



Parent Education in Youth Sport: A Community Case Study of Parents, Coaches, and Administrators

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The present community case study was designed to highlight parent, coach, and administrator perceptions of community-based parent education in a youth sport community in the Rocky Mountain region of the United States. Interviews with parents ($n = 12$), coaches ($n = 13$), and administrators ($n = 11$) were interpreted inductively using constructivist thematic analysis. Nine emergent categories are highlighted, including parents' sport goals for their children, parents' involvement in youth sport including impacts of involvement on children, and barriers to implementing parent education, as well as potential content for parent education. A proposed sequential framework informing community-based parent education, as well as suggestions for further action, and study limitations are included.

Lay Summary: Key stakeholders in youth sport are encouraged to consider program- and family-related barriers to the implementation of parent education, as well as desired program content and delivery, in light of children's age and level of competition.

For the vast majority of North American youth, participation in organized sport is a common experience during childhood and/or adolescence (Sports & Fitness Industry Association, 2016; US Department of Health and Human Services, 2017). Parents are active participants in these experiences, and therefore youth sport provides a common context for family interaction whereby the behaviors exhibited by mothers and fathers can shape children's developmental experiences (Knight & Holt, 2014). However, according to the American Academy of Pediatrics (2016), youth sport is being increasingly driven by adults and as a result is becoming less centered on the participants. As parents continue to invest a growing percentage of tangible family resources (e.g., time and money) into the athletic development and success of their children, what is considered "appropriate" parental involvement has become more difficult to define. This is important because parent involvement has the potential to enhance child outcomes such as enjoyment and motivation in sport (see Dunn, Dorsch, King, & Rothlisberger, 2016).

Although researchers understand the theoretical link of parent involvement and child outcomes (see Knight, Berrow, & Harwood, 2017, for a review), there are few evidence-

Received 17 November 2017; accepted 7 August 2018.

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based education programs being systematically implemented for sport parents, either in the United States (e.g., Dorsch, King, Dunn, Osai, & Tulane, 2017) or abroad (e.g., Thrower, Harwood, & Spray, 2017). As a first step in building and refining such community-based programs, there remains a critical need to better understand the insights of key stakeholders (i.e., parents, coaches, and administrators) in youth sport. Such understanding will allow researchers and practitioners to assess community readiness as well as best practices for implementing parent education programs in the United States.

Underscoring the importance of parents in youth sport, family researchers (e.g., Bremer, 2012) have called for an empirical focus on athlete families and their relationship dynamics. Such calls echo Hellstedt's (1987, 1995) original conceptualization of the athlete as the center of the family system as well as the coach/parent/athlete triad. In line with this body of literature, it is important to understand the perceptions of key stakeholders that surround young athletes prior to designing, implementing, and evaluating evidence-based parent education in youth sport. Moreover, it is vital to glean from these individuals the areas where targeted intervention may enhance parents' involvement in the sport participation of their youth (see Wuerth, Lee, & Alfermann, 2004). Important to note, research exploring these issues should view parents not through a deficit lens (i.e., as a problem to be "fixed") but rather as an asset to be enhanced through targeted, community-based intervention.

Parent involvement is a multidimensional construct consisting of thoughts and emotions related to a child's activities and has been dichotomized via parent support and pressure behaviors (Fredricks & Eccles, 2005; Hoyle & Leff, 1997; Lee & MacLean, 1997; Stein, Raedeke, & Glenn, 1999). Parent support is behavior aimed at facilitating a child's participation in sport and has been linked to adaptive outcomes such as child enjoyment (Sanchez-Miguel, Leo, Sanchez-Oliva, Amado, & Garcia-Calvo, 2013), autonomy (Gagné, Ryan, & Bargmann, 2003; Hein & Joesaar, 2015), and physical self-worth (Chen, 2014). Parent pressure is "directive and controlling parental behaviors designed to prompt athlete responses and outcomes that are important to the parent" (O'Rourke, Smith, Smoll, & Cumming, 2011, p. 400) and has been linked to less adaptive outcomes such as child perceptions of a more threatening sport performance environment (Gould, Lauer, Rolo, Jannes & Pennisi, 2008), child discontent with sport performance (Smith, Smoll, & Passer, 2002), and performance anxiety and negative affect (Kaye, Frith, & Vosloo, 2015; O'Rourke, Smith, Smoll, & Cumming, 2014).

In the sport parenting literature (see Knight et al., 2017, for a review), one area that is linked to parents' pressure and support behaviors is parents' goals for their children's participation (see Dorsch, Smith, Wilson, & McDonough, 2015; White, Kavussanu, Tank, & Wingate, 2004). Indeed, when parents introduce youth to sport, they often look to sport as a way to facilitate quality time, develop closer relationships, and teach children transferable values and skills (Gottzen & Kremer-Sadlik, 2012). These goals, however, can change quickly based on children's performance outcomes and trajectory (see Côté, 1999; Dorsch et al., 2015). Therefore, it is important to consider parents' definitions of success, as well as how they structure either mastery-focused or performance-focused climates in the sport setting (Appleton, Hall, & Hill, 2011; Gershgoren, Tenenbaum, Gershgoren, & Eklund, 2011; O'Rourke et al., 2014). This is an important distinction, as mastery-focused climates relate to high intrinsic motivation and satisfaction, whereas performance-focused climates have been associated with negative attitudes toward activities and boredom (Dorsch, Smith, & Dotterer, 2016; Juntumaa, Keski-aara, & Punamäki, 2005; Keegan, Harwood, Spray, & Lavallee, 2009).

Over the past decade, researchers and practitioners have begun to systematically disseminate information about developmentally appropriate youth sport parenting behaviors to parents (see Dorsch et al., 2017; Knight, Boden, & Holt, 2010; Thrower et al., 2017).

This is a valuable endeavor, given the breadth of empirical evidence linking parent involvement to children's developmental outcomes (see Holt & Knight, 2014). As evidence-based resources for parents are developed and honed, there remains a critical need to gain insights from key stakeholders in youth sport (i.e., parents, coaches, and administrators) regarding the current climate of youth sport and how parent involvement might best be leveraged to enhance the sport experience for youth. In light of this need, the purpose of the present community case study was to highlight parent, coach, and administrator perceptions of community based parent education in a youth sport community in the Rocky Mountain region of the United States.

