HEALTH PSYCHOLOGY REPORT · VOLUME 3(1), 2015
ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Ashley Marsh
A,B,C,D,E,F
Stephanie Zavilla
A,B,C,D,E,F
Kyra Acuna
A,B,C,D,E,F
Artur Poczwardowski
A,C,D,E

Perception of purpose and parental involvement in competitive youth sport

BACKGROUND
Because of the various demanding investments, parents develop various expectations regarding their children's sport experience. The purposes of this study were twofold: (a) to determine whether there is a discrepancy between parents and athletes in terms of perception of purpose for engaging in youth sport, and (b) to explore whether the reported discrepancies impact parental involvement.

PARTICIPANTS AND PROCEDURE
Participants included 25 club level athletes (19 girls, 6 boys), ages 13-17 (M = 14.96 years, SD = 1.49 years), and 24 parents (18 women, 6 men) of these athletes, ages 39-55 (M = 48.26 years, SD = 4.44 years) from both individual and team sports. Parents and athletes completed their respective versions of both the Participation Motivation Questionnaire (PMQ) and Parental Involvement in Sport Questionnaire (PISQ). Optional individual interviews with 12 athletes and 12 parents were then conducted to further triangulate perceptions of purpose and parental involvement in youth sport.

RESULTS
Findings included four statistically significant negative correlations between the PMQ and PISQ, as well as a statistically significant discrepancy between parents and athletes on one subscale of the PMQ (p = .026). Also, statistically significant discrepancies were found between perceived and desired levels of parental involvement on three out of four subscales of the PISQ (there are 3 exact p-values since there were significant discrepancies for 3 out of the 4 subscales. They are: Directive Behavior: p < .001, Praise and Understanding: p = .042 and Pressure: p = .025).

CONCLUSIONS
Perceptions of parental involvement between the parents and their children were not congruent. Similarly, the parents and their children perceive why an athlete participates in sport somewhat differently. If further explored, parent-athlete relations and interactions could be improved to facilitate optimal youth sport participation.

KEY WORDS
parent-athlete relationships; participation motivation; competitive sports

ORGANIZATIONS – University of Denver, Denver, USA

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION – A: Study design · B: Data collection · C: Statistical analysis · D: Data interpretation · E: Manuscript preparation · F: Literature search · G: Funds collection

CORRESPONDING AUTHOR – Ashley Marsh, University of Denver, University of Denver, Graduate School of Professional Psychology, 2450 S. Vine Str., Denver, CO 80208, USA, e-mail: amarsh1405@gmail.com

TO CITE THIS ARTICLE – Marsh, A., Zavilla, S., Acuna, K., & Poczwardowski, A. (2015). Perception of purpose and parental involvement in competitive youth sport. *Health Psychology Report*, *3*(1), 13–23. DOI: 10.5114/hpr.2015.48897

RECEIVED 31.10.2014 · REVIEWED 03.12.2014 · ACCEPTED 02.01.2015 · PUBLISHED 29.01.2015

BACKGROUND

Parents enroll their children into youth sport programs for various reasons including the development of cognitive, affective, moral, and social skills and competencies (Ewing & Seefeldt, 1996; Kanters & Casper, 2008). As a result, the number of children between ages 6 and 17 who engage in youth sports has increased by more than 7 million in the past decade (Ede, Kamphoff, Mackey, & Armentrout, 2012). As many as 70% of these athletes will drop out of youth sport organizations by the age of 13 (Armentrout & Kamphoff, 2011; Ede et al., 2012; Engh, 2002). Since parents are one of the main socializing agents in the life of a youth athlete (Hutchinson, Baldwin, & Caldwell, 2003), it seems prudent to examine their own expectations regarding their children's sport experience. These expectations can be incongruent with the purposes that their children ascribe to their sport participation and, as a result, may impact parental behavior towards the child-athlete.

PURPOSE AND MOTIVATION FOR ENGAGING IN YOUTH SPORT

Participation factors for engaging in youth sport have been explored in terms of both individual and organizational factors. For instance, Armentrout & Kamphoff (2011) found that organizational satisfaction is a predictor of motivation and purpose. From an individual athlete standpoint, Duda (1989) examined motivation to participate in youth sport through the lens of goal achievement perspective. Her work revealed that those athletes who were task-oriented viewed sport as a means of obtaining mastery, experienced increased personal improvement, and had higher perceptions of their success and competence. Conversely, athletes who were more ego-oriented engaged in sport for the sake of competition and to enhance social status (White, Duda, & Keller, 1998). When athletes had a task-oriented goal perspective, they tended to see sport as an end in itself and were able to draw more enjoyment from participation, making them less likely to drop out of youth sport than their ego-oriented counterparts (White et al., 1998).

