, therefore, different aspects of such involvement also come into consideration, for instance, active involvement, directive behaviour, praise and understanding and, undeniably pressure as well. Following this, reports of significant levels of pressure were found in the literature, Hellstedt's findings (1987) indicated that the majority of adolescent swimmers experience a moderate to excessive level of parental pressure, while Lee and MacLean (1997) found that the swimmers in their study perceived an excess of directive behaviour and pressure, insufficient praise and understanding, and satisfactory levels of active involvement. Participants' feelings of parental pressure depended mainly on perceived directive behaviour. The study by Wuerth et al. (2003), on the other hand, reported high levels of praise and understanding, moderate levels of parental involvement, and low to moderate levels of both directive behaviour and pressure.

None of the above-mentioned studies reported the same results. Variables such as different sporting codes, age differences and levels of participation should be taken into consideration when outcomes are noted.

The purpose of this study was to examine how a group of competitive and professionally trained adolescent swimmers perceived parental involvement and how it affected their total sport experience.

The discussion of the results will follow according to the three scales of the PISQ: Directive behaviour (DB), Praise and understanding (PU) and Active involvement (AI). Furthermore, the frequently mentioned themes, pressure and enjoyment will also be discussed.

6.2 Directive Behaviour

6.2.1 Mothers

The results showed that Directive behaviour (DB) and pressure had a significant negative correlation. This indicates that when directive behaviour increases, pressure decreases and vice versa.

This finding is contradictory to the study done by Lee and MacLean (1997) which suggests that the most potent source of pressure lies in parents' behaviour which has the effect of taking control, or directing, their children's sporting experience. A perception of such behaviour was widely held by the swimmers in the above-mentioned study, as the results reflect a tendency of excessive DB and excessive pressure.

With regard to the current study, swimmers reported insufficient levels of DB. This might be due to the fact that the mothers' conduct is typically sympathetic and compassionate, rather than dictating.

Wuerth et al. (2003) found that mothers see themselves as giving more positive support and being more actively involved in the athlete's sport activity than fathers do. This might be due to the fact that mothers feel more responsible for family life and childcare. It could also reflect that they acknowledge the coach's capabilities and recognise their professional knowledge; therefore they refrain from directing, interfering or becoming overly involved.

The results appear to indicate that the swimmers desire a higher level of control over their swimming activities by their mothers; which is considered a positive outcome. The finding suggests that mothers have a good comprehension of their role as being more supportive and less directive.

6.2.2 Fathers

The results indicated a highly significant negative correlation between DB and pressure with regard to the father's behaviour. The same conclusion can be drawn for the fathers as for the mothers. Lee and MacLean (1997) report excessive DB, and reason that DB predicts pressure. Furthermore, Wuerth et al. (2003) found that fathers score higher than mothers on DB. This means they give sport-specific advice to their children (i.e. pointing out what was bad or telling them how to improve) and push them to train harder and give their best.

In the current study, however, swimmers reported satisfactory levels of DB by their fathers and insufficient levels of DB by their mothers, which confirms the finding of Wuerth et al. (2003) that fathers score higher on DB than mothers. Hence, satisfactory levels of DB imply that the extent to which fathers control their children's swimming is acceptable to them.

This result suggests that fathers exhibit an appropriate level of directing or controlling of their children's' sporting experience. This is in contrast to the excessive levels of Praise and understanding (PU) and Active involvement (AI) that the respondents perceive from their fathers. This could imply that the respondents have difficulty either in judging directive behaviour, or in evaluating the degree to which it is demonstrated. This could be the reason for the negative correlation.

It could also suggest that the level of competition and experience of the respondent may play a role in the perception of parental involvement as a whole (DB, PU and AI), thus the higher the level of competing or the longer the period of competitive swimming, the higher the tolerance of the swimmer toward pressure. Another factor that might be considered is that of the different levels of involvement and the levels of pressure, and hence, the possible diverse perceptions of respondents in different countries based on several factors that may be taken into account, e.g., culture, background, environment, situation, to name but a few.

6.3 Praise and Understanding

6.3.1 Mothers

The results showed a significant correlation between Praise and understanding (PU) and pressure. One item: "Even when you have swum a poor race do your parents praise you for the good things that you did?" showed a highly significant negative correlation, which indicates that when the score for this item increases, the pressure level decreases.

It is apparent that respondents appreciate the fact that their mothers point out positive aspects, instead of concentrating on the negative, and therefore not adding pressure.

Negative feedback in particular could be perceived as disappointment, which could lead to feelings of inadequacy. Feedback from parents continues to play a critical role in shaping children's self-perception of their ability and enjoyment in sport (Stipek & MacIver, 1989). As complex as this may seem, it appears to be important that parents provide encouraging but accurate feedback about sport ability and performance when children reach adolescence (Horn & Harris, 1996).

Consequently, respondents in the current study reported satisfactory levels of PU; therefore they are content with the amount of praise and empathy their mothers demonstrate. This appears to be contradictory to the study by Lee and MacLean (1997) where insufficient levels of PU were reported. Age variation across different studies could be a reason for the differences in perceptions of praise and understanding. In the study by Hoyle and Leff (1997) the respondents were tournament tennis players with a mean age of 13 years, as were the respondents in the study by Hellstedt (1990).

The respondents in the study by Lee and MacLean (1997) were swimmers aged between 10 and 15 years, whereas the respondents who participated in the study by Wuerth et al. (2003) were athletes between the ages of 10 and 20 years.

Respondents who participated in the current study were all adolescents between the ages of 13 and 22 years. It could be an indication that the early adolescent requires more compassion than the mature adolescent (e.g. the adolescent in the middle or late period) and the perceptions of adolescents of their parents' behaviour may change as they grow older, e.g. a 16-year-old may find a certain amount of praise excessive, whereas a 10-13 year old may find it imperative.

6.3.2 Fathers

Two items on the PU scale showed a significant positive correlation with pressure. Fathers scored higher than mothers on Praise and understanding.

The data suggests that swimmers perceive the PU they receive from their fathers as excessive.

It seems that even empathy towards poor performance can be perceived as negative and exaggerated behaviour e.g. praise conveyed when not appropriate to the circumstances to make the child feel better may have an opposite effect. A possible explanation for this occurrence is that children may feel pressured by disproportionate praise as this might be accompanied by efforts to take control to an unacceptable degree.

It is vital not to underestimate the ability of the middle and late adolescent to judge “success”. The reported excessive levels of PU from fathers in this study may point to an inability of fathers to recognise what Ryan (1995) refers to as the “fine line” between encouragement (praise) and pressure.

6.4 Active Involvement

6.4.1 Mothers

With regard to Active involvement (AI) and pressure, there are two items that showed a highly significant correlation with parental pressure, in contrast with the remaining items, which showed no correlation.

Swimmers are satisfied with the degree to which their mothers are actively involved in the swimming club. This is in keeping with much of the reported research that revealed satisfactory active involvement by parents.

In addition, Wuerth et al. (2003) clearly suggest that parents' involvement is higher in the initiation phase than later. This could imply that the adolescent expects a reduced amount of involvement from mothers and therefore are satisfied with any contribution at all, or that mothers participate enthusiastically in club activities and the respondents are contented with their input.