METHOD

Methodology

A community case study was conducted to gain insight into key stakeholder perceptions of parent involvement in youth sport. The study was designed using a constructivist lens perspective, which is built on the relativist ontological assumption that individuals have multiple understandings and perspectives that are dependent on past experiences (Charmaz, 2014). Through this lens, we sought to co-construct understanding of participants' social experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013) by pursuing "beliefs and ideologies as well as situations and structures" within the community under investigation (Charmaz, 2000, p. 525). In line with this epistemology, the present study was designed to offer a descriptive analysis of emerging themes as well as the production of a sequential framework informing community-based parent education.

Participants

Thirty-six participants were recruited using purposeful sampling techniques (Suri, 2011). Specifically, parents ($n = 12$), coaches ($n = 13$), and administrators ($n = 11$) from a range of youth sports (e.g., soccer, basketball, track and field, cross-country, football, softball, and dance) in a single community in the Rocky Mountain region of the United States were recruited to participate in the research. Consenting participants included 19 men and 17 women ranging from 24 to 58 years of age ($M = 41.8$, $SD = 9.7$). Twenty-eight of the 36 participants (77.8%) identified as White or Caucasian, and three participants (8.3%) identified as Black or African American. The remaining participants identified as Asian American ($n = 2$; 5.6%), more than one race ($n = 2$; 5.6%), or unknown ($n = 1$; 2.8%). Thirty-four of the 36 participants were college educated, and the majority ($n = 21$, 58.3%) reported an annual household income between \$50,000 and \$99,999.

Procedures

Over approximately two months, the fourth and sixth authors conducted face-to-face ($n = 23$), phone ($n = 10$), and Skype ($n = 3$) interviews with parents, coaches, and administrators from the community. These stakeholders' experiences were framed not as sharing a single, objective reality but as dynamic and situational (Schwandt, 2000). Guided by social constructivism, data collection strategies were predicated upon prespecified research questions but remained flexible based on individual and context-related factors (Charmaz, 2014).

The semistructured interview protocol consisted of four primary topic areas/questions that drove conversations with participants: (a) What does it mean to be a good youth sport parent? (b) What would be important aspects of a parent education program? (c) What positive outcomes would be associated with an educational program? (d) What might be the negative outcomes to a parent educational program for youth sport parents? Interviewers used follow-up prompts to facilitate discussion of stakeholders' perspectives and experiences. The semistructured interview format served as a "roadmap" for researchers while still allowing for intuitive exploration and clarification (Brinkmann, 2014).

Data Analysis

Data were organized and analyzed using constructivist thematic analysis. Themes and categories were evaluated descriptively through a continuous cycle of data collection and inductive analysis called constant comparison (see Charmaz, 2014; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). In the present community case study, we allowed for constant comparison by using each interview to inform our ongoing analysis as well as subsequent interviews and interpretation. Without forcing data into preconceived categories or a priori theory, the thematic framework was constructed inductively as the study evolved, essentially maintaining a stance of maximum flexibility as data emerged. Therefore, the formation of our proposed sequential framework was constructed based on the experiences of the stakeholders in the community.

Interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim by the sixth author. Mean interview lengths were 31:14 for the 12 parents, 28:01 for the 13 coaches, and 26:47 for the 11 administrators. Transcribed interviews generated 211 pages of data. This included 68 pages of parent interviews, 83 pages of coach interviews, and 60 pages of administrator interviews. All transcribed interviews were cross-checked against the original recordings by the first author to ensure accuracy. In cases where the transcript did not align with the recording, transcripts were amended to accurately represent what was stated in the interviews.

A six-member research team, trained in thematic analysis, read the entirety of the data, participant by participant. A second read of study data was completed by the fourth and sixth authors, whereby an inductive analytic approach was used to code all raw data thematically. Open coding procedures outlined by Corbin and Strauss (2008) were used to code themes representing stakeholders' perspectives of parent involvement in youth sport. Although this was an inductive process, theme labels were applied that were consistent with contemporary sport parenting literature, where appropriate. Examples of such theme labels include family sacrifice (Dorsch, Smith, & McDonough 2009), a lack of skills to help their child (Harwood & Knight, 2009), parenting styles (Holt, Tamminen, Black, Mandigo, & Fox, 2009), emotional support (Omli, LaVoi, & Wiese-Bjornstal, 2008), and transfer skills/life lessons (Wiersma & Fifer, 2008). The fourth and sixth authors produced memos during the coding process that highlighted recurring themes (both across and within participants). Subsequent to this step, the fourth and sixth authors clustered the inductive themes into broader categories. A closer examination of the interrelationships among inductive themes (i.e., axial coding) was then conducted, prompting a more nuanced clustering of themes within subcategories. Finally, a proposed sequential framework informing community-based parent education in youth sport was constructed by the full authorship team. Throughout the analysis, the first author employed constant comparison (see Corbin & Strauss, 2008), comparing categories, subcategories, and themes across

participant groups (i.e., parents, coaches, and administrators). This afforded continuous refinement over the course of the analysis.

To construct the personal experiences of stakeholders, data are represented at three levels of interpretation. First, a list of categories, subcategories, and themes representing the shared perceptions of stakeholders was created. In constructing this list, the fourth and sixth authors amalgamated the full data matrix for each cohort of participants. Serving as a critical friend (Hill, 2002; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000), the first author was presented with a complete list of coded themes and one example quote for each theme. Following careful examination, the first, fourth, and sixth authors met to discuss potential changes to the coding framework. This process led to substantive edits to the final hierarchy of categories, subcategories, and themes. Data are also represented in the form of a case report. Through personal quotes, the fourth and sixth authors depicted perceptions of parent involvement in the community under investigation. Serving as peer debriefers, the second, third, and fifth authors read the case report, providing suggestions for how to better (a) represent stakeholder experiences in the narrative; (b) incorporate the language of the categories, subcategories, and themes into the narrative; and (c) utilize the narrative to foster a coherent understanding of stakeholder perceptions. Incorporating this feedback, the first author revised the narratives for each participant. As a final means of representing the experiences of study participants, the entire authorship team developed a sequential framework informing community-based parent education.

Quality Considerations

To address the quality of this community case study, relativistic standards (Smith & McGannon, 2017; Sparkes & Smith, 2009) were considered in five areas that reflect characteristics of constructivist thematic analysis in youth sport. First, interviews with study participants were constructed to be relevant to the field of inquiry, informed by our research questions, and executed in an ethical manner. Second, the fourth and sixth authors attempted to establish trust and rapport with the participants to enable the collection of high-quality (i.e., personal and introspective) data. This was done prior to the interview by sharing personal stories about their own youth sport experiences (e.g., playing or coaching) and during each interview by employing ice-breaker questions before engaging in the more relevant interview dialog. Third, to ensure that multiple perspectives would inform the interpretive process, the insights of multiple actors in youth sport (i.e., parents, coaches, and administrators) were sought. Fourth, to strengthen the interpretive process, the authors critiqued and challenged one another's assumptions, as well as interpretation and reconstruction of the data. When disagreement occurred, the research team met and discussed coding procedures or the hierarchy of categories, subcategories, and themes before proceeding. In three cases where consensus could not be reached by the authorship team, the first author made a final determination. Fifth, the resultant case report and sequential framework informing community-based parent education (a) are constructed from participant experiences, (b) evoke multiple dimensions of key stakeholder experiences, and (c) offer opportunity to generate knowledge that may inform parent education in youth sport.