Given that sport is an environment characterized by interpersonal interactions, psychosocial researchers have attempted to differentiate between intrinsic motives (sport is an end in itself, the ultimate goal) and instrumental motives (using sport as a means to achieve a goal; i.e., forming social relationships; Skille & Osteras, 2011). Allen (2003) found in a study surveying 100 female athletes ages 14 to 17, that social affiliation, status, and recognition demonstrated that social validation is one potential instrumental motive for participation in youth sport.

Participation in youth sport has also been explored in terms of gender differences in an effort to ascertain why athletes commit to long-term sport participation. For example, Sirard, Pfeiffer, and Pate (2006) examined gender differences in motivational factors associated with youth sport participation amongst adolescents and found that females tended to participate in sport primarily for the social benefits, followed by competition and fitness. Conversely, males valued competition first, followed by social and fitness benefits. Similarly, Skille and Osteras (2011) examined Norwegian 16 to 19-year old athletes and found that reasons for engaging in sport included general health, a means to release excess energy, body appearance benefits, identity, self-confidence, competitiveness, social benefits, and above all, fun and enjoyment.

In short, it is evident that purpose for engaging in youth sport has been examined from the youth's perspective; however, the parents' perspectives have been largely overlooked in previous research. Consequently, any possible agreements or discrepancies and their potential effects on parental involvement in their children's sport participation have not been examined.

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN YOUTH SPORT

While parents are typically the driving force behind initiating their children's sport experience, they also become a key component in determining future sport involvement and decisions (Fredericks & Eccles, 2005; Kanters & Casper, 2008; Wuerth, Lee, & Alfermann, 2004). Entering the youth sport world, athletes typically rely on their parents for information regarding their skills, abilities, and competencies (Fry & Duda, 1997). For example, Harter, in her Competence Motivation Theory (1978, 1981) asserted that positive feedback directly following mastery-related behavior, results in an athlete in positive emotion, increased intrinsic motivation, and enhanced perceptions of skills and abilities. Further, Fredericks and Eccles' Model of Parental Influences (2004) stated that parents act as interpreters of their child's abilities, and can substantially influence their children's perceptions of their skills, competencies, and experiences based on the way the parents perceive them, as well as how they relay that information to their child (Ede et al., 2012; Holt, Tamminen, Black, Sehn, & Wall, 2008). As athletes develop socially, they begin to compare themselves to peers, and will have a higher chance of dropping out of organized youth sport if they are ability oriented as a result of parents reinforcing outcome-oriented behavior or a lack of perceived support (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004). Other research that has examined parental involvement through an ecological systems perspective, supported these no-

tions that change is a product of the relations between the developing individual and the social contexts he or she engages in (Lerner, Brown, & Kier, 2005).

Parental involvement in youth sports has been examined in terms of quantity of interactions, and the content, sentiment, and intent within those interactions (Kidman, McKenzie, & McKenzie, 1999; Wuerth et al., 2004). In a longitudinal study following four families involved in competitive youth soccer, Holt and his colleagues (2008) found that the volume of comments increased with emotional intensity. Parental involvement was eventually developed into a model that characterizes parents as under involved (lacking in financial and emotional investment, presence, and interest), moderately involved (direction with an open communication system), or overinvolved (excessive attendance, emphasis on winning, and a personal investment in athlete's performance; Hellstedt, 1987). A review of the literature revealed that athletes who received support and encouragement from their parents were more likely to engage in enduring sport participation (Brown, Frankel, & Fennell, 1989). Nevertheless, while one athlete may perceive a parent's involvement as beneficial and positive, another may find that same parent directive and overbearing, which underscores the perceptual nature of this dynamic (Ede et al., 2012).