6.4.2 Fathers

A highly significant negative correlation was reported between Active involvement and pressure, which indicates that a high level of involvement in club activities by fathers resulted in decreased levels of pressure.

Swimmers reported excessive Active involvement (AI) by their fathers. This finding is unexpected, and contradictory to most of the literature (Hoyle & Leff, 1997; Lee & MacLean, 1997; Wuerth et al., 2003), which reports satisfactory AI on the part of the parents. The general assumption may be that with the demanding professions of fathers, there may not be much time left to be involved in club activities. However, in this study, fathers seem to be extremely involved. This excessive involvement suggests that as fathers' involvement increases, pressure decreases.

Involvement in club activities, which the respondents considered satisfactory, is not in itself detrimental; the problem arises when that action takes the form of controlling the child's activity to an unacceptable degree. Thus, this finding seems to point towards sensitivity in fathers who play an active role in the organisation of their children's clubs.

6.5 Pressure

6.5.1 Mothers

Anderson et al. (2003) report that low amounts of pressure are related to positive reaction while high levels of parental pressure are more likely to elicit a negative emotional reaction. The results revealed in this study showed that swimmers perceived satisfactory levels of pressure from their mothers, which leads to the conclusion that they find the amount of pressure acceptable and perceive it as positive emotional support, which is very encouraging.

6.5.2 Fathers

Swimmers reported excessive levels of pressure from their fathers, which may point towards dissatisfaction with their father's behaviour. Lee and MacLean (1997) report excessive DB, and reason that DB predicts pressure. Wuerth et al. (2003) maintain that DB is the only predictor of pressure. However, there is no direct association between directive behaviour and pressure in this study, in contrast with literature mentioned previously regarding directive behaviour and pressure.

Nevertheless, swimmers perceived the praise and understanding (PU) they received from their fathers as excessive, as well as the active involvement. As PU showed a positive significant correlation with pressure, it might be suggested that disproportionate PU could be related to pressure.

6.6 Enjoyment

6.6.1 Mothers

The results indicate that there is no correlation between pressure and enjoyment. This finding is anomalous and is contradictory to most of the literature regarding enjoyment in sport concomitant with pressure.

Greendorfer et al. (1996) found that lower parental pressure and lower maternal control in parenting were related to higher enjoyment in sport. Research done by Anderson et al. (2003) suggest that parental pressure is a significant negative predictor of sports activity enjoyment - as parental pressure increased, children's reported enjoyment decreased.

Respondents reported satisfactory levels of pressure from their mothers in the current study, which indicates that they are contented. It may thus be assumed that the level of pressure they experience does not have any affect on their level of enjoyment.

6.6.2 Fathers

Although respondents reported excessive levels of pressure from their fathers, it is encouraging that the data revealed that the majority of the respondents (92.47%) were very satisfied with their swimming experience in general, indicating that they enjoyed it to a large extent. Consequently, the swimming experience is indeed a positive experience and they obtain a good deal of enjoyment from it.

Research by Anderson et al. (2003) yielded different results as they found that relationships between pressure and children's affective experience of participation indicate that perceived parental pressure could negatively influence the adolescent's extracurricular enjoyment.

Following this, examining how long a child has been involved in activities or in a certain type of activity may provide a better understanding of the relationships between pressure and affective experience. Hence, adolescents who have been swimming competitively for many years, and who indicate that they derive a high level of enjoyment from it, might have become accustomed to the pressure and involvement of their parents and not be affected by it.

6.7 Future research directions

Additional research is needed to investigate whether the differences in the perceptions of swimmers are related to the age, level of participation or level of competition, or to the period of professional training and competing at certain levels. There may be a difference in perceptions of parental behaviour in swimmers who have been participating in competitive swimming for a long period of time or who are in a transition phase towards a higher level of competition, such as national or international level of competing.

A possible explanation for this could be that when adolescents reach a certain phase in their sporting careers, parents typically move to the background and withdraw gradually. Moreover, adolescents at such a level show a noticeable degree of independence. Further investigation into these aspects could provide valuable information toward the influence of parental involvement during different phases or competitive levels.

The main issue for parents is to find the proper balance of understanding, support and encouragement of maximal effort. Hellstedt (1990) and Anderson et al. (2003) conclude that the issue of parental pressure needs further research, and these authors propose workshops and seminars for parents to address potential problems.

Guidelines for sport parenting should be encouraged by sport organisations. Future research should contribute to parent awareness and education and should help parents to keep the focus on maintaining children's enjoyment and enrichment. With this in mind there remains a need for further exploration of the relationship between parental involvement and children's enjoyment of sport.

Scanlan and Lewthwaite (1986) and Wuerth et al. (2003) suggest that parental support increases enjoyment as a result of the association between parental support and self esteem. Weiss (1993) maintains that more research is needed to determine the extent to which social support by parents, coaches and peers influences and affects self-esteem and motivation in youth sport. In the current study, the mothers' behaviour is similar to that revealed in the above studies, as insufficient DB, and satisfactory PU, AI and pressure seem to have a positive effect on the respondents. Therefore, further investigation towards adequate involvement and support by parents and the connection with self esteem development and motivation is recommended.

The role of parental support and pressure among athletes in other individual and team sports on a competitive level should be addressed. This should provide information as to whether participants in individual sports experience parental support and pressure to a different degree and extent than participants in team sports. With little adaptation the PISQ could be applied to other sports.

Further investigations to examine the possible association of excessive praise and understanding and active involvement with pressure might be considered. Previous studies clearly indicated an association of directive behaviour and pressure only.

6.8 Recommendations

Increasing requirements for coaching certification and increasing parental and media awareness of the potential negative effects of competitive sport programmes for children may ensure that the climate in children's sport, at least at the recreational and minor competitive levels, will continue to improve (Donnelly, 1993).

Barnes and Ramsay (2001:9) conclude with a statement that is true for parents in general: "Of all the skills a parent requires, the last is perhaps the hardest. Letting go". Martens (1978) wrote in his book *Joy and sadness in children's sport* that he believes that the qualities needed to find joy in sports are the qualities needed to find joy in life. To know the joy of sports, he suggests that children's rights have to be acknowledged. This Bill of Rights for young athletes is endorsed by many educational, medical and national youth sport organisations and can be found in the book, *Sportparent* by the American Sport Education Program (1994).

Adolescents tend to drop out of sport, some never returning. With the right encouragement, however a parent may ensure that the teenager remains in competitive sport (Quartly, 2002). According to Hellstedt (1990) there is a need for parent education and role clarification in sport parents.

Martens (1993) implies that sport can be either constructive or destructive for children, but that the outcome greatly depends upon the values, education and skills of the adults involved in the programme. Hence, The National Recreation and Parks Association and the National Alliance for Youth Sports (USA) have joined forces in a comprehensive strategy to help keep youth sports fun and rewarding. This joint endeavour is focused on changing the culture of children's sports through "Time Out! For Better Sports for Kids", a national strategy that educates adults involved in all aspects of youth sports and holds them accountable for their behaviour (Heinzman, 2002).

