THE KID AND "MR. AND MR. AND MRS. SIDELINE PARENT": A RHETORICAL
CLUSTER ANALYSIS OF YOUTH SPORT PARTICIPATION DISCOURSE

by

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DEDICATION

This is dedicated to my loving Mother and Father. May you rest in peace, Dad, I did it!

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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ABSTRACT

THE KID AND "MR. AND MR. AND MRS. SIDELINE PARENT": A RHETORICAL CLUSTER ANALYSIS OF YOUTH SPORT PARTICIPATION DISCOURSE

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There are serious problems in the world of youth sports, with the "finger of blame" pointed squarely at adults for spoiling the fun. Unruly parent behavior and violent confrontations at youth sporting events have become increasingly frequent. Consequently, these behaviors have damaged parents' relationships with coaches, officials, spectators, other parents and even their own children (Ford, Jubenville, & Phillips, 2012). With factors like intense training schedules, the pressure to win and be the best, and painful injuries, it is not surprising that some athletes simply burn out on their sport. But what is shocking to many who study youth sport are the young ages at which this happens, sometimes as early as 9 or 10 (Stenson, 2004).

Using elements of rhetorical cluster criticism (Foss, 1996), I examine recurring themes found in the youth sport literature. Specifically, two major themes are posited—violence in youth sports; and the genuine lack of "fun" associated with sport. Key terms are identified as are associated clusters, and a comparison and discussion of the

discovered clusters is offered. Findings showed how the language throughout the selected youth sport literature reinforced recurring concepts regarding *violence in sport* and *lack of fun*. In both cases, key terms and related words and phrases reiterated the frequency and intensity of identified themes.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

There are serious problems in the world of youth sports, with the "finger of blame" pointed squarely at adults for spoiling the fun. Unruly parent behavior and violent confrontations at youth sporting events have become increasingly frequent. Consequently, these behaviors have damaged parents' relationships with coaches, officials, spectators, other parents and even their own children (Ford, Jubenville, & Phillips, 2012). With factors like intense training schedules, the pressure to win and be the best, and painful injuries, it is not surprising that some athletes simply burn out on their sport. But what is shocking to many who study youth sport are the young ages at which this is increasingly happening, sometimes as early as 9 or 10 (Stenson, 2004).

As Stenson (2004) observes:

Eager to nurture the next A-Rod [Alex Rodriquez] or [figure skating's] Michelle Kwan, parents enroll their 5- or 6-year-olds in a competitive sports league or program. Over the next few years, training intensifies and expands to the off-season, making practice essentially year-round. Youngsters may join more than one league or a traveling team. They may have to sacrifice other interests and give up most of the down time that allows them to just be kids. Soon the stakes get higher because many parents and coaches play to win. Winning means recognition and that could lead to lucrative opportunities, high school championships, college scholarships and perhaps a shot at the pros.

With more youths than ever in organized sports, an estimated 30 million through high school, Metzl and other experts (as cited in Stenson, 2004) in sports medicine and youth athletics say they are increasingly concerned about the pressures put on some children to excel. Not only are these youngsters at risk for emotional burnout, they may also develop injuries that plague them for a lifetime. Some will turn to steroids or other performance-enhancing substances to try to gain an edge. And some may give up on sports and exercise altogether (Stenson, 2004).

"Parents are becoming increasingly involved in the lives of young athletes," according to Cumming and Ewing (2002, para. 2). They go on to say:

> Greater competition for athletic scholarships and the lure of professional sports has motivated many parents to commit their children to specialized training regimens at an early age (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2000). Parents are also investing larger amounts of time and finances into the athletic development of their children. Further, parents' decisions to send or transfer children to and from academic institutions are increasingly based upon the athletic, and not the academic, reputation of the schools concerned. . . . Although such actions are supposedly taken in 'the child's best interests,' there is a concern that the over-involvement of parents may negatively affect the child's immediate and long-term experiences in sports. (para. 2)

Indeed, "a growing concern amongst those involved in youth sports is that certain aspects of parental involvement are detrimental to the development and experiences of young athletes. An increase in the number of reported instances of parents engaging in violent,

abusive, and controlling behavior toward athletes, coaches, officials, and fellow spectators has led many organizations to reconsider the role of the parent in youth sports" (para. 1).