Introduction of the Parental Involvement in Sport Questionnaire (PISQ) (Lee & MacLean, 1997) allowed researchers to measure parents' directive behavior, praise and understanding, and active involvement. For example, parental involvement in youth sport has been examined across an athlete's career development to determine during what phases which aspects of parental involvement are active (Salmela, 1994). Specifically, during the initiation phase, the parental role was very active in directive behavior, and began to lessen as the athlete entered into the developmental phase, becoming more independent and task-oriented (Wuerth et al., 2004). Once the athlete transitioned into the mastery phase, parents became supporters rather than active agents in their athlete's sport participation. Wuerth and colleagues found that successful athletes (those able to transition smoothly through all of the stages) received more praise and understanding from their parents throughout their sport experience than those who were unable to successfully transition. However, successful athletes also reported a great deal more directive behavior from their parents than their less successful counterparts. The researchers concluded that parents of successful athletes engaged in a consistent interplay of directive behavior and praise and understanding. Nevertheless, Wuerth et al. noted that directive behavior can act as a threat to an athlete's sense of autonomy, ownership, and independence, and that this will often cause athletes to feel trapped to honor their parents' investment in their career development. Another risk of the overly directive parent is that the athlete is more susceptible to developing state anxiety (Scanlan & Lewthwaite, 1984) or burnout (Coakley, 1992), with the latter potentially resulting in the athlete disengaging from youth sport altogether.

PARENT AND ATHLETE PERCEPTIONS OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

Purpose and parental involvement

A growing body of literature presents compelling evidence that children's perceptions of their parent's level of involvement in part co-determine enduring sport participation (Ede et al., 2012; Hedstrom & Gould, 2004; Kanters & Casper, 2008). Welk, Babkes, and Schaben (2004) identified two social-cognitive structures through which parents have a direct and indirect influence on their children: outcome expectancies and efficiency expectancies. Ulrich-French and Smith (2006) found that positive perceptions of the parent-athlete relationship resulted in more enjoyment, decreased state anxiety, an increase in perceived competency, and an increase in self-determined motivation among competitive soccer players. These findings combined suggested that parent-child relationships, and the perceptions within parent-child relationships, have significant effects on an athlete's youth sport experience and likelihood of continuation.

Previous research indicated that parents rarely perceived their children's sport experiences accurately, and their children then subconsciously learned to accommodate their own means of expressing those experiences so that their descriptions matched the way their parents perceived them (Miller, 1981). Similarly, Hellstedt (1990) found that when assessing satisfaction of a youth sport organization, parents and athletes did not operate from the same frame of reference. Green and Chalip (1997) used a market metaphor, in which parents were the "providers" and "purchasers," while athletes were the "consumers." Therefore, parents can sometimes unknowingly come to expect a "return on investment" from their child's performance, which impacts their behavior towards their child-athlete (Ede et al., 2012).

As evidenced above, it is clear that parent and athlete perceptions of parental involvement do not always correlate (Kanters & Casper, 2008). With the added pressure that comes with elite sport participation, there is very little research investigating athletes' reasons for continued sport participation at a more competitive level. Previous research has not investigated the possibility of discrepancies between parent and athlete perceptions of purpose for engaging in organized youth sport, and whether or not they affect parental involvement. Therefore, the purpose of this study was twofold: (a) to determine whether there is a discrepancy between parents and

athletes in terms of perception of purpose for engaging in youth sport, and (b) to explore whether the reported discrepancies impact parental involvement.

PARTICIPANTS AND PROCEDURE

METHODS

A mixed method design was used in this study in an attempt to corroborate quantitative data (i.e., Participation Motivation Questionnaire (PMQ) and PISQ; dominant feature) with qualitative insights (i.e., interview data; Giacobbi, Poczwardowski, & Hager, 2005). The use of multiple methods (mixed-method designs) has been successfully used by sport psychologists in the past (e.g., Culver, Gilbert, & Trudell, 2003).

PARTICIPANTS

The sample consisted of 25 club level athletes (19 girls, 6 boys), ages 13 to 17 (M = 14.96 years, SD = 1.49 years), and 24 parents (18 women, 6 men) of these athletes, ages 39 to 55 (M = 48.26 years, SD = 4.44 years). E-mail was used to obtain a convenience sample from clubs in a major city in the western part of the United States. The participants represented the following sports: swimming (n = 13), volleyball (n = 7), soccer (n = 4), and hockey (n = 1). The club level is more competitive than recreational level. In addition, club level sports require significant time and monetary commitments from both the parent and athlete (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004). Also, this population was chosen because specialization in sport usually occurs during this age range (Baker, 2003). Importantly, athletes in this age range have the cognitive capabilities to be cognizant of their reasons for participating in competitive sport. Finally, the researchers chose 18 as the maximum age, if still in high school, because parents are less likely to be involved in their athlete's sport post-high school (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004).