This leads to the recognising of the need to alert parents of their critical role (compare Scanlan & Lewthwaite, 1988). The Life Advice Pamphlet by MetLife (2005) provides parents with practical advice regarding their supporting role, although numerous sources offer similar advice and guidelines (cf. Amateur Swimming Association of Great Britain, s.a; Wolfville Tritons Swimming Club, s.a; Slear, 2005).

The Managing Director of the Coaching of USA Swimming, Rose Snyder, adapted a document initially drafted for little league parents called the Ten Commandments for Swimming Parents (consult Appendix D for the full text), which emphasises the importance of parent's behaviour (Snyder, 2005).

In order to prepare parents on how to handle children's competitive sport participation and to provide them with a course of action to maximise their involvement, a combination of the advice in the above-mentioned literature have been incorporated and summarised.

The proposed document "Practical Guidelines for Swimmers' Parents" is included in Appendix D. Consequently, the researcher recommends that the above-mentioned document be distributed to the parents of the participants in this study. Subsequently, a support programme, including voluntary meetings and possibly a regular newsletter to encourage positive input could pursue the document.

The researcher believes that such action could:

- a) increase awareness of the importance of parental involvement in adolescent competitive swimmers, and
- b) enhance the positive influence of parental involvement in the enjoyment of competitive adolescent swimmers experience and children's sport in general.

Several limitations and shortcomings of this study should be noted. Firstly, there is the issue of gender differences. The way sons perceive the role of their fathers may be different from that of daughters, and vice versa as far as the mother is concerned. This is an issue that could have been addressed.

Secondly, the ages of the participants may have an effect on their perception of parental involvement, particularly because of the fact that in the middle adolescent period the child focuses mainly on increased independence from the parents (Vrey, 1991).

Finally, the difference in the levels of competition could also have an impact on the way swimmers perceive parental involvement. It could be argued that the period of time during which the swimmer is involved in the sport may influence his/her perception, and that he/she may perceive and experience the competitions and parental involvement as less intimidating and less complicated. Thus, they become accustomed to the pressure and involvement of their parents and not be affected by it.

6.9 Conclusion

“Children are not mini-adults and they should not participate for the entertainment and gratification of adults” (Byrne, 1993:45).

It is not easy for parents to help their children keep winning in perspective in a society that seemingly places winning out of all perspective. But that is what coaches and parents of young athletes must strive to do (Martens, Christian, Harvey & Sharkey, 1981). The first step is to take the “must win at all costs” aspect out of the sport. A very small percentage of sportspeople make it to the elite level where the must-win attitude is essential.

It is possible to enjoy sport without being the best (doing your best does not necessarily mean doing the best you have ever done at all times, it also means doing the best you can at the time). Sport should be an avenue for adolescents to have some good, healthy fun and to learn some life skills, such as teamwork, doing one's best and striving to improve (Quartly, 2002).

Martens (1978) offers solutions to solve, or rather avoid, parental problems in sport. Two solutions go hand-in-hand. The first is to have top-flight leadership in the sports programme. Parents who see well-organised, well-run programmes are less likely to find reason to complain or interfere. Instead, they will find themselves an active part of their children's participation.

The second solution is to provide parents with an opportunity to receive some education about the sports programmes in which their children are involved. Scanlan and Lewthwaite (1988), Hellstedt (1990) and the American Sport Education Program (1994) confirm these suggestions and add that educating parents as to their critical roles in children's sport experiences is perhaps the most direct, positive intervention that can take place in youth sport programmes. By recognising how adults relate to outcomes such as children's stress and enjoyment, parents and coaches can deal more effectively with the social, emotional and psychological needs of their young athletes.

It is also imperative that adults involved in youth sports recognise that competitive stress and burnout effects in young athletes result from the complex interplay of environmental factors and personal characteristics inherent in the child. Adults must consider both factors in the sport setting of adolescents. Therefore, the recognising of individual differences is of great significance.

To conclude, the following important aspects should be borne in mind. Parents should not impose their ambitions on their children. They should be supportive under all circumstances, which also implies that they should always make positive remarks. The parent should not try to coach and should honour the coach, which also implies that the coach and other officials should not be criticised. Acknowledge the swimmers' fears and help them to set realistic goals besides winning. This includes the fact that the expectations of children of becoming Olympians should be realistic. Parents should be loyal and supportive of the club they and their child choose to be part of. Parents who have a good understanding of their supporting role add positive value to the total sporting experience of the child.

Thus it is desirable for parents to discuss openly the nature and extent of their involvement with their children's sport and to define jointly their role in it.

Parents who express satisfaction with children's sport performance, who interact positively with them, and who are generally positively involved and supportive in the children's sport experience may enhance the enjoyment they derive from their sport participation.

Finally, Martens (1993:17) summarises the core of parental involvement in sport: "Sport is like a double-edged sword. Swung in the right direction the sword can have tremendously positive effects, but swung in the wrong direction it can be devastating. That sword is held by adults who supervise children's sports."

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Appendix A

PISQ

Parental Involvement in Sport Questionnaire

SECTION B

Read each statement and then make a clear cross over the appropriate number to indicate which response best reflects how you feel. You need to answer each question in the following way:

- * how you *perceive* your mother’s involvement in your swimming (**A**)
- * which behaviour you *desire* from your mother (**B**)
- * how you *perceive* your father’s involvement in your swimming (**C**)
- * which behaviour you *desire* from your father (**D**)

1. DO YOUR PARENTS LOOK DISAPPOINTED WHEN YOU SWIM A POOR RACE?

MOTHER						FATHER						
A	1	2	3	4	5	PERCEIVE	C	1	2	3	4	5
	Always	Quite often	Some times	Hardly ever	Never			Always	Quite often	Some times	Hardly ever	Never
B	1	2	3	4	5	DESIRE	D	1	2	3	4	5

17-18
19-20

2. BEFORE A GALA DO YOUR PARENTS TELL YOU HOW TO SWIM YOUR RACE?

MOTHER						FATHER						
A	1	2	3	4	5	PERCEIVE	C	1	2	3	4	5
	Always	Quite often	Some times	Hardly ever	Never			Always	Quite often	Some times	Hardly ever	Never
B	1	2	3	4	5	DESIRE	D	1	2	3	4	5

21-22
23-24

3. HOW OFTEN DO YOUR PARENTS ATTEND GALAS THAT YOU ARE SWIMMING IN?

MOTHER						FATHER						
A	1	2	3	4	5	PERCEIVE	C	1	2	3	4	5
	Always	Quite often	Some times	Hardly ever	Never			Always	Quite often	Some times	Hardly ever	Never
B	1	2	3	4	5	DESIRE	D	1	2	3	4	5

25-26
27-28

4. DO YOUR PARENTS CONGRATULATE YOU AFTER A GOOD RACE?

MOTHER						FATHER						
A	1	2	3	4	5	PERCEIVE	C	1	2	3	4	5
	Always	Quite often	Some times	Hardly ever	Never			Always	Quite often	Some times	Hardly ever	Never