RESULTS

Participants articulated 164 specific themes related to their knowledge and experiences in youth sport. These themes were subsumed within 27 subcategories that were classified

into nine overarching categories of participant experiences. Specifically, participants spoke about (a) the current state of youth sport, (b) parent goals for children in sport, (c) patterns of parent involvement, (d) the impact on children, (e) the impact on parents, (f) barriers to the implementation of parent education, (g) desired program content, (h) desired program delivery, and (i) desired outcomes of parent education. These nine categories of participant experiences are described in the subsequent sections. Within each section, quotes representing the underlying subcategories and themes are used to highlight our understanding of stakeholders' perceptions of parent involvement in this youth sport community.

Current State of Youth Sport

Participants described the current state of youth sport as an important factor necessitating an evidence-based approach to parent education, not just in their own community but nationwide. Specifically, participants highlighted characteristics of parents, the local youth sport context, and the broader American youth sport culture as areas needing attention.

Parents

Parents described other parents as demonstrating a range of philosophies including behaving in increasingly negative ways, showcasing a "know-it-all" attitude, and participating vicariously through their children's involvement. Parents also described desires for high-level (e.g., college or professional) participation, many times leading to unrealistic expectations of children. One father noted, "Parents I've watched ... tend to expect a lot more out of their kids than what the kid may be able to do." Coaches also noted that when children were outperformed by other players or were unable to fulfill expectations, parents were quick to blame teammates, coaches, or referees instead of seeing fault in their children. Coaches noted a great deal of vicarious involvement and described it as leading to parental pressure. They also felt this style of involvement took away from the primary purpose of youth sports. As one coach stated, "Parents want [children] to be superstars, they want to live vicariously through their child." Although parents divulged a range of philosophies regarding their children's participation in sport, administrators described how certain philosophies become problematic. As one administrator stated, "You have those select few who are just die-hards and are all about winning and all about their kid being the best. Those are the ones we have to keep in check so it doesn't make [sport] a negative experience."

Context

Participants in the community discussed a number of characteristics that highlighted the need for evidence-based parent education. For example, a mother of two daughters who participated on elite travel teams said, "I've seen a couple of parents [in our community] that I don't want to be like ... [their behavior] is kinda embarrassing." Another mother reflected on her own sideline behavior as indicative of the need for strategies and potentially interventions for other parents starting out in youth sport, "When [my son] first started playing, I'd be running up and down the sideline with [him], screaming and yelling and making a fool out of myself."

Parents also perceived that coaches and leagues in the community were increasing in their expectations of children and were thus responsible for creating unhealthy levels of competition among the parents. One parent recounted a coach's e-mail encouraging

participation on an elite team for 8-year-olds that would travel out of state. Coaches, although describing this as “the system we’re in,” noted that increased competitiveness detracted from children gaining skills, forming relationships, and having fun. Even though many coaches blamed the culture of American youth sport, others referenced the lack of parent education as allowing this contextual shift: “I don’t know if there is really a training for parents on how to be a good sport parent. There really needs to be some sort of training or some information that could help. ... They need help!”

Administrators discussed two current factors necessitating parent education. First, administrators noted the increasing demands on multisport athletes today and the fact that parents need to be taught to help their children deal with these demands. Conversely, other administrators discussed a generational shift toward early, single-sport specialization and wondered whether parents were equipped to deal with this “all-in” mentality. Discussing this trend, one administrator noted, “[We] are making ‘super leagues’ and traveling to other states. By the time they are eighth graders, [the children] hate it, and they don’t want to play anymore. How do parents deal with that?”

Culture

At a more macrolevel, participants described a number of characteristics of America’s youth sport-focused society that underscore the need for evidence-based parent education. One father noted, “I think the reality of youth sport in America is that people think they can bully people, trash talk coaches, or whatever. We have a lot less stability across the board.” An elite travel baseball coach, citing today’s über-competitive youth sport culture, echoed those sentiments: “There is this culture that parents are going to come in and fight the kids’ battles ... so, we are all a little more volatile and more apt to complain about every call.” Although stakeholders did not fully explicate the impact of cultural characteristics, their comments did imply that the broader American youth sport culture had a trickle-down effect on their own community as well as the leagues, teams, and families within it.

Parent Goals for Children in Sport

Participants articulated how the current state of youth sport, both at the community and societal level, impacts the goals parents have for their children’s participation. Specifically, participants drew distinctions among parents’ desires for their children to realize achievement outcomes, health outcomes, social outcomes, and developmental outcomes through their participation in youth sport.

Achievement Goals

Parents expressed a desire for their children to develop and improve in multiple areas within sports. One mother mentioned that she wanted her children to “become better as players, so they earn that spot.” Another mother stated, “I think all parents want the best for their kids and ... just lose sight of that.” Whereas many parents described a focus on winning, coaches and administrators described wanting to see young athletes develop athletic skills and perform well. As one female coach said, “I want [my athletes] to win the league cup, but I also want them to play better than they did last time and take more steps from last year.”

Health Goals

Parents described goals of youth sport as a mechanism to keep their children active, namely, by reducing screen time and improving overall health: “I don’t want them to just sit and stare at [a screen].” One coach stated, “We want them to stay involved, just for the health benefit. Obesity is a huge [issue]. ... It is more important than ever to get kids involved.” Administrators suggested parents help their children avoid injury and burnout by setting appropriate goals, identifying improvements, balancing sport with other activities, allowing for sufficient breaks from sport, and assisting with the physical demands of sport.

Social Goals

Parents described youth sports as a great opportunity to help athletes develop socially. One mother said, “We try and have a team bonding party at one of the girls’ homes ... and we’ll also have parents help with little ‘motivational,’ a little gift or something.” Conversely, coaches observed that some parents take a more Machiavellian approach. As one coach shared,

A lot of parents want their kid to be the best, to score the most goals, to be a leader, to earn a spot on the next team ... but other parents just want the kid to have fun with their friends, be happy, and learn to respect an authority figure.