According to Silbar (2011), youth sports in America is big business, with more than 26 million children participating in some type of non-school sanctioned athletics. Sadly, a staggering 70% quit by the age of 13 and youth sports coaching expert Gary Avischious knows why. Parents. It is becoming so bad that, according to Avischious (as cited in Silbar, 2011), "parents are ruining youth sports in America."

Cumming and Ewing (2002, para. 9) observe:

Parents that over identify with their children start to see their children as an extension of their own egos. In this situation, the parent becomes dependent upon the child for feelings of self-worth. If the child is successful, the parents feel good about themselves. If the child fails, however, the parents feel bad about themselves. Not surprisingly, this situation places the child under a high degree of pressure.

Further, "parents that feel pressure for their children to be successful also tend to behave in a manner that is inappropriate for youth sports. Sources of pressure include competition, social expectations, and even personal pride. Parents who have been successful athletes themselves often feel greater expectations that their children should also be successful athletes" (para. 10). Observes Mueller (2001):

I'll call them Mr. and Mrs. Sideline Parent. I was standing near them while watching a youth soccer game. Mr. Sideline Parent was making it hard for me to

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focus on the game. I wasn't the only one he was bothering. His constant yelling at the players and refs was making it hard for the players to play the game and the officials to call the game. At one point, his never-ending stream of demeaning, high decibel, verbal outbursts prompted the ref to stop the game to issue a rather pointed warning "Sir, I must ask you to be quiet. If you can't control yourself, I'll either have to ask you to leave the area, or I'll be forced to forfeit the game."

The only one who didn't seem to be aware of her husband's shouting fits was Mrs. Sideline Parent. Perhaps she was so used to it that she didn't even hear him. While he was verbally fixing and critiquing the action on the field, Mrs. Sideline Parent was involved in a serious discussion with several other mothers about fixing the growing problem of youth violence. The catalyst for their discussion was a vicious student assault that had taken place in the community just two days before.

In Mueller's (2001) "The Age of Sideline Rage," he offers the following documented incidents:

*A Pennsylvania midget football game ended in a brawl involving over 100 coaches, players, parents, and fans.

* A hockey practice for 9 and 10-year-olds in Massachusetts turned deadly when a father became enraged over his son taking an elbow to the face. The angry dad complained to another father and after they began arguing, the enraged dad killed the other man by banging his head repeatedly on the concrete floor.

* A Florida soccer referee suffered a broken nose after he was head-butted by the angry coach of a team of 13-year-olds.

* A Texas, a baseball coach who had been ejected from a game returned in his police uniform. He followed the umpire out of the parking lot and cited him for a unfounded illegal turn.

* A disappointed Maryland father knocked down and kicked his son's coach for leaving him off the All-Star team.

* A Florida baseball game for 7 and 8 year-olds ended with the parents brawling.

* In Oklahoma, a 36-year-old coach had to be restrained after choking a 15-year-old umpire who was making a few extra dollars umpiring a tee-ball game for 5 and 6 year-olds.

Dagenais (2009) offers a useful description of different types of parents involved with sports:

(The Model Parent)

This is the dream parent that softball coaches want to work with. They're the ones who understand when to step in and when to let coaches do their work. They're not pushy when they give suggestions. And when they do provide suggestions, they're suggestions and not commands.

Model parents may also display other common types of traits, but they're a lot easier to deal with.

(The Competitive Parent)

Competitive parents are great in the sense that they always try to motivate their kids to try harder and become better players. The only problem is when a parent becomes too competitive and becomes an obnoxious presence in the team. They'll also try to provide you with regular advice on how to coach the team better. If they're not obnoxious, just try to be a little more patient as they give you their advice.

(The 'Living through Your Kids' Parent)

Some parents couldn't seem to get over their past glory as a softball player. They typically talk to their kids starting with this line, "when I was your age." Like competitive parents, they're the types who try to push their kids a little harder than most. But when they push their kids too hard, that's where the problem begins. What you can do is to nicely tell them that their kid is working hard enough, and tell them if their kid reached a certain milestone or set a record for the team. This might help lessen the pressure they give to their kids.