29-30

		often	times	ever				often	times	ever		
B	1	2	3	4	5	DESIRE	D	1	2	3	4	5

31-32

5. AFTER A GALA DO YOUR PARENTS TELL YOU WHAT THEY THINK YOU NEED TO WORK ON?

		MOTHER							FATHER				
A	1	2	3	4	5	PERCEIVE	C	1	2	3	4	5	
	Always	Quite often	Some times	Hardly ever	Never			Always	Quite often	Some times	Hardly ever	Never	
B	1	2	3	4	5	DESIRE	D	1	2	3	4	5	

33-34

35-36

6. HOW OFTEN DO YOUR PARENTS WATCH YOUR TRAINING SESSIONS?

		MOTHER							FATHER				
A	1	2	3	4	5	PERCEIVE	C	1	2	3	4	5	
	Always	Quite often	Some times	Hardly ever	Never			Always	Quite often	Some times	Hardly ever	Never	
B	1	2	3	4	5	DESIRE	D	1	2	3	4	5	

37-38

39-40

7. DO YOUR PARENTS KNOW YOUR PB'S (PERSONAL BEST PERFORMANCES)?

		MOTHER							FATHER				
A	1	2	3	4	5	PERCEIVE	C	1	2	3	4	5	
	Always	Quite often	Some times	Hardly ever	Never			Always	Quite often	Some times	Hardly ever	Never	
B	1	2	3	4	5	DESIRE	D	1	2	3	4	5	

41-42

43-44

8. AFTER A POOR RACE DO YOUR PARENTS POINT OUT THE THINGS THEY THINK YOU DID BADLY?

		MOTHER							FATHER				
A	1	2	3	4	5	PERCEIVE	C	1	2	3	4	5	
	Always	Quite often	Some times	Hardly ever	Never			Always	Quite often	Some times	Hardly ever	Never	
B	1	2	3	4	5	DESIRE	D	1	2	3	4	5	

45-46

47-48

9. DO YOUR PARENTS TELL YOU HOW IMPORTANT IT IS TO TRAIN HARD?

		MOTHER							FATHER				
A	1	2	3	4	5	PERCEIVE	C	1	2	3	4	5	

49-50

	Always	Quite often	Some times	Hardly ever	Never		Always	Quite often	Some times	Hardly ever	Never	
B	1	2	3	4	5	DESIRE	D	1	2	3	4	5

51-52

10. DO YOUR PARENTS VOLUNTEER TO HELP AT GALAS THAT YOU ARE SWIMMING IN, E.G. AS OFFICIALS, ETC.?

	MOTHER						FATHER					
A	1	2	3	4	5	PERCEIVE	C	1	2	3	4	5
	Always	Quite often	Some times	Hardly ever	Never		Always	Quite often	Some times	Hardly ever	Never	
B	1	2	3	4	5	DESIRE	D	1	2	3	4	5

53-54

55-56

11. IN GENERAL, HOW MUCH PRESSURE DO YOUR PARENTS PUT ON YOU?

	MOTHER						FATHER					
A	1	2	3	4	5	PERCEIVE	C	1	2	3	4	5
	None at all	Not much	Moderate	Quite a lot	A lot		None at all	Not much	Moderate	Quite a lot	A lot	
B	1	2	3	4	5	DESIRE	D	1	2	3	4	5

57-58

59-60

12. AFTER A RACE DO YOUR PARENTS PRAISE YOU FOR WHERE YOU WERE PLACED (E.G. 1ST, 10TH, ETC.)?

	MOTHER						FATHER					
A	1	2	3	4	5	PERCEIVE	C	1	2	3	4	5
	Always	Quite often	Some times	Hardly ever	Never		Always	Quite often	Some times	Hardly ever	Never	
B	1	2	3	4	5	DESIRE	D	1	2	3	4	5

61-62

63-64

13. DO YOUR PARENTS COMPARE YOU TO OTHER SWIMMERS?

	MOTHER						FATHER					
A	1	2	3	4	5	PERCEIVE	C	1	2	3	4	5
	Always	Quite often	Some times	Hardly ever	Never		Always	Quite often	Some times	Hardly ever	Never	
B	1	2	3	4	5	DESIRE	D	1	2	3	4	5

65-66

67-68

14. BEFORE A RACE DO YOUR PARENTS TELL YOU WHAT PARTICULAR THINGS YOU NEED TO WORK ON IN ORDER TO DO WELL?

	MOTHER						FATHER					
A	1	2	3	4	5	PERCEIVE	C	1	2	3	4	5

69-70

	Always	Quite often	Some times	Hardly ever	Never		Always	Quite often	Some times	Hardly ever	Never	
B	1	2	3	4	5	DESIRE	D	1	2	3	4	5

71-72

15. DO YOUR PARENTS CHANGE MEALTIMES SO THAT YOU CAN TRAIN AND GO TO GALAS?

	MOTHER						FATHER					
A	1	2	3	4	5	PERCEIVE	C	1	2	3	4	5
	Always	Quite often	Some times	Hardly ever	Never		Always	Quite often	Some times	Hardly ever	Never	
B	1	2	3	4	5	DESIRE	D	1	2	3	4	5

73-74

75-76

16. AFTER YOU HAVE SWUM IN A COMPETITION DO YOUR PARENTS SAY SOMETHING ENCOURAGING TO YOU – EVEN IF YOU HAVE SWUM BADLY?

	MOTHER						FATHER					
A	1	2	3	4	5	PERCEIVE	C	1	2	3	4	5
	Always	Quite often	Some times	Hardly ever	Never		Always	Quite often	Some times	Hardly ever	Never	
B	1	2	3	4	5	DESIRE	D	1	2	3	4	5

77-78

79-80

17. DO YOUR PARENTS SHOW THAT THEY UNDERSTAND HOW YOU FEEL ABOUT YOUR SWIMMING?

	MOTHER						FATHER					
A	1	2	3	4	5	PERCEIVE	C	1	2	3	4	5
	Always	Quite often	Some times	Hardly ever	Never		Always	Quite often	Some times	Hardly ever	Never	
B	1	2	3	4	5	DESIRE	D	1	2	3	4	5

81-82

83-84

18. HOW MUCH DO YOUR PARENTS HELP AND ENCOURAGE YOU IN YOUR SWIMMING?

	MOTHER						FATHER					
A	1	2	3	4	5	PERCEIVE	C	1	2	3	4	5
	None at all	Not much	Moderately	Quite a lot	A lot		None at all	Not much	Moderately	Quite a lot	A lot	
B	1	2	3	4	5	DESIRE	D	1	2	3	4	5

85-86

87-88

19. AFTER A RACE DO YOUR PARENTS TELL YOU THAT YOU DIDN'T TRY HARD ENOUGH?

	MOTHER						FATHER				
--	--------	--	--	--	--	--	--------	--	--	--	--

A	1	2	3	4	5	PERCEIVE	C	1	2	3	4	5		
Always						Quite often	Some times	Hardly ever	Never					
B	1	2	3	4	5	DESIRE	D	1	2	3	4	5		