Administrators described the most important parent roles as helping children have fun and ensuring a positive experience. Important to note, they suggested that this outcome is usually achieved when children enjoy being around their teammates: “I know our organization really tries to pair kids up who want to play together. That seems to keep them coming back, enjoying their time, and wanting more!”

Developmental Goals

Parents discussed sport as a way to “let the youth grow, develop, gain experiences, and gain self-confidence.” Other positive outcomes described included having an enhanced work ethic, learning to overcome adversity, developing leadership skills, and embracing teamwork. Coaches reported these outcomes as being among the most important purposes for sport and hoped that parents would focus on these as opposed to outcomes of games. Coaches were able to reference experiences seeing this appropriate focus from parents. One coach said,

One of my players struck out, and he walked in to the dugout and threw his helmet. ... Both parents came in and had him pack up his mitt, and his bag. The dad said, “I’m sorry, I know that this will affect the team and it might affect whether you win or lose but we [need] a teaching moment, we have to leave the game.” I was very impressed with that.

Administrators also communicated a hope that youth sport would be a context for important learning experiences. One administrator said, “[Children] get frustrated with maybe not being a starter, and that’s okay. I look at that as a learning experience. Those skills are going to help them in their careers, in their college experience, in their marriages.”

Patterns of Parent Involvement

Parents in the community expressed how their goals for their children in youth sport drive their involvement in the sport setting. These parents, as well as coaches and administrators, communicated perceived distinctions between underinvolved (e.g., lack of responsibility, support, or attendance), appropriately involved, overinvolved, and extremely involved (e.g., disrespectful of coaches) parents in youth sport.

Underinvolvement

One mother described receiving a text from her daughter's teammate asking for a ride to an out-of-state tournament. The mother explained, "I would be happy to take her, but I haven't seen her mom at one game." Another parent who volunteers with his son's football team described underinvolvement this way: "A lot of parents don't understand what it takes to run a program. I think our society has become a drop-off, daycare society. They think when their kids get involved that other people will take care of them." Coaches described parent underinvolvement as showing a lack of support or attendance, showing a lack of responsibility or preparedness, being disrespectful of coaches, and being emotionally or physically absent. Coaches noted that these behaviors affect athletes' performances and shared stories of how difficult it can be to coach these athletes.

Appropriate Involvement

Most parent participants categorized themselves as appropriately involved parents. In describing this type of parent, parents used phrases such as "supportive of my child and their program," "allowing my child to make mistakes," "not being overly critical," "letting my child decide what to play," "following the league's rules," "showing good sportsmanship," "cheering," "being a taxi driver," "volunteering or coaching," and "supplying equipment and fees." A coach described appropriately involved parents as being emotionally and physically present, providing encouragement, showing an interest in other children and parents, acting as a helpful volunteer, remaining process-oriented, establishing open communication, and setting realistic expectations.

Overinvolvement

Parent participants described overinvolved parents as those who combine unrealistic expectations with micromanagement of their children's sport, becoming "obnoxious" and "embarrassing," or "trying to tell the coach how to coach" and "yelling at the refs." Coaches recognized overinvolved parents as those who disrespect boundaries, have a sense of entitlement, or push their kids to go to camps and participate at an elite level while blindly supporting them with money, resources, and connections. One coach noted, "As far as an over-involved parent, they can hinder the development of the athlete." Another coach described helicopter parents as ones who are "constantly meddling, whether it's the coach or an administrator saying their son or daughter hasn't been treated right, that coach isn't giving them enough playing time, coach should be doing this." Another behavior that overinvolved parents display, according to coaches, is focusing on negative outcomes. This includes a focus on poor performance at a game or practice without focusing on any positives. One coach noted, "They say the things they should have been doing, but yet they're not able to express to them the things they did well at the same time."

Other overinvolved behavior described by coaches are parents engaging in vicarious living through their children's experiences and frequent sideline coaching.

Extreme Involvement

Participants described a small number of parents displaying extreme involvement. Examples include yelling at their children, devoting resources to performance outcomes, seeking recognition, and controlling their children's participation. One parent provided an example, reporting, "We had one girl whose mom thought her kid was the best on the team. I remember that mom coming ... and yelling at the coach and how embarrassed her daughter was." Administrators reported commonalities with overinvolved parents but that extreme involved parents often expected perfection and displayed overzealous competitiveness. They also perceived parents believing that their children were the best and would thus prioritize athletic scholarships or professional contracts. In addition, these parents frequently voice complaints about coaches and referees, often causing embarrassment for their children.

Impact on Children

Study participants verbalized the impact that parent involvement has on child participation in youth sport. Specifically, stakeholders in the community discussed the impact of parental involvement on children's beliefs, relationships, and development as athletes.

Beliefs

Coaches and administrators shared that children commonly described to them feelings of pressure in sport. Most commonly, this pressure arose from parents' expectations exceeding their children's perceptions of their own abilities. In some cases, this left the children with a decreased perception of ability or embarrassed by a parent's public behavior. Of interest, parents viewed this pressure more as *support*. Specifically, one father felt that athletes with overinvolved or extremely involved parents are held "to the highest standards ... to be the best athlete out there." And as a result, the parent noted, "You see the child's attitude change. ... They start to feel like they're better than everybody else ... and in many cases they are!"

Relationships

Parents' presence, or lack thereof, was found to impact the parent-athlete relationship. Namely, this was observed through athletes' poor relationships with parents, resulting in coaches becoming the primary support system. When asked how her involvement impacted her child's experience, one mother said, "I notice sometimes, them looking over, like to see if we saw something good they did. I think they definitely have noticed when we've been there." Just as parents perceive that their children recognized support, they also recognized parents' absence. Some coaches mentioned that parental absence results in stunted learning, burnout, and defiant behavior in children. One parent said, "You can see it when athletes have parents who aren't there, you can tell in the kids, their demeanor, and in their performance." Parents described overinvolvement hindering the parent-child relationship. One administrator noted parental pressure leading to sport feeling like a job rather than an

activity to be enjoyed. They witnessed negative peer interactions and lack of enjoyment in participation.

Development

Despite the potential of parent involvement to positively impact sport as a youth development context, a number of coaches and administrators identified more negative impacts stemming from parents' involvement. Specifically, one coach suggested that parents who are overbearing "have kids that grow up to hate sport and resent the fact that they have to be there." This sentiment was echoed by a sport administrator, who suggested that "the best athletes have parents who get it. They stay out of the way, let the coaches coach, and support the club when we ask them to. Unfortunately, these parents are few and far between."