(The 'Coach' Parent)

Again, there will be parents who will think they can do a better job than you. And it's typical with the 'coach' parent. The good thing with this type of parent is that it's good if they can work with you. At least you'll have somebody to throw ideas around with. It only becomes problematic when they try to coach your team behind your back. So try as much as possible to get them on your side.

(The Negative Parent)

This is probably one of the worst parent types you have to deal with. It's the parent type who never sees anything good with how you coach, how your players play the game, etc.

You need to be able to deal with this kind of parent before he/she even wreaks havoc in the team. Again, this isn't about stereotyping parents, but looking for signs that may set off trouble in the team. And the earlier you deal with them, the easier it will be for you to handle potential problems. Just like the other parent types, you will see most parents with some or many of these traits. It is just so much easier to have to deal with these qualities, than some of the others coming up.

Today's youth sports scene no longer resembles the days of pickup games in the park, says Rick Wolff, chairman of the Center for Sports Parenting and a former professional baseball player in New York. In fact, 75 percent of youngsters drop out of athletics by the time they are 13 because taking part in sports is no longer fun, according to Wolff (as cited in Cohn, 2002). While most, if not all, parents enroll their children in sport with the best of intentions, clearly the actions of many parents suggest that there may be a problem (Cohn, 2002).

With this backdrop, there are clearly a myriad of issues and concerns related to youth sport and motivation. Among them are parental over-involvement, unfair pressures placed upon children to excel in sport, sideline behavior of parents and coaches, violence, and the lack of genuine fun or enjoyment for youth participants. With such concerns, it is little wonder why these overlapping events can have detrimental effects on children—from an over realistic desire to please parents via performance to sheer burnout. Given the available literature on violence in sport, children who cease sport participation, and the loss of sheer enjoyment, a preliminary rhetorical cluster critique of recurring key terms as found in disparate sources (e.g., sport psychology texts, journal articles, opinion

pieces) is offered. The notion of key terms will be supplied as I examine recurring terms in selected, disparate literature.

Objective

The objective of this study is to determine the level of youth enjoyment in organized sports and the impact of parental involvement as presented in the related literature. As a secondary concern, it is hoped that the rhetorical analysis will suggest some of the key aspects of being a responsible sports parent.

Research Question

This study is guided by a single overarching research question:

RQ1:   What do recurring discourse patterns regarding violence in youth sports and the genuine lack of "fun" associated with sport reveal about the pervasiveness of these concerns addressed in the youth sport literature?

Summary

This chapter has served as an introduction to the overall issues involved in examining problems in youth sport participation as presented in the literature. Chapter Two offers a detailed look at that literature, emphasizing the themes to be addressed. Rhetorical cluster criticism, the methodology selected for this study, is explained in Chapter Three. Chapter Four explores two recurring themes found in the related youth sport literature via rhetorical cluster analysis. Conclusions and implications for practice are offered in Chapter Five.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Youth sports have clearly become more professionalized in recent years. Many more parents want to see their children achieve some level of success, be it athletic scholarship or in certain cases a pro sports contract. That hyper-competitive atmosphere can translate into over involvement of coaches, referees, or other parents who interfere with their own children's performances. Youth sports activist Bob Bigelow (as cited in Mueller, 2001) calls it "the Tiger Woods syndrome" where parents think they have to push their little kids earlier. Although brawling, abusive parents are not the norm, at least 15 states have adopted statutes making it a crime to assault sports officials. Community leagues require parents to sign codes of conduct, in addition to developing education programs and forums for parents to address the issues of "sideline rage" and pushing kids too hard. It is parents like that who are ruining youth sports by treating their kids like "miniature adults," says Bigelow, a former first-round NBA draft pick and author of "Just Let the Kids Play" (Weaver, 2004).