89-90

20. DO YOUR PARENTS TELL YOU HOW THEY THINK YOU CAN IMPROVE YOUR TECHNIQUE (E.G. STROKES, STARTS, TURNS, ETC.)?

91-92

MOTHER						FATHER								
A	1	2	3	4	5	PERCEIVE	C	1	2	3	4	5		
Always						Quite often	Some times	Hardly ever	Never					
B	1	2	3	4	5	DESIRE	D	1	2	3	4	5		

93-94

95-96

21. DURING TRAINING DO YOUR PARENTS TELL YOU OR SIGNAL TO YOU WHAT YOU SHOULD DO?

MOTHER						FATHER								
A	1	2	3	4	5	PERCEIVE	C	1	2	3	4	5		
Always						Quite often	Some times	Hardly ever	Never					
B	1	2	3	4	5	DESIRE	D	1	2	3	4	5		

97-98

99-100

22. DO YOUR PARENTS YELL AND CHEER BEFORE A RACE?

MOTHER						FATHER								
A	1	2	3	4	5	PERCEIVE	C	1	2	3	4	5		
Always						Quite often	Some times	Hardly ever	Never					
B	1	2	3	4	5	DESIRE	D	1	2	3	4	5		

101-102

103-104

23. DO YOUR PARENTS LEAVE IT UP TO YOU TO DECIDE WHETHER YOU GO TRAINING OR NOT?

MOTHER						FATHER								
A	1	2	3	4	5	PERCEIVE	C	1	2	3	4	5		
Always						Quite often	Some times	Hardly ever	Never					
B	1	2	3	4	5	DESIRE	D	1	2	3	4	5		

105-106

107-108

24. AFTER YOU HAVE SWUM A GOOD RACE DO YOUR PARENTS POINT OUT THINGS THEY THINK YOU DIDN'T DO VERY WELL?

MOTHER						FATHER						
A	1	2	3	4	5	PERCEIVE	C	1	2	3	4	5

109-110

	Always	Quite often	Some times	Hardly ever	Never		Always	Quite often	Some times	Hardly ever	Never	
B	1	2	3	4	5	DESIRE	D	1	2	3	4	5

25. DO YOUR PARENTS PUSH YOU TO TRAIN HARDER?

	MOTHER						FATHER					
A	1	2	3	4	5	PERCEIVE	C	1	2	3	4	5
	Always	Quite often	Some times	Hardly ever	Never		Always	Quite often	Some times	Hardly ever	Never	
B	1	2	3	4	5	DESIRE	D	1	2	3	4	5

26. DO YOUR PARENTS TAKE AN ACTIVE ROLE IN RUNNING YOUR CLUB BY DOING SUCH THINGS AS TEACHING, BEING ON A COMMITTEE, OR HELPING WITH SOCIAL EVENTS?

	MOTHER						FATHER					
A	1	2	3	4	5	PERCEIVE	C	1	2	3	4	5
	Always	Quite often	Some times	Hardly ever	Never		Always	Quite often	Some times	Hardly ever	Never	
B	1	2	3	4	5	DESIRE	D	1	2	3	4	5

27. HOW INTERESTED ARE YOUR PARENTS IN YOUR SWIMMING?

	MOTHER						FATHER					
A	1	2	3	4	5	PERCEIVE	C	1	2	3	4	5
	Not at all	A little	Moderately	Very much	Extremely		Not at all	A little	Moderately	Very much	Extremely	
B	1	2	3	4	5	DESIRE	D	1	2	3	4	5

28. DO YOUR PARENTS DISCUSS YOUR PROGRESS WITH YOUR COACH?

	MOTHER						FATHER					
A	1	2	3	4	5	PERCEIVE	C	1	2	3	4	5
	Always	Quite often	Some times	Hardly ever	Never		Always	Quite often	Some times	Hardly ever	Never	
B	1	2	3	4	5	DESIRE	D	1	2	3	4	5

29. AFTER A RACE DO YOUR PARENTS PRAISE YOU FOR TRYING HARD?

	MOTHER						FATHER					
A	1	2	3	4	5	PERCEIVE	C	1	2	3	4	5
	Always	Quite often	Some times	Hardly ever	Never		Always	Quite often	Some times	Hardly ever	Never	

		often	times	ever				often	times	ever		
B	1	2	3	4	5	DESIRE	D	1	2	3	4	5

131-132

30. DO YOUR PARENTS GET UPSET WITH YOU IF THEY THINK YOUR SWIMMING IS NOT GOING AS WELL AS IT SHOULD BE?

		MOTHER							FATHER				
A	1	2	3	4	5	PERCEIVE	C	1	2	3	4	5	
	Always	Quite often	Some times	Hardly ever	Never			Always	Quite often	Some times	Hardly ever	Never	
B	1	2	3	4	5	DESIRE	D	1	2	3	4	5	

133-134

135-136

31. DO YOUR PARENTS ENCOURAGE YOU TO TALK TO THEM ABOUT ANY PROBLEMS OR WORRIES THAT YOU HAVE WITH YOUR SWIMMING?

		MOTHER							FATHER				
A	1	2	3	4	5	PERCEIVE	C	1	2	3	4	5	
	Always	Quite often	Some times	Hardly ever	Never			Always	Quite often	Some times	Hardly ever	Never	
B	1	2	3	4	5	DESIRE	D	1	2	3	4	5	

137-138

139-140

32. AFTER A RACE DO YOUR PARENTS TELL YOU THAT YOU SHOULD HAVE FINISHED IN A HIGHER PLACE?

		MOTHER							FATHER				
A	1	2	3	4	5	PERCEIVE	C	1	2	3	4	5	
	Always	Quite often	Some times	Hardly ever	Never			Always	Quite often	Some times	Hardly ever	Never	
B	1	2	3	4	5	DESIRE	D	1	2	3	4	5	

141-142

143-144

33. EVEN IF YOU HAVE SWUM A POOR RACE DO YOUR PARENTS PRAISE YOU FOR THE GOOD THINGS THAT YOU DID?

		MOTHER							FATHER				
A	1	2	3	4	5	PERCEIVE	C	1	2	3	4	5	
	Always	Quite often	Some times	Hardly ever	Never			Always	Quite often	Some times	Hardly ever	Never	
B	1	2	3	4	5	DESIRE	D	1	2	3	4	5	

145-146

147-148

Thank you very much for your time! Best of luck with your swimming career.

Questionnaire (Swimming)

Please complete the information below.

1. Age: years |
2. Gender: Male: |
 Female: |
3. **Highest level of participation** e.g. Inter schools meeting, Inter high Championship, Southern Free State Championship, FS Championship, SA Championship, National Championship, etc. |
 |
4. **Duration of professional coaching**, e.g. 10 years |
 More than 1 year: years |
5. **Months spend training in a year**, e.g. 3 months |
 months in a year |
6. **Hours spend training in a week**, e.g. 5 hours a week |
 hours a week |

SECTION B

PLEASE INDICATE TO WHAT EXTENT YOU ENJOY SWIMMING. (Make a clear cross over the appropriate number to indicate which response best reflects how you feel.)