Overall, athletes reported the average number of years spent participating in their sport was 7.22 years (SD = 3.02 years). The average number of years spent playing at the current level (club) was 3.26 years (SD = 2.03 years). The average number of hours spent in sport per week was 11.36 hours (SD = 5.72). Parents reported that the average number of hours they spent engaging in their child's sport per week was 9.97 hours (SD = 9.27 hours).

MATERIALS

The researchers utilized both questionnaires and interviews to collect data. The questionnaires measured both perceptions of purpose and parental involvement in sport, while the interviews further triangulated any discrepancies between parent and athlete perceptions of purpose and involvement. Demographic information was gathered prior to participation in the questionnaire.

Participation Motivation Questionnaire (PMQ). To assess perceptions of purpose, the PMQ was administered (Gill, Gross, & Huddleston, 1983). Because the original version had inadequate psychometrics, a modified version adapted by Zahariadis and Biddle (2000) was used. The PMQ is a 30-item questionnaire that lists specific reasons for participation in sport. Responders completed the stem: "I participate in sport because…," rating their answers on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). The form was adapted to create a parent/guardian version to compliment the athlete version. The parent/guardian version was adapted by changing "I" statements into "my child" and "he or she" and asked parents to answer from their athlete's point of view. The PMQ has a six-factor solution: skill/competition, status/recognition, energy release, team atmosphere, affiliation, and fitness. Convergent validity was established, and Cronbach's α scores for the subscales ranged from .63-.89 (affiliation was the only subscale below .70; Zahariadis & Biddle, 2000). Since its inception, the PMQ has been successfully employed in conjunction with other measures (Zahariadis & Biddle, 2000), efficiently modified, and proven consistent across populations and cultures (Buonamano, Cei, & Mussino, 1995; Trembath, Szabo, & Baxter, 2002).

Parental Involvement in Sport Questionnaire (PISQ). To explore the level of parental involvement, participants completed the PISQ (Lee & MacLean, 1997). Wuerth et al. (2004) adapted the PISQ to create a parent/guardian version. For this study, both athlete and parent/guardian forms were adapted to evaluate any sport. The questionnaire consisted of 20 items that were divided into one of four factors: directive behavior (DB; 10 items), praise and understanding (PU; 4 items), active involvement (AI; 5 items), and pressure (1 item). Each item was assessed on a 5-point Likert scale, 1 (*always*) to 5 (*never*) excluding pressure, which was labeled 1 (*none at all*) to 5 (*a lot*). Athletes answered each item based on how they perceived their parents' behavior, as well as on how they desired their parents' behavior to be, individually (i.e., mother and father separately). Parents completed their version of the PISQ from their athlete's point of view. Wuerth et al. established convergent validity, and found Cronbach's α scores ranging from .42-.88 (AI was the only factor below .63) and test-retest reliability extending between .63 and .76.

Interview guide. Separate structured interview guides for athletes and parents were developed for this study. The athletes spoke about each parent's

involvement separately, and parents participated in their own individual interview. The first section of the guide explored reasons the athletes' began sport participation, their motives for continuing to play, and their future goals and aspirations in sport. In the parent guide, parents were questioned regarding prior and current involvement in their athlete's same sport. The second section explored the athletes' favorite and least favorite part of participating in their sport, and then moved into an assessment of parent's level of involvement in the athlete's sport, as well as the affect it has on the athlete both personally and athletically, and how the parent is assisting the athlete in accomplishing his/her goals. In the final section, athletes were asked to share one thing about their parents' involvement in their sport that they are particularly grateful for, whereas parents were asked to share one thing about their athlete's involvement in sport that they are particularly proud of to end the interviews on the positive note.

PROCEDURE

Prior to the study, the Institutional Review Board approved all study procedures. After agreeing to participate, informed consent, as well as parental consent and athlete assent for all participants under the age of 18, was gathered. Parents and athletes then completed their surveys independently.

After completion of the questionnaires, participants were then asked if they would be willing to conduct an individual interview. In-person interviews were conducted individually with 12 athletes and 12 parents. Probing and clarifying questions were used when appropriate. No participant refused to answer any questions in the interviews. Informed consent, parental consent, and athlete assent to be audio recorded were gathered from the participants prior to the interviews being conducted. Interviews lasted approximately 5 to 15 minutes. The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim by the researchers. After the questionnaires and interviews (if applicable) were completed, participants were debriefed and participation was terminated.