This review of related literature briefly examines the research pertinent to the influences of adult involvement in children's sport, with a specific focus on the sideline behavior of adult parents and coaches, and the impact of these behaviors on children participating in sport. What can bring on or prompt parental sideline rage? Jay Goldstein (as cited in "University of Maryland," 2008) observed that when parents perceived

"something that happened during the game to be personally directed at them or their child, they got angry. . . . That's consistent with road rage." Goldstein went on to say that ego defensiveness, one of the triggers of road rage, also causes "sideline rage." Goldstein observed parents at youth soccer games in suburban Washington, D.C., and concluded that parents become angry when there is an apparent challenge to their ego. He also found that control-oriented parents were far more likely to take something personally and explode than autonomy-oriented parents, who take greater responsibility for their own behavior. What can bring on or prompt parental sideline rage? Concluded Goldstein (as cited in "University of Maryland," 2008), "Well, you do not have to look much farther than your car's rearview mirror for evidence."

Sport, Children, and Enjoyment

As noted by Walters et al. (2011, p. 6):

Concerns have been expressed about children's organized sport experiences for some considerable time. Originally published in 1975, the book *Every Kid Can Win* was motivated by the authors' concerns about the damage caused by win-at-all-costs behaviors exhibited by teachers, parents, and coaches (Orlick & Botterill, 1975). Interviews with children showed that children played sport primarily for fun and for the action. As sport became more serious, these children clearly indicated that they did not like being yelled at, getting little game-time, or feeling as though they were failures. Orlick also cited evidence that showed that children, as they grew older, were already withdrawing from a range of organised sports.

They continue:

Concern over attrition rates in children's sport has been ongoing for researchers, and a number of studies have focused on childrens' attrition rates and reasons for withdrawing from sport. However, conflicting evidence has emerged (Gould, 2007; Weiss & Amorose, 2008) and many of these studies have focused on the older teenage age group. Children appear to have multiple reasons for either participating or deciding not to participate in organized sports (Biddle, 1999); and Gould (2007) noted that other larger scale studies (e.g., Sapp & Haubenstricker, 1978) have suggested that children may temporarily withdraw from sport, engage with other sports, or withdraw for reasons that differ from the more negative ones referred to by Orlick and Botterill (1975). Although there are a range of reasons as to why children withdraw from sport, studies have consistently shown to varying degrees that a lack of fun, an over-competitive sporting environment, and perceived low levels of competence are regular contributing factors to early withdrawal (Gould, 2007) (Walters et al., 2011, pp. 6-7).

The Influence of Parents

As pointed out by Hedstrom and Gould (2004, p. 26):

Existing research has shown that parents can influence a child's motivation, perceived competence, and enjoyment of sports (Brustad, Babkes, & Smith, 2001). The feedback and behavior of a parent can affect how long a child stays involved in a sport as well as how a child perceives his or her abilities. The outcome a parent emphasizes and reinforces, such as winning or improving skills, can have a major effects on what a child deems as success in sports. Moreover,

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how a parent acts before, during, and after a practice or game can cause a great deal of anxiety in the child. As a result, a child's performance and enjoyment can be impacted.

They continue (p. 27):

Parents knowingly and unknowingly create motivational climates that can have enduring effects on a child. For instance, when a child plays sports, competence is reinforced by his or her parents and as a result the child will become more confident and motivated to perform these skills. Children also look to parents for information regarding judgments on ability and decisions about future participatory behavior (Weiss & Ambrose, 2002). As a result, parents are thought to play an important role in the development of perceived competence, intrinsic motivation, and emotional development. Researchers have generally supported these contentions. For example, it has been found that:

- "Parental expectations and orientations towards achievement are related to children's perceptions and motivated behavior" (Brustad, 1992, p. 72).

- Parental influences are conveyed through modeling and reinforcement (Brustad, 1988; Swain & Harwood, 1996; Yusuff, 1991).

- Parents are the main socializers influencing children's sport involvement. Fathers have typically been found to be the most important socialization influence for both boys and girls (Greendorfer, Lewko, & Rosengren, 1996).

- Low perceived parental pressure was found to be associated with higher enjoyment of a season (Brustad, 1988).

- The greater the value placed on the outcome of the swim race by a significant other, the more the race outcome mattered to youth swimmers. Moreover, if swimmers perceived their parent as being more concerned with the swimmer's mastery of skills, the swimmer also became more intrinsically motivated (Swain & Harwood, 1996).