1. TRAINING:

1	2	3	4	5
None at all	Not much	Moderately	Quite a lot	A lot

2. GALAS / COMPETITIONS:

1	2	3	4	5
None at all	Not much	Moderately	Quite a lot	A lot

3. SWIMMING IN GENERAL:

1	2	3	4	5
None at all	Not much	Moderately	Quite a lot	A lot

Appendix B

Discrepancy scores

Table 1: Discrepancy scores reported by respondents: Directive behaviour (in percentages)

Item	(5)	(5)	(8)	(8)	(20)	(20)	(21)	(21)	(22)	(22)	(25)	(25)	(30)	(30)	(14)	(14)	(2)	(2)	(19)	(19)
Gender of parent	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Discrepancy																				
4	1.07		1.07									1.07						1.07		
3	1.07	1.07				1.07				1.07	1.07	1.07		1.07			1.07			
2	4.30	5.37	2.15	3.22	3.22	3.22	2.15	2.15	2.15	2.15	3.22	7.52	1.07	3.22	5.37	4.30	1.07	5.37	3.22	4.30
1	19.3	15.05	23.6	19.35	15.05	15.05	4.30	5.37	3.22	8.60	18.27	16.12	7.52	8.60	11.82	12.90	15.05	13.9	9.67	7.52
0	51.6	59.1	47.31	55.9	59.13	62.36	83.87	87.09	72.04	73.1	61.29	60.20	61.29	59.13	61.20	68.8	59	54.8	65.59	59.13
-1	15.05	15.05	16.12	11.8	17.20	11.82	5.37	3.22	16.12	11.82	13.97	5.37	20.43	19.35	12.90	7.52	17.20	17.20	16.12	17.20
-2	5.37	3.22	6.45	7.52	4.30	4.30	3.22	2.15	3.22	2.15	1.07	8.60	7.52	6.45	5.37	5.37	5.37	5.37	3.22	9.67
-3	2.15	1.07	2.15	2.15	1.07	2.15	1.07		2.15	1.07	1.07		2.15	1.07	2.15	1.07	1.07	2.15	1.07	1.07
-4			1.07						1.07					1.07	1.07					

**Table 2: Discrepancy scores reported by respondents: Praise and understanding
(in percentages)**

Item	(33)	(33)	(29)	(29)	(17)	(17)	(12)	(12)
Gender of parent	Mother	Father	Mother	Father	Mother	Father	Mother	Father
Discrepancy								
4						1.07		
3		2.15		1.07	1.07	3.22		
2	3.22	5.37	1.07	5.37	6.45	9.87	1.07	1.07
1	10.75	16.12	12.90	10.75	22.58	21.50	12.90	13.97
0	67.74	64.51	74.19	76.34	63.44	58	72.04	64.51
-1	12.90	10.75	9.67	5.37	6.45	6.45	10.75	11.82
-2	4.30		1.07				2.15	1.07
-3		1.07		1.07				1.07
-4	1.07		1.07					

**Table 3: Discrepancy scores reported by respondents: Active involvement
(in percentages)**

Item	(26)	(26)	(10)	(10)	(28)	(28)	(31)	(31)	(15)	(15)
Gender of parent	Mother	Father								
Discrepancy										
4		1.07		1.07		1.16				
3	4.30	2.15		1.07	1.07	1.16	1.07	1.07	2.15	2.15
2	2.15	6.45	5.37	13.97		8.13	1.07	6.45	3.22	2.15
1	7.52	10.75	18.27	15.05	18.27	12.79	12.90	10.75	8.60	10.75
0	68.81	65.59	33.33	51.6	66.66	68.60	69.89	66.66	76.34	75.26
-1	9.67	5.37	16.12	6.45	5.37	8.13	9.67	7.52	6.45	8.60
-2	2.15	2.15	11.82	4.30	4.30		2.15	1.07	3.22	1.07
-3	1.07		3.22		2.15		3.22	1.07		
-4	2.15									

Appendix C

Regression Results

REGRESSION

Item	Mother (perceived)	Father (perceived)	Mother (desired)	Father (Desired)
I.DIRECTIVE BEHAVIOUR				
5. After a gala do your parents tell you what they think you need to work on?	.536	.043	.794	.906
8. After a poor race do your parents point out the things they think you did badly?	.303	.114	.548	.504
20. Do your parents tell you how they think you can improve your technique (e.g. strokes, starts, turns etc.)?	.948	.240	.715	.418
21. During training do your parents tell you or signal to you what you should do?	.197	.023	.097	.129
22. Do your parents yell and cheer before a race?	.527	.008**	.938	.122
25. Do your parents push you to train harder?	.005*	.032	.000	.000
30. Do your parents get upset with you if they think your swimming is not going as well as it should be?	.181	.296	.332	.948
14. Before a race do your parents tell you what particular things you need to work on in order to do well?	.190	.254	.410	.537
2. Before a gala do your parents tell you how to swim your race?	.651	.488	.095	.359
19. After a race do your parents tell you that you didn't try hard enough?	.818	.891	.381	.097

II. PRAISE AND UNDERSTANDING				
33. Even when you have swum a poor race do your parents praise you for the good things that you did?	.125	.553	.297	.958
29. After a race do your parents praise you for trying hard?	.847	.002	.727	.075
17. Do your parents show that they understand how you feel about your swimming?	.270	.792	.005	.186
12. After a race do your parents praise you for where you were placed (i.e. 1st, 10th etc.)	.184	.092	.541	.118
III. ACTIVE INVOLVEMENT				
26. Do your parents take an active role in running your club by doing such things as teaching, being on a committee, or helping with social events?	.349	.285	.221	.613
10. Do your parents volunteer to help at galas that you are swimming in, as officials, whips etc.?	.735	.665	.281	.312
28. Do your parents discuss your progress with your coach?	.823	.483	.018	.035
31. Do your parents encourage you to talk to them about any problems or worries that you have with your swimming?	.138	.426	.012	.094
15. Do your parents change mealtimes so that you can train and go to galas?	.622	.108	.934	.295

Appendix D

Practical Guidelines for Swimmers' Parents

Valuable practical guidelines for you as parent on how to make your child/adolescent's swimming a positive and enjoyable experience.

As a parent your major responsibility is to provide a stable, loving and supportive environment. Show your interest by ensuring your child's attendance, by coming to galas and by being aware of what is going on.

Parents are not participants on their child's team, but contribute to the success experienced by the child and the team - providing transportation, officiating, and fundraising are a few ways to contribute positively. If children see swimming as a sport, with an opportunity to learn skills, compete, increase confidence, and have fun they will be able to go with the flow, enjoy themselves and relax.

Be aware that your attitude will often set the tone for your children. More than likely your child will make mistakes; remember that they are still learning. Encourage all efforts, and point out the things done well. Some mistakes often made by parents are that their questions centre too much on the outcome instead of the process ("Did you win?" or "How did you place?"). This emphasis sends the message that mistakes are occasions of failure rather than opportunities to learn: this is wrong. The most important thing about of a child's swimming experience is that they learn about themselves while enjoying the sport. A healthy environment encourages learning and fun, which will develop a positive self-image within each child. Be enthusiastic and supportive.

Strive to be positive role models and most importantly, show good sportsmanship at all times towards coaches, officials, opponents and teammates. The coach is the only one qualified to judge a swimmer's performance and technique, so let the coach do the coaching.