DATA ANALYSIS

SPSS version 20 was used to run all statistical analyses. Qualitative data was analyzed by all investigators for content to identify major themes in both athlete and parent interviews (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). The interview transcripts and themes were then reread by all investigators to ensure accuracy and identify common primary and secondary themes based on occurrence across all athlete or parent interviews. Finally, the data was interpreted and discussed against the quantitative findings.

RESULTS

An overall alpha level of .05 was chosen for all analyses. The researchers chose to forego a Bonferroni correction despite multiple hypotheses tests since the study had a smaller sample size and the conservative nature of a Bonferroni correction would further reduce statistical power and increase the chances of committing Type II error (Bender & Lange, 2001). Cronbach's α coefficients were calculated for all six PMQ subscales using the data from the current study and were found to be satisfactory (Zahariadis & Biddle): skill/competition (.73), status (.70), energy (.69), team atmosphere (.69), affiliation (.62), and fitness (.78). Items 11 ("I like the excitement") and 17 ("I like to have something to do") were found to cross-load and were dropped from subsequent analysis during the source study. They were also omitted from analysis in the present study in order to increase internal reliability. Similarly, it was discovered during preliminary analysis that the Cronbach's α for team atmosphere would increase with the exclusion of item 20 ("I like the coaches"), so it was omitted from further analyses as well. Cronbach's α coefficients were also calculated for the PISQ and were satisfactory: DB (.87), AI (.65), PU (.80). Since the pressure subscale consisted of only one item, internal consistency could not be obtained.

BIVARIATE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN PURPOSE AND PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

Pearson's correlation coefficients were calculated to explore the interrelationships between the variables for both questionnaires (see Table 1). The subscale scores were used to calculate the difference scores between athlete and parent means for all appropriate items (n = 29 pairs). Four significant correlations were found between the PMQ and the PISQ. Skill/competition was negatively correlated with pressure, $r = -.37$, $p = .047$, $r^2 = .14$, as was team atmosphere, $r = -.49$, $p = .007$, $r^2 = .24$. Status and AI were also negatively related, $r = -.37$, $p = .042$, $r^2 = .14$. Lastly, fitness was found to negatively correlate to PU, $r = -.45$, $p = .013$, $r^2 = .20$. With the low coefficient of determination values for the above correlations, it is clear that a large part of the variation seen may be attributed to factors not measured in the present study. However, given the statistical significance of the correlations, important conclusions can still be drawn about how changes in one value are associated with changes in the other value. All other significant correlations found within each respective questionnaire are noted in Table 1.

Table 1

Pearson's correlation coefficients for the PMQ and the PISQ variables for athlete-parent mean difference scores

Subscale	Status	Energy	Team	Affiliation	Fitness	DB	AI	PU	Press
Skill	.27	.27	.48**	.54**	.46*	.24	−.03	−.07	−.37*
Status	–	.54**	.33	.65**	−.02	−.23	−.38*	.12	.14
Energy	–	–	.20	.38*	.10	−.22	−.21	−.06	.01
Team	–	–	–	.53**	.35	.28	−.09	−.17	−.49**
Affiliation	–	–	–	–	.26	−.07	−.21	.02	−.08
Fitness	–	–	–	–	–	.24	−.05	−.45*	−.24
DB	–	–	–	–	–	–	.30	−.20	−.54**
AI	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	.51**	−.06
PU	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	.25
Pressure	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–

Note. *$p < .050$, two-tailed, **$p < .010$, two-tailed

DISCREPANCIES

Related-samples *t*-tests were run using the athlete and parent mean scores for the PMQ subscales (within the parent-athlete dyads) to determine if there were any significant discrepancies between athletes' and parents' perceptions of purpose. The results indicated that the only significant discrepancy was between the mean ratings for the skill/competition subscale, $t(28) = 2.35$, $p = .026$. The ratings differed by an average of $M = 0.13$ with $SD = 0.31$ with the higher overall score reported by the athletes. A second set of related-samples t-tests was conducted to determine if there was a significant discrepancy between the athletes' perceived and desired ratings of parental involvement for the four PISQ subscales. The results showed that there were significant discrepancies between perceived and desired parental involvement for the DB, PU, and pressure subscales. The DB ratings ($t(28) = -4.21$, $p < .001$) differed by an average of $M = -0.46$ with $SD = 0.59$, indicating that most athletes perceived a level of directive parental behavior that was lower than they desired. The PU ratings ($t(28) = 1.21$, $p = .042$) varied by an average of $M = 0.38$ with $SD = 0.95$. This demonstrates that athletes perceive a higher level of praise and understanding than what is desired. Lastly, pressure ($t(28) = 2.37$, $p = .025$) fluctuated by an average of $M = 0.45$ with $SD = 1.02$, such that athletes reported a higher level of parental pressure than they desired.