Impact on Parents

Participants also discussed the impact of parental involvement on the parents themselves. Specifically, participants discussed the role of youth sport in shaping parent–peer relationships, parent–coach relationships, and parent–child relationships in the community.

Parent–Peer Relationships

Parent participants described how parents will often learn how to behave in youth sport from other parents. Parents then feed off their peers, oftentimes creating a negative atmosphere for the athletes. However, parents noted, with the right education parents police one another, potentially creating an overall more positive sporting experience. One coach reported, "More powerful than anything, are the rest of the parents on the sidelines. If they're following the rules and trying to do what is right, very quickly everyone else gets on board."

Parent–Coach Relationships

The coaches in the current study commonly stressed the importance of volunteering, regular and open parent–coach communication, trust, and staying positive. The majority of coaches believed in an "open door policy," allowing parents to ask questions or talk about problems they have. This was especially true following confrontation, after time had passed, and everyone involved had a chance to cool down. One coach stated, "If parents ever have an issue, come and talk to me, as long as it is an appropriate time."

Parents were at times frustrated with coaches' strategies and approach to playing time. Some parents described how complaints were taken straight to league directors. One mother described her experience with an overbearing coach, explaining, "We had a coach that we let control our life for three or four years ... she was not very tolerant of missing practice and she would sit our daughter on the bench the whole game if she missed."

Parent–Child Relationships

Coaches believed the parent–athlete relationship could be improved by having unconditional support for children and healthy expectations. In addition, the expectation of perfection weakens the parent–athlete relationship and the athlete's confidence. One coach noted

that “[parents] have to have that self-discipline and that restraint to just sit back and just, you know, clap and be supportive and realize their [child] did the best that they could do.” Coaches noticed that children with appropriately involved parents display better behavior, commitment, and work ethic. If children perceive parental warmth, the parent–athlete relationship improves and children care more about the sport.

Parents reported the demanding nature of youth sports strained time, money, and emotions. One mother felt that the soccer season often became stressful, mentioning, “I actually like it when it’s not in the middle of soccer season. When they’re not playing games because ... I feel like we do argue a lot. It’s more negative than it should be.” This parent also wished for more family time outside of soccer and that they learned not to sacrifice so much for a sport.

Barriers to the Implementation of Parent Education

Despite the discussed need, participants share a number of barriers to the implementation of an evidence-based parent education program in the community under investigation. Specifically, these barriers fell into two subcategories: those related to the family such as parent availability and priorities and those related to the implementation of the program such as funding and perception of information. All three groups (parents, coaches, and administrators) indicated that attendance would be a barrier.

Family Related

The barrier most mentioned by parents was time. Indeed, one parent admitted, “I think as parents sometimes we do over-schedule.” Some parents felt constraints would include time conflicts, underinvolvement, or a perception of already understanding what would be taught. Coaches commonly felt that parents would not make the time for the parent education program. One coach said, “You’d be lucky to get them there once a year.” Other family-related barriers included the age or developmental level of children and parental priorities.

Program Related

Parents and coaches worried that parents would not see the need for an evidence-based parent education program or that the strategies presented by educational programing would somehow not apply to them. Specifically, this centered on parents’ perception of the information or presenters. One coach described a hypothetical parent’s thought process:

I definitely think a program would be very beneficial, I don’t know if it would come off to the parents quite that way because they don’t see it like that they don’t seem to have a need for sportsmanship. It might be hard to get parents there and even if they came, getting them to listen and even buy into it might be more of a struggle.

Administrators cited funding as a primary barrier to program implementation. One administrator reported, “The only thing that I could see ... is the financial side of teaching. Maybe they could fix it by upping the registration fee a few dollars, or tax income or something like that.”

Desired Program Content

Despite participants' focus on potential barriers to the implementation of an evidence-based parent education program in youth sport, parents, coaches, and administrators also shared two primary areas of content that they felt would be important to include in an evidence-based parent education program. Specifically, these areas of emphasis related to developmentally appropriate practices for parenting in sport and technical sport knowledge.

Developmentally Appropriate Practices for Parenting in Sport

Parents hoped that any form of formalized education would include fundamental knowledge of "best practices" for parenting in sport. Important to note, parents demonstrated an understanding that appropriate involvement can help "build the self-esteem of the team." However, they also noted the potential harm that poor parent involvement can elicit, and thus craved information about youth and adolescent development. As one mom shared, "It's not just about being there and being present. We need to know when to talk to them and how to talk to them. When to push them and when to let them slack off."

Coaches also hoped that parent education would include strategies for more appropriate involvement and focus on the potential impact of parents' behavior on children. As one female coach shared,

There's no manual for (parenting in sport). If we could create one, I'd give it to every parent I come across because right now, at least on my teams, they're flying blind. And that's not always good for the kids.

Coaches also hoped that formalized education would give parents strategies to be more realistic about their children's abilities (e.g., odds of playing in high school, college, and professionally) and that this knowledge would allow parents to focus on children's need to feel needed, loved, and accepted.

Administrators hoped that parents' participation in a formalized education program would provide them access to cutting-edge knowledge that would facilitate appropriate behavior. Specifically, administrators noted that information should be provided to parents regarding how to help manage their children's successes and failures, foster sportsmanship through their sideline behavior, and eliminate unrealistic expectations. Describing their hope for parental involvement, one administrator suggested that the content of parent education program should help parents "be realistic about what [their] role is—and that is to be the support system."

Technical Sport Knowledge

A second area of content parents desired by way of educational programing was access to more technical sport knowledge. By in large, parents felt ill-equipped to comment on their children's performances—but also noted that this didn't stop them. As one father said,

I didn't have the opportunity to play lacrosse growing up. So, when I watch my daughter out there I want to be, um, you know, supportive. But sometimes I sound stupid cheering because I don't know what the heck is going on.

Of interest, coaches also wanted parents to be provided with more sport-specific knowledge. One coach described how some parents do not even know how to use equipment

and how this might be a barrier to children's development away from practice and game situations:

We only have 90 to 120 minutes with them each day. They're learning a lot from parents at home too. In some families this is good; in others, I feel like the kids come back to me dumber than the day before.

Administrators suggested that parents who learn about their children's sports are better equipped as sport parents and that this should be a primary goal of formalized parent education.

Desired Program Delivery

In a further effort to overcome potential barriers to the implementation of parent programming, participants in the community discussed many aspects of program delivery to consider when designing an evidence-based program for parent education in youth sport. Specifically, these related to the timing of the education, the characteristics of the speaker, and the format of the educational program. Of interest, stakeholders did not agree in all cases regarding the timing of the education, characteristics of the speaker, or format of the educational program.