Coaches are not always right, but you cannot help the situation by making negative statements. Remember that your child is the swimmer, and that he/she needs to establish individual goals and make progress towards them. Be careful not to impose your own standards or goals.

The Life Advice Pamphlet by MetLife (2005) provides parents with practical advice, such as:

- Attend practices and galas if your schedule allows. Lend the swimmers your support in a positive manner. Emphasise their accomplishments and efforts.
- Avoid material rewards. Stress the joy of sport.
- Listen. Make your child feel important and encourage contribution to a team effort.
- Be positive and don't criticise. If your child is not performing correctly or improving, suggest an alternate technique with the coach's guidance.
- Be graceful - and not boastful - when your child's team wins.
- Be positive and provide encouragement when your child's team loses or your child fails to place.
- Make fun and technique-development top priorities when practising.
- Support your child's coach and, before being asked, offer to help in any way possible.
- Don't disagree with the coach or referees in front of your child. Questions, input and positive suggestions should be discussed privately and calmly.
- Enjoy the excitement of sport and the opportunity to be with your child.

Practical tips parents could follow are: If he/she loses, parents should not over-sympathise, but listen. Children should be encouraged to tell about good parts of the game/race, where they think it went well, and what their teammates did well. They should be asked how they think they could improve.

If he/she has been working on a particular weakness in their sport, and improved in that aspect, they should be congratulated. Knowing that their work has led to a positive outcome will give them a reason to stay in the sport, as well as show them that striving to improve is enjoyable. Also, do not over-congratulate a win, the adolescent will spot the different reactions very quickly, and come to the conclusion that winning is more important than losing. Again, listen and encourage positive summaries, particularly in the opposition's performance. This shows that you are serious about everybody being able to enjoy competitive sport, even when losing, and will also teach them how to objectively analyse a sportsperson's performance, including their own. But ensure, as much as possible, that the analysis is positive. The second step is to gently push the teenager in continuing participation, by driving them to training and competitions, preparing their equipment and clothing, and definitely attending games/galas/competitions. Often they will take over the arrangements and preparation themselves. Parents must be careful not to overdo the pushing, gauging how far to go of course is never easy.

Parent Code of Conduct

As a parent of a swimmer and member of the Swim Club, I will abide by the following guidelines:

1. Practise teamwork with all parents, swimmers and coaches by supporting the values of discipline, loyalty, commitment and hard work.
2. As a parent, I will not coach or instruct the team or any swimmer at a practice or meets (from the stands or any other area) or interfere with coaches on the pool deck.
3. Demonstrate good sportsmanship by conducting myself in a manner that earns the respect of my child, other swimmers, parents, officials and the coaches at meets and practices.
4. Maintain self-control at all times. Know my role.
SWIMMERS = SWIM
COACHES = COACH
OFFICIALS = OFFICIATE
PARENTS = PARENT
5. As a parent, I understand that criticising, name-calling, use of abusive language or gestures directed toward the coaches, officials and/or any participating swimmer will not be permitted or tolerated.
6. Enjoy involvement with Swim Club by supporting the swimmers, coaches and other parents with positive communication and actions.
7. During competitions, questions or concerns regarding decisions made by meet officials are directed to a member of our coaching staff. Parents address officials via the coaching staff only.

Test yourself

Are you a pressure parent?

The following survey was taken from the Amateur Swimming Association of Great Britain.

If you answer “yes” to one or more of these questions, you may be in danger of pressuring your child. It is important to remember that the parents’ role is critical and should be supportive at all times to ensure a positive experience for your child.

- Is winning more important to you than it is to your child?
- When your child has a poor swim, is your disappointment, such as through body language or vocal tones, obvious?
- Do you feel that you are the one to have to “psyche” your child up before a competition?
- Do you feel that winning is the only way your child can enjoy the sport?
- Do you conduct “post mortems” immediately after competition or practice?
- Do you feel that you have to force your child to go to practice?
- Do you find yourself wanting to interfere with coaching and instructions during practice or competition thinking that you could do it better?
- Do you find yourself disliking your child’s opponents?
- Are your child’s goals more important to you than they are to your child?
- Do you provide material rewards for performance?

10 COMMANDMENTS FOR SWIMMING PARENTS

I. Thou shalt not impose thy ambitions on thy child

Remember that swimming is your child's activity. Improvements and progress occur at different rates for each individual. Don't judge your child's progress based on the performance of other swimmers and don't push them based on what you think they should be doing. The nice thing about swimming is that every person can strive to do his or her personal best and benefit from the process of competitive swimming.

II. Thou shalt be supportive, no matter what

There is only one question to ask your child after a practice or a competition - "Did you have fun?" If galas and practices are not fun, your child should not be forced to participate.

III. Thou shalt not coach thy child

You are involved in one of the few youth sports programmes that offer professional coaching; do not undermine the professional coach by trying to coach your child on the side. Your job is to provide love and support and a safe place to return at the end of the day. Love and hug your child no matter what. The coach is responsible for the technical part of the job. You should not offer advice on technique or race strategy or any other area that is not yours. And above all, never pay your child for a performance. This will only serve to confuse your child concerning the reasons to strive for excellence and weaken the swimmer/coach bond.

IV. Thou shalt only have positive things to say at a swimming gala

If you are going to show up at a swimming gala, you should be encouraging, and never criticise your child or the coach. Both of them know when mistakes have been made. And remember "yelling at" is not the same as "cheering for".

V. Thou shalt acknowledge your child's fears

A first swimming gala, 500 m free or 200 IM, can be a stressful situation. It is totally appropriate for your child to be scared. Don't yell or belittle, just assure your child that the coach would not have suggested the event if your child was not ready to compete in it. Remember your job is to love and support your child through all of the swimming experience.

VI. Thou shalt not criticise the officials

If you do not care to devote the time or do not have the desire to volunteer as an official, don't criticise those who are doing the best they can.

VII. Honour thy child's coach

The bond between coach and swimmer is a special one, and one that contributes to your child's success as well as fun. Do not criticise the coach in the presence of your child; it will only serve to hurt your child's swimming.

VIII. Thou shalt be loyal and supportive of thy club/team

It is not wise for parents to take their swimmers and to jump from club to club. The water isn't necessarily bluer in another club's pool. Every club has its own internal problems, even clubs that build champions. Children who switch from club to club are often ostracised for a long time by the teammates they leave behind and are slowly received by new teammates. Often, swimmers who do switch teams never do better than they did before they sought the bluer water.

IX. Thy child shalt have goals besides winning

Most successful swimmers are those who have learned to focus on the process and not the outcome. Giving an honest effort regardless of the outcome is much more important than winning. One Olympian said, "My goal was to set a world record. Well, I did that, but someone else did it too, just a little faster than I did. I achieved my goal and I lost. Does this make me a failure? No, in fact I am very proud of that swim." What a tremendous outlook to carry on through life.

X. Thou shalt not expect thy child to become an Olympian

There are 250,000 athletes in USA Swimming and we keep a record of the Top 100 all time swimming performance by age group. Only 2% of the swimmers listed in the all-time Top 100, 10 & under age group make it to the Top 100 in the 17 & 18 age group and of those only a small percentage will become elite level, world-class athletes. There are only 52 spots available for the Olympic Team every four years. Your child's odds of becoming an Olympian are about .0002%.