MULTIVARIATE ANALYSIS OF DISCREPANCY AND INVOLVEMENT

Finally, a 3 × 4 MANOVA was conducted in order to explore whether the discrepancies in perceptions of purpose influence parental involvement. The independent variable was amount of discrepancy with three levels: low, moderate, or high. The dependent variable was parental involvement with four levels that corresponded with the PISQ subscales. In order to determine discrepancy level, the *z*-scores that corresponded with the absolute value of the mean athlete-parent discrepancy scores were calculated. From there, the calculated *z*-scores were divided into thirds based upon the *z*-scores associated with the appropriate percentiles on the normal *z*-distribution. Low discrepancy had *z*-scores below $z = -.44$. Moderate discrepancy had *z*-scores between $z = \pm.43$, and high discrepancy had *z*-scores greater than $z = .44$. The MANOVA revealed no significant differences in parental involvement based upon amount of discrepancy (p values ranged from .55 to .99).

TRIANGULATION OF PURPOSE AND PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

Purpose. Both parents (P) and athletes (A) reported that family was the number one reason for the athletes getting involved in sports (A = 9, P = 12). Both groups were also in agreement that the top reasons for continuing to play were "liking/loving it" (A = 8, P = 10) and being "good at it" (A = 6, P = 10). For instance, one participant said, "I actually realized that I could be pretty good at something, because I wasn't good at other sports, so that one stuck." Parents also stated that friends/social aspects were important to continued participation with 9 reports, which was incongruent with the athletes' reports (A = 2). This shows that the parents in the sample overestimated the role that friends play in their athletes' continued participation. Parents and athletes agreed that going

to "college or beyond" (i.e., Olympics) was the top goal/aspiration within sport with 11 reports each. Both groups also had similar thoughts for the other goals reported (i.e. exercise, fun); however, the parents also mentioned goals that were not shared by the athletes. Once again, both groups had the same scores for the favorite aspects of participating in sport, which were competitions/training (A = 7, P = 7) and coaches/team/friends (A = 5, P = 5). Parents also listed improvement (P = 7) as a favorite part of participation, which was not mentioned by the athletes. Success/accomplishment was mentioned more by parents than the athletes (A = 2, P = 4). Lastly, parents and athletes agreed about the least favorite aspects of sport participation being practice/sets/drills (A = 7, P = 7) and losing/struggle/failure (A = 3, P = 3).

In summary, parents and athletes were similar on how athletes got involved in sport, why they have continued to play, their sport-related goals and aspirations, and the athletes' favorite/least favorite aspects of participation. However, there were several notable differences within those categories, with parents often reporting more themes than athletes (i.e. improvement, the impact of friends). These results corroborated with the quantitative findings in that parents and athletes perceived similar motivations for participation in sport for the most part, but did differ in several areas.

Parental involvement. A majority of the parents and athletes agreed that the parents were very involved in their children's sport (A = 8, P = 11). The groups also had similar perceptions for parents who were moderately involved (i.e., present at games, drives; A = 8, P = 8). Only one parent-athlete pair reported that the parent was not at all involved. Both parties reported that the athletes generally feel supported/motivated by parental involvement (A = 7, P = 8). For example, one athlete shared, "Sometimes it's hard, and sometimes I get that feeling like I just want to quit, but then my parents are there." However, parents were much more likely to negatively evaluate their impact on the athletes. For example, seven parents reported giving unwanted advice or criticism, while four parents felt that they were overly involved. On the other hand, only three athletes reported that they felt pressured/stressed out by their parents' involvement. The most frequent response for athletes when discussing how their parents' involvement affects them athletically was "motivationally" (A = 8). For instance, one athlete commented, "It's pressure, but it's really more of a motivational thing… It makes me want to play harder knowing they're there. I don't want to have them come out and say 'oh man, my son's responsible for us losing'."

Conversely, most of the parents felt that their involvement had no effect on the children from an athletic standpoint (P = 6). This contrasts with the athletes' perspectives, since only two of them reported no effect. Five parents also reported that their children felt "supported" athletically by their involvement. Finally, when discussing how parents assist their children in accomplishing their athletic goals, both parties frequently mentioned travel/driving (A = 8, P = 10). The parents other answers were centered around the opportunities given (P = 12) and money spent (P = 9). The athletes took a more service-oriented approach to the question, discussing meals, reminders, rides, and so forth. Only one athlete mentioned the financial support received from his/her parents.