Timing

Parents were nearly unanimous that they already manage a heavy youth sports schedule and that this is a potential barrier to engaging in voluntary parent training opportunities. In light of this, most participants shared the belief that any program should be mandatory and that it should not add greatly to parents' already demanding schedules. One mother said, "If it is taught during their practice at their facility, I'm waiting anyways [and] I'd be happy to do that." Coaches spoke at a more general level about when parent education should take place. Many of the coaches felt that the training would be most impactful early in development. Indeed, one coach stated, "High school is too late ... we need to get to the parents early." Most administrators felt that any training should take place at the beginning of a season and that it would not be realistic to expect parents to show up to more than one seminar per season. Concerning the length of the presentation, administrators recommended keeping the length of the meeting to between 1 and 2 hours. One administrator said, "If you're going to take an hour of their time, it needs to make a positive experience; it's got to be short and sweet."

Speaker

A lack of consensus emerged when parents were asked who should deliver the educational programming. Answers included a sport psychologist, a successful professional athlete, a coach, or a parent who has also coached. Coaches also emphasized the need for the presenter to be credible but also relatable. Coaches reported the need for education to come from a third party. One coach said, "I shouldn't be teaching this to my parents because that is going to come off as 'oh, that's what she wants and that's her way of doing it.'" Administrators unanimously felt someone with scientific authority or well-respected knowledge and reputation should facilitate the training. As one administrator noted, "I think a sport psychologist would be good, or sport scientists to show the research and say

‘you do this with your kid they are more likely to excel, exceed, and have a good experience.’”

Format

Parents shared multiple ideas about the format of the education program. One father stressed that the only way to communicate important aspects of the program was through “mandatory meetings.” Coaches concurred, noting that making all meetings mandatory would be the only way to get parents to participate. Administrators were in favor of a program that helped parents magnify their role through a better understanding of rules and competition levels based on age. Rather than a textbook or media broadcast, most administrators’ preferred method was in-person training. However, one coach expressed the complementary value of offering the program via website as well. Administrators also noted that education programs for parents of younger athletes would need to be built upon individual character training and ethics. Parents of older athletes would benefit from a review of advanced rules, behavior regulation, and drawing future life lesson parallels from sport. As one administrator stated, “I think there are different levels and definitely different aspects. But it definitely needs to be tailored to the age group of the child.”

Administrators also suggested that the training be presented in small groups, assisting with scheduling conflicts, and expressed interest in having a short, concise meeting after the season to evaluate the application of the program and receive feedback. As a final note, administrators suggested incorporating visual media to display good and bad examples of parent behavior. One administrator noted, “What would engage me—almost like YouTube videos—would be showing good examples and showing poor examples of how people are reacting. Then you can talk about how you can be positive with the kids.”

Desired Outcomes of Parent Education

Parents explicated numerous outcomes that they hoped would be achieved via any parent education program in youth sport, some of which would build from existing program strengths and others that could be achieved by ameliorating existing weaknesses. Specifically, participants in the community highlighted the potential impact that parent education could have on these outcomes at the individual (parent and child) and team levels.

Parents

Parents, coaches, and administrators hoped that increased knowledge, mutual respect, positive attitudes, and appropriate communication would result from a parent education program. One parent said, “Knowledge is power, and the more knowledge we have, the more positive it will be for everyone involved.” Coaches hoped that a mutual respect would develop between parents and coaches as a result of the program. When asked directly if a parent education program would bring about positive outcomes, one coach stated, “I sure hope so ... even if it just helped parents stop and think, ‘wait a minute, maybe I am that parent’ or ‘maybe I need to pay a little more attention to what my kid is doing in practice.’” Another coach hoped for “less bickering” among adults in youth sport. Many coaches expressed their desire to have better communication with parents but emphasized that it should take place at appropriate times.

Administrators suggested including content on parent underinvolvement and improving the athlete’s experience. Most administrators reported that the most effective sport parents

were those who kept their involvement within appropriate boundaries. One administrator attested to this by saying, “Being a supportive parent is nice, but also letting the coach do their job in teaching and making sure that they’re entrusting the coach to be able to teach their child.” Administrators also stressed the importance of teaching parents how to communicate with their children. One administrator noted, “[Parents] need to understand how to deal with them after a game—things they should say or shouldn’t say if they just won a big game or lost a big game.”

Children

The majority of parents felt that athletes would indirectly benefit from parent education as well. One father articulated how adaptive changes in parents’ behavior could lead to decreased athlete burnout. He said, “I think [parent education] would be good because more kids would stay involved in athletics if parents knew what their goals were, which isn’t ‘my kid has to be the best, play the most, get the most playing time.’” A major concern for sport administrators was athlete burnout. As one administrator noted,

If athletes weren’t burning out so young, they would participate longer, and have the potential to become more successful in their talents. ... I have seen it a ton, the athlete is amazing, but their parent just brings them down and yells at them and doesn’t think they are doing a good enough job ... so by the time they get to high school they don’t want to play anymore because they have had it with their parent yelling at them and bringing them down.

Teams

Parents explicated a host of positive team outcomes that could stem from the implementation of parent education in youth sport. In the absence of any formalized parent training, one mother felt that youth sports “get really stressful for everybody” and noted that parent education holds the potential to make the experience “more enjoyable all around.” Other parents hoped that programing for parents could enhance team environments and team unity. As one mother said, “I wish parents weren’t so hard on their kids if they weren’t the best on their team or the highest scorer ... We put a lot of pressure on our kids at a young age.” In describing a range of negative team outcomes and how they permeate the youth sport experience, many participants noted how these negative outcomes might be remedied through parent education. By in large, participants hoped that implementing educational programing would enhance parental involvement, thus providing better sport experiences and competitive success for their children.