References:

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Opsomming

Ouerbetrokkenheid in sport: persepsies van kompeterende adolessente swemmers

Sleutel terme: ouerbetrokkenheid, ouergedrag, sport, persepsies, kompeterende adolessente swemmers, druk, genot.

Volwassenes wat betrokke is by kinders se sport het 'n invloed op die aard van die sportervaring, en bepaal in 'n groot mate of die ervaring positief sal wees vir die kind. Van alle betrokke volwassenes, is die ouers waarskynlik die belangrikste en speel hulle die mees noemenswaardige rol in kinders se sport.

Die doel van hierdie studie was om ondersoek in te stel na die persepsie van 'n groep kompeterende, professioneel afgerigte adolessente swemmers oor ouerbetrokkenheid en hoe dit hulle totale sportervaring beïnvloed.

Deelnemers in die studie was 93 (45 manlik en 48 vroulik) kompeterende adolessente swemmers tussen die ouderdomme van 13 en 22 jaar, wat professionele afrigting ontvang het vir 1 tot 15 jaar, en oefen vir 5 tot 11 maande per jaar. Respondente het die ouerbetrokkenheid in sport vraelys (PISQ) voltooi. Die vraelys bestaan uit drie multi-item skale. Die drie skale het Voorskriftelike gedrag (DB), Aktiewe betrokkenheid (AI) en Aanmoediging en begrip (PU) gemeet. 'n Enkele item van Druk (P) was ingesluit as afhanklike veranderlike.

Die vraelys was ontwerp om die persepsies van die respondente te toets t.o.v. die gedrag van hul ouers wanneer dit kom by die kinders se swem aktiwiteite. Respondente moes die voorkoms van sekere gedrag identifiseer aan die hand van a) vertoon deur, en b) verlang van hulle ouers.

Verskille tussen vertoonde en verlangde gedrag was 'n aanduiding van die mate van tevredenheid oor die gedrag wat hulle ouers openbaar het.

Enkel t-toetse het aangedui dat respondente onvoldoende vlakke van DB waargeneem het, maar bevredigende vlakke van PU, AI en P van hulle moeders. Die uitslae dui daarop dat swemmers ook bevredigende vlakke van druk ervaar deur hulle moeders, wat lei tot die gevolgtrekking dat hulle die hoeveelheid druk aanvaarbaar vind.

Enkel t-toetse om te bepaal wat die gedrag van vaders kenmerk, het bevredigende vlakke van DB aangedui, wat aandui dat vaders 'n aanvaarbare vlak van voorskriftelike of beherende gedrag openbaar t.o.v. hulle kinders se sportervaring. Dit is kontrasterend met die hoë vlakke van PU, AI en P wat die respondente van hulle vaders ondervind. Respondente mag druk voel wanneer aanmoediging buite verhouding gegee word en dit ervaar word as 'n poging om beheer oor te neem.

'n Tweede vraelys was versprei om die deelnemers se vlak van genot t.ov. hul swem aktiwiteite te bepaal. Die vraelys het bestaan uit drie vrae oor die genot wat hulle ervaar in hulle sport. Die data het aangedui dat die oorgrote meerderheid (92%) baie tevrede is met hulle swem ervaring in die algemeen en dat hulle dit baie geniet. Die data suggereer dat die vlakke van druk wat hulle tans ervaar geen invloed het op die vlakke van genot wat hulle ervaar nie.

Die studie toon dat ouers wat tevredenheid uitspreek oor hulle kinders se sport optredes, wat positiewe interaksie met hulle kinders het, en wat oor die algemeen ondersteunend optree t.o.v. hul kinders se sportervaring die genot wat kinders uit sportdeelname ervaar, kan verhoog.

Optimale ouerbetrokkenheid in sport kan verkry word deur goed georganiseerde programme, wat gekontroleer en beheer word en deur die skep van geleenthede vir ouers om opvoeding en hulp te ontvang oor die sport waaraan hulle kinders deelneem. 'n Voorgestelde dokument, "Practical Guidelines for swimmers' parents", is opgestel om ouers te voorsien van praktiese riglyne om hulle betrokkenheid te verbeter. Dit word voorgestel dat bogenoemde dokument versprei word aan die ouers van die deelnemers aan die studie.

Summary

Parental involvement in sport : Perceptions of competitive adolescent swimmers

Key terms: parental involvement, parental behaviour, sport, perceptions, competitive adolescent swimmers, pressure, enjoyment.

All adults involved in children's sport affect the nature of the sporting experience, and to a large extent determine whether or not it is a positive experience for children. Of all adults involved, the parents are perhaps the most important and play the most significant role in children's sport.

The purpose of this study was to examine how a group of competitive and professionally trained adolescent swimmers perceived parental involvement and how it affected their total sport experience.

Participants in the study were 93 (45 male and 48 female) competitive adolescent swimmers between the ages of 13 and 22 years, who received professional coaching for 1 to 15 years, and trained for 5 to 11 months per annum. Respondents completed the parental involvement in sport questionnaire (PISQ). The questionnaire consists of three multi-item scales. The three scales measured Directive behaviour (DB), Active involvement (AI), and Praise and understanding (PU). A single item of Pressure (P) was included as a dependent variable.

The questionnaire was designed to elicit responses about the behaviour of parents with regard to their children's swimming activities. Respondents identified the frequency with which certain behaviours were (a) exhibited by, and (b) desired of their parents. Discrepancies between exhibited and desired behaviour indicated the extent of respondents' satisfaction with these behaviours.

Single sample t-tests showed that respondents perceived insufficient levels of DB, and satisfactory levels of PU, AI and P from their mothers. The results revealed that swimmers perceived satisfactory levels of pressure from their mothers, which leads to the conclusion that they find the amount of pressure acceptable.

Single sample t-tests to determine the behaviour of fathers, showed satisfactory levels of DB, which suggests that fathers exhibit an appropriate level of directing or controlling of their children's sporting experience. This is in contrast with the excessive levels of PU, AI and P that the respondents perceive from their fathers. Respondents may feel pressured by disproportionate praise as this might be accompanied by efforts to take control to an unacceptable degree.

A second questionnaire was distributed to assess participants' enjoyment of their swimming. This questionnaire consists of three questions measuring the enjoyment of sport. The data revealed that the majority of the respondents (92%) were very satisfied with their swimming experience in general and indicated that they enjoyed it to a large extent. The data suggests that the current level of pressure the swimmers experienced did not have any affect on their level of enjoyment.

The study indicates that parents who express satisfaction with children's sport performance, who interact positively with them, and who are generally positively involved and supportive in the children's sport experience may enhance the enjoyment they derive from their sport participation.

Optimal parental involvement in sport could be achieved by having well-organised, well-run programmes, and by providing parents with an opportunity to receive some education about the sport programmes in which their children are involved. A proposed document, “Practical Guidelines for Swimmers’ Parents”, was prepared in order to provide parents with a course of action to maximise their involvement. It is recommended that the above-mentioned document be distributed to the parents of the participants in this study.