In summary, parents and athletes were similar on level of involvement and how parental involvement affects the athletes personally. However, parents were more likely to report a negative impact on athletes. While most athletes reported feeling motivated athletically by parental involvement, parents were divided on their perceptions of athletic impact; half reported having no effect while the other half stated that they were supportive. A unique finding and an area of contradiction between qualitative and quantitative data, was that athletes reported a significantly higher amount of perceived parental pressure than they desired, and yet only three out of the 12 athletes interviewed mentioned feeling stressed or pressured by parental involvement. Similarly, athletes did not mention receiving unwanted advice or criticism as often as the parents reported giving it, which contradicts the quantitative finding that athletes perceived a lower amount of directive behavior than they desired. That is to say, the athletes interviewed received amounts of directive behavior from their parents that were consistent to the levels that the athletes desired.

DISCUSSION

The present study sought to ascertain if there was a discrepancy between parent and athlete perceptions of purpose for participating in youth sport. Furthermore, it explored whether or not parental involvement varied according to amount of discrepancy.

In short, the findings indicated that there was a discrepancy between parent and athlete perceptions of purpose with regard to motives related to the aspects of skill or competition, demonstrating that parents are more likely to underestimate the impact of skill/competition on their athletes' motivation for participating in sport. The findings also showed that even though some measure of discrepancy exists between perceptions of purpose, it does not have any significant effect on parental involvement regardless of the amount of discrepancy between said perceptions. However, with regard to perceptions of parental involvement, the findings suggest that there

is a discrepancy between how involved athletes perceive their parents to be and how involved athletes would like their parents to be. In other words, even though it appears as if parents have a clear understanding of why their children participate in sports, it seems as if they are unclear as to how and to what extent their children wish them to be involved in their sports. Themes gathered from the interviews revealed similar patterns found in the quantitative results: while responses deviated occasionally, perceptions of purpose were generally aligned amongst parent and athlete. Similarly, although athletes tended to have a positive and appreciative view of their parent's involvement, there were occasional references to increased pressure to perform coming from their parents.

Consistent with previous research, motives for participating in sport included skills, competition, social affiliation/recognition, and health/general fitness (Allen, 2003; Sirard et al., 2006; Skille & Osteras, 2011). In addition, the difference between how athletes perceive parental involvement, and what they desire for parental involvement (Green & Chalip, 1997; Hellstedt, 1990; Miller 1981) was confirmed in the present study. According to Miller (1981), parents are not well attuned to their athletes' sport experience. The results of the present study showed that athletes desired a level different than what they perceived in three out of the four subscales: praise and understanding, directive behavior, and pressure. While on average, athletes desired a lower level of parental pressure, the interviews revealed that some athletes welcomed more pressure as a functional motivator. Regardless of how the pressure is perceived, it is clear that while parents and athletes may agree with regard to purpose for engaging in youth sport, there is a discrepancy between parent and athlete perceptions of parental involvement.

Contrary to previous research, which found that athletes perceived their parents to use more praise and understanding than active involvement (Ede et al., 2012), the present study found that active involvement and praise and understanding were positively correlated; thus, the greater the perceived parental involvement, the more the athlete felt supported and encouraged. This could be due in part to the required financial and travel investments of the sports surveyed. Also in contrast with many studies using the PISQ, directive behavior and pressure were negatively correlated, suggesting that as parents' directive behavior increases, the athletes in the sample perceived that they are feeling less unwanted parental pressure (Ede et al., 2012; Hellstedt, 1990; Lee & MacLean, 1997; Wuerth et al., 2004). This could be due to the fact that all but one of the athletes interviewed reported that they had aspirations to compete at the college level and/or beyond. Therefore, the directive behavior (especially from parents who had experience in the sport their athlete was participating in) could be viewed as a means to help the athletes achieve their sporting aspirations in these situations instead of unwanted parental pressure.