INFORMING COMMUNITY-BASED PARENT EDUCATION

A proposed sequential framework informing community-based parent education in youth sport is offered in [Figure 1](#). The framework connects the nine categories to one another sequentially, depicting parent, coach, and administrator perceptions of parent involvement in youth sport. Specifically, the framework depicts how the current state of youth sport in the United States may drive parents’ goals for their children in sport, and subsequently the styles of involvement adopted by parents in youth sport. A feedback loop is also depicted, whereby parent involvement may impact the current state of youth sport. The model depicts parent involvement as impacting participating children and their parents, suggesting a need for

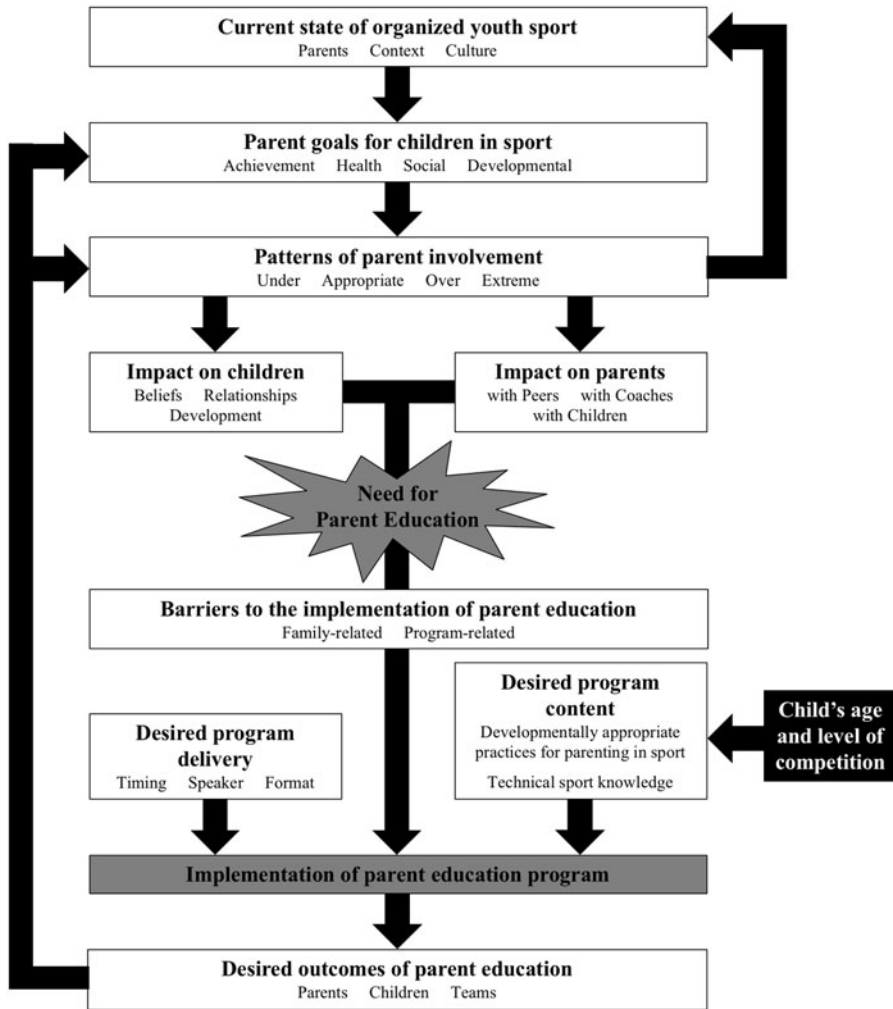


Figure 1. A proposed sequential framework informing community-specific parent education.

parent education in youth sport. Despite this need, the model accounts for various barriers that may prevent the implementation of educational programming for parents in this setting. Important to note, the framework also includes consideration of the content and delivery of parent programming, as well as the developmental impact of children's age and level of competition in designing any program. Finally, the model highlights the importance of desired outcomes for the young athletes in this context, as well as the impact of achieving those outcomes may have on parents' future goals and involvement styles.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of the present community case study was to highlight parent, coach, and administrator perceptions of community-based parent education in a youth sport community in the Rocky Mountain region of the United States. Despite growing recognition that

parent involvement plays a large role in the sport experiences of youth, researchers and practitioners have yet to broadly disseminate evidence-based strategies to parents to help enhance their involvement in this ubiquitous family context (cf. Dorsch et al., 2017; Thrower et al., 2017). Such an effort may be enhanced at the community level by examining the perspectives of key stakeholders with regards to the development of parenting “expertise” (see Harwood & Knight, 2015).

As a necessary step in creating an educational platform for parents in youth sport, the present research was designed to gain valuable insights from parents, coaches, and administrators across a range of youth sports in a single youth sport community. Specifically, we sought key stakeholders who could provide a clear picture of the current climate of youth sport in the target community and how parent involvement might best be leveraged to enhance sport experiences for its youth. Moreover, we attempted to highlight the individual and cultural perspectives held by these stakeholders as they pertained to their community’s readiness for parent education in youth sport. Collectively, qualitative interview data inform a sequential framework that has the potential to serve as an exemplar for future efforts at community-based parent education in youth sport.

According to our framework, and in line with an ecological perspective (see Bronfenbrenner, 2005), youth sport in the community under investigation can be viewed in terms of family, community, and cultural characteristics. Contrary to the popular caricature of the American youth sport parent, our data suggest that parents should not be viewed through a deficit lens (i.e., as a problem) in youth sport but as a resource to be enhanced through targeted intervention. Despite this supposition, negative parenting characteristics have also been delineated in past youth sport research (e.g., Bremer, 2012; Dorsch, Smith, Wilson, & McDonough, 2015; Fredricks & Eccles, 2005; Ullrich-French & Smith, 2006). Indeed, the present research suggests that some parenting behaviors and characteristics can be perceived as pressuring and thus may negatively impact children’s sport experience. These types of reports are consistent with work by other researchers (e.g., Dunn et al., 2016) as well as theories that point to observational learning and modeling as mechanisms of children’s learning (e.g., Bandura, 1986; Fredricks & Eccles, 2004).

Our study also points to the importance of the context in understanding the current state of youth sport. In line with recent studies (e.g., Côté, 1999; Côté, Baker, & Abernethy, 2007; Côté & Hay, 2002; Fraser-Thomas, Côté, & Deakin, 2005), the present work suggests that parents, coaches, and administrators remain worried about specific issues such as burnout, early specialization, and overscheduling. Moreover, our data suggest that parent involvement in this community held the potential to impact the current state of youth sport via the “systems” and “policies” that composed its implementation. Indeed, these context-level factors, as noted in Figure 1, are both a cause of and *caused by* parent involvement. Important to note, these community-level issues are related to parents, coaches, sport organizations, and more broadly the culture of youth sport in America. As such, further targeted investigations are needed in a range of sport contexts to tease apart the contributions of parents and other individual, community, and societal factors in youth sport.

Throughout our interviews, we were able to see that most parents in the community maintained adaptive goals for their children. Indeed, in line with past work (e.g., Dorsch et al., 2015; Smoll & Smith, 2012), none of the themes that emerged from the present study suggest that winning is the primary concern for parents of youth athletes. Rather, it appears that physical and psychological goals such as increasing physical fitness and gaining leadership skills are preferred to winning and/or accumulating statistics. Important to

note, this presents a starting point for parents and other adults to align their goals with their children's goals in the context of organized youth sport.