Lastly, the findings did reveal that several motivating factors for participating in sport affected reports of the level of parental involvement perceived. With regard to perceived pressure, the motivation factors related to skill/competition and team atmosphere were found to negatively correlate with pressure indicating that those athletes who are more motivated by skill/competition or aspects of belonging to a team reported lower levels of perceived parental pressure. A similar relationship was seen between subjects who reported being more motivated by factors pertaining to achieving status and the level of active parental involvement seen such that the more an athlete was motivated by status, the less the parents were perceived as being actively involved. Finally, fitness and praise and understanding also varied in a manner parallel to the above mentioned factors such that subjects who reported being more motivated by aspects of participation relating to fitness also reported lower levels of perceived praise and understanding from their parents.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

One limitation arose from the circumstance that three researchers conducted interviews, thus potentially impacting the participants' willingness to respond to the interviewer's inquiries and perhaps influenced the nature of their responses. To minimize the potential confounding effect, interview guides were developed and the researchers practiced conducting neutral interviews.

Second, this study used convenience sampling, so the sample could have consisted of parents who are normally more involved than other parents, or even within the same family, the parent who is more involved in their child's sport. While this study was able to gather a few complete families' dynamics and data, research in the future could examine parental involvement differences between multi-parent/guardian families and what effect, if any, it has on an athlete's motivation to play sport.

Third, social desirability with regard to the answering of various questions, both for the questionnaires and interviews is of concern. For instance, participants could have answered questions differently due to the presence of the researchers (both the survey and interviews) and the nature of answering questions about one's parent(s). In other words, the participants would attempt to guess and say what they think either their parent or child would want them to say, possibly minimizing negative or unfavorable responses (Scott, 1997). In the present study,

this threat was minimized through assuring the anonymity and confidentiality to all participants and conducting interviews separately.

Fourth, to increase statistical power (an additional concern in the present study), future research needs to access a larger number of parent-athlete pairs from a variety of sporting backgrounds, including individual and team sports, in order to better conceptualize preferences for parental involvement and how it may varying depending on sport and individual differences.

Finally, other future directions include longitudinal studies, surveying parent and athletes over the course of several years, to look at whether or not perceptions of purpose and desired level of parental involvement vary depending on age, level of competition, and future aspirations within sport.

PRACTICAL INSIGHTS

Given the limitations discussed above, practical implications cannot be firmly drawn. However, parents and sport psychologists might consider several tentative insights derived from the data as related to the past research. Specifically, because there was a difference found between current and desired level of parental involvement, parents might introduce conversations with their athletes and evaluate the current level of involvement with regard to directive behavior, praise and understanding, and active involvement, and what effect, if any, it could be having on their children. In addition, parent education workshops or individual sessions can also be used to bring awareness of potential pressuring behaviors that parents are putting on their children (both positive and negative), despite the parent's best intentions. Because parental pressure has been understudied in the realm of youth sports, parents may not be aware of the effects of their behaviors and involvement (Anderson, Funk, Elliot, & Smith, 2003). Parents have some control over whether their child enjoys or is made anxious by participation in sport, and through being aware of one's intentions and motives for their actions and involvement in youth sport, parents can learn to be sensitive to their child's responses and modify their behavior accordingly (Anderson et al., 2003). By increasing parental awareness, through their position of influence, the parents can facilitate the development of skills and competencies that support and promote an autonomous and self-directed, mastery-oriented, fulfilling lifestyle (Hutchinson et al., 2003). Specifically, these constructive behaviors have also been linked to a reduced number of athletes who drop out of sport (Coakley, 1992); facilitating the development of cognitive, affective, moral, and social skills and competencies (Ewing & Seefeldt, 1996; Kanters & Casper, 2008; Skille & Osteras, 2011); and a longer, more fulfilling career in youth sports (Armentrout & Kamphoff, 2011).

Finally, from a family systems perspective (Lerner, Brown, & Kier, 2005), the sport psychology consultant can facilitate or encourage open discussions between parent(s) and athlete in an attempt to bridge the gap; thus, helping to reduce the perceived discrepancies surrounding desired parental involvement.

SUMMARY

While this study was exploratory in nature, it provided several interesting results pertaining to motivation for participating in competitive youth sport as well as parental involvement in youth sport that create a solid foundation for future research to build upon to continue examining these increasingly relevant topics. Based upon these findings, it appears that parents tend to underestimate the role that factors pertaining to skill/competition play in motivating their athletes to participate in sports. However, even though parents appear to have a solid understanding as to why their athletes participate in sport, they seem unclear as to how and to what extent they should be involved in their children's sporting endeavors. Lastly, the aforementioned interrelationships between purpose for participating in sport and parental involvement, indicate that future research focusing on these topics could be very beneficial. This future research would be used to enhance parent-athlete relations and interactions, which in turn could impact an athlete's purpose for sport involvement, and likelihood of enduring sport participation.

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