In addition to the quality of parent involvement, it also appears that the simple quantity of parent involvement has the potential to impact children's experiences in youth sport (see Hellstedt, 1987). Specifically, our data suggest that parents in this community who were extremely involved had children who enjoyed the sport experience less. This finding supports past research suggesting that parents who yell at their children become a source of embarrassment for others, namely, their children (see, Knight et al., 2010; Omli et al., 2008). Through a family systems lens, it is clear that youth sport is a family experience, whereby negative experiences of the parent and child impact the whole family (Clarke & Harwood, 2014; Knight & Holt, 2013). Although sport has the potential to provide positive experiences for youth (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2005; Holt, 2008), our research highlights some of the potentially negative results including poor parent-child relationships, parents feeling responsible for children's outcomes, and children's decreased enjoyment in and/or motivation to continue in their sport.

THE NEED FOR PARENT EDUCATION

Collectively, our data support community stakeholders' desire for evidence-based parent education in youth sport. In interviewing stakeholders from one community in the northern Rocky Mountain region of the United States, we learned that parents, coaches, and administrators believe that the current state of youth sport in their community can be improved via informative and efficient parent education programming (e.g., Dorsch et al., 2017; Thrower, Harwood, & Spray, 2016). Researchers have been quick to acknowledge this need (e.g., Grimm, Dorrance Hall, Dunn, & Dorsch, 2017); however, community-level research designed to inform such interventions has been slow to follow. In line with Gould et al. (2008), it is important to evaluate the communities and stakeholders where interventions take place and subsequently incorporate an evidence-based approach when assessing the efficacy of any intervention (see Dorsch et al., 2017).

Although there exists a need for parent education in this, and potentially other youth sport communities, stakeholders did acknowledge some of the barriers to providing this type of service. In the present study, for many families, time was found to be one of the most difficult barriers to overcome. Indeed, Wiersma and Sherman (2005) asserted that youth coaches in the United States are typically parents; therefore, adding one more thing to their agenda may result in a further reduction in the number of volunteer coaches. In addition, some parents who are underinvolved may not see a need for training and may discredit or avoid participation altogether. In fact, as noted first by Woodside (2011), administrators in our study were concerned with how to get some parents to attend educational workshops when they do not even attend their children's games. In examining the reasons for parent underinvolvement, it is important to acknowledge that not all families have the resources to view organized youth sport as a leisure time activity. Indeed, many parents—especially those at lower socioeconomic strata—may be constrained by demanding work schedules, whether it be long hours at one job or working multiple jobs.

Although there have been different approaches on how to implement certain programs (e.g., Dorsch et al., 2017; Thrower et al., 2016), there does not seem to be consensus on a single method that would address the barriers to participation and implementation. This was evidenced in the present data, as well. Although parent, coach, and administrator perspectives were generally in alignment, these stakeholders did not agree regarding the timing of the education, characteristics of the speaker, or format of an educational program.

This suggests that there is not a one-size-fits-all approach to evidence-based parent education in organized youth sport and that future researchers, practitioners, and stakeholders need to engage in critical discourse regarding the feasibility and implementation of parent education in youth sport.

Although the creation and delivery of parent education doesn't seem to have a single, clear path forward, past suggestions from researchers and key stakeholders seem to have some consistency. Regarding the content of a parent education program, our research aligns with work conducted by others (Knight & Holt, 2013; Smoll & Smith, 2012; Thrower et al., 2016), noting that stakeholders recognize the importance of giving information that would detail appropriate parent behavior, childhood outcomes, and sport knowledge. Similar to Dorsch, Lowe, Dotterer, Lyons, and Barker (2016), who investigated parents of intercollegiate athletes, our participants asserted that a short, mandatory program (approximately 60–90 min, once per season) would likely be best for parents. Participants also indicated that best delivery practices would be from someone with authority outside of the team (e.g., a researcher, a former parent, a sport psychologist, or a family therapist).

Despite the strengths of the present work, there important limitations and delimitations to be considered in interpreting our findings and pursuing future research. First, the present community case study was situated in a single youth sport community in the northern Rocky Mountain region of the United States. This makes it difficult to provide wide-reaching inferences and/or generalizations about the design and implementation of sport parent education in other communities, as would have been feasible in a broader grounded theory study. Parent sport involvement is likely tied to multiple contextual factors such as individual, community, and societal goals, thus making it difficult for a single community case study to capture the essence of all sport families and communities. However, as suggested by Woodside (2011) and Gould et al. (2008), the definitions and details used to implement parent education are likely to vary depending on the nature of the sport and the community context in which it is enacted, but the principles are likely to be generalizable across multiple contexts. Future researchers should attempt to tease out the contributions of various systems of the social environment (e.g., macro, exo, meso, micro) by conducting larger scale work across a number of diverse youth sport communities.

A second limitation is that the present sample was somewhat monolithic, identifying as largely Caucasian, upper middle class, and educated. Although this is true of many Western cultures, these stakeholders had the time and resources to be involved in youth sport settings—a fact not universally true in contemporary youth sport (Humbert et al., 2006). However, as the sport experiences of individuals are influenced by demographic factors (Fredricks & Eccles, 2004; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2014), future research should aim to understand the sport experiences of stakeholders from ethnically diverse; single parent; and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender families, from a range of socioeconomic and geopolitical backgrounds.

CONCLUSION

The present study extends understanding of the potential need for parent education in youth sport in three ways. First, it highlights stakeholders' perceptions of a range of themes and categories of parent involvement in youth sport. This descriptive understanding is an important first step toward assessing community needs and best practices for implementing parent educational programming in the target community. Second, it provides a rich narrative account of multiple stakeholders' experiences. Specifically, through a social constructivist lens, the ways parents, coaches, and administrators in this youth sport

community made sense of their own experiences was revealed. Finally, it offers an understanding of participant experiences that can be used by researchers and practitioners who wish to develop and implement parent education in other youth sport communities. In making these contributions, the present research answers past calls for an increased understanding of parent involvement in youth sport (e.g., Bremer, 2012; Fredricks & Eccles, 2004; Holt & Knight, 2014). However, our findings also suggest that there is not a one-size-fits-all approach to evidence-based parent education in organized youth sport. As such, researchers, practitioners, and community stakeholders need to take a community-centered approach as they work with parents in youth sport. This approach should be informed not only by the needs of parents, coaches, and administrators but by the goals, traditions, and expectations of the community as well.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We thank the many participating parents, coaches, and administrators who took part in the research.

FUNDING

This research was supported by a research award from the Department of Family, Consumer, and Human Development at Utah State University.

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