As Walters et al. (2011, pp. 7-8) aptly observe:

Although parents have been identified as key influences determining the level and quality of involvement of their children in sport (Clark, 2008; Kremer-Sadlik & Kim, 2007), there have been few studies that have monitored and examined the actual effect of parental behavior at children's sporting events (Kidman et al.,1999).

International media coverage relating to parental involvement has tended to be sensationalist in nature, but some quite disturbing stories have been revealed. An Australian publication published details of some of the more extreme cases that have occurred ([Haines], 2002). Probably the most extreme relates to a Boston, Massachusetts father, who, in 2000 used, hockey sticks to beat another father, with the victim subsequently dying from his injuries. Another case related to a father who was banned from attending four of his 8 years old son's football games and forced to undergo counseling sessions after swearing at and slapping a **junior** volunteer umpire at one of his son's games. Similar stories have been reported in New Zealand including a recent account of a Dunedin father who

was convicted for punching a man for swearing at an under-10 years rugby union match (Walters, Schluter, Thompson & Payne, 2010).

It is not only the parental spectator behavior which is attracting media attention, as highlighted by an Auckland journalist: "While taking part in an over-30s training in Auckland a few years ago, I watched in horror as the man labeled as the coach of a tiny soccer team berated his 8 charges to the point that you wondered why any of those kids would ever turn up again" (Rattue, 2006, p. C15).

There would appear to be increasing media concern over what is deemed to be inappropriate and excessive parental touchline behavior in many countries, including the US, Australia, the UK, and New Zealand. However, there are few studies which have measured the extent and prevalence of this behaviour.

The Negative Influence of Parents

Walters et al. (2011, pp. 9-10) point out how sport parents can have a negative influence on their children:

Although there are many positive parental influences on children participating in sport, unfortunately, children's sporting experiences can also include more negative ones such as perceived stress, lower self-esteem, and lack of motivation (Woolger & Power, 1993). The impact of the parent on the stress, anxiety, and motivational levels of children playing sport has been examined in a range of studies (Barber, Sukhi, & White, 1999; Conroy, 2001; Hamstra et al., 2002). Conroy (2001) noted that much of the research conducted by sport psychologists

had focused on issues relating to performance enhancement. Conroy (2001) While

the enhancement of sporting performance is of understandable interest to sports

researchers, acknowledged an obvious need to focus on the perspective of the

child and advocated the nurturing of a child' holistic development through sport,

with potential benefits not only for a child's physical health and emotional well-

being, but also for overall social development.

Parents' demands, family structure, and parent-child communications have

been identified as key factors in the development of a fear of failure for children

(Conroy, 2001). Infants begin life with little fear of failure, but as they progress

through childhood, the consequences of failure become apparent (e.g., from forms

of punishment such as criticism), and based on their experiences children display

varying degrees of a fear of failure (Conroy, Coatsworth, & Kaye, 2007). The

stress and anxiety associated with this fear of failure can be potentially extremely

damaging to a child's social development (Conroy, 2001). The study by Conroy et

al. (2007) found evidence of sport performance anxiety, a fear of failure, and

associated feelings of low self-esteem in female athletes as young as eight years

of age.

Parental Behavior as Excessive?

Other than negative influences, Walters et al. (2011, pp. 10-12) discuss extreme

behaviors exhibited by sport parents:

Frankl (2004) explored the impact of excessive parental behavior at children's

sporting events in the US and noted that reports of inappropriate and violent

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behavior by adults were on the increase. Although concerns are often expressed about the excesses of parental behavior in children's sport, there still remain relatively few studies that have observed and recorded these behaviors. The earlier studies that were conducted (Graham, Ratliffe, Faucette, Salter, & Walley, 1982; Randall & McKenzie, 1987; Walley, Graham, & Forehand, 1982) indicated that parent spectators were not overly verbal at their children's games. Subsequent studies (Blom & Drane, 2008; Kidman et al., 1999) concluded that the significant amount of instruction provided by parents from the touchline, and their level of negative comments recorded, did give rise for concern. The authors of both of these later studies highlighted the need for further research to establish more accurately the nature and prevalence of parental behaviors, with (Kidman et al 1999) calling for interventions to educate and inform parents on how to provide a more supportive and positive sporting experience for their children.

One account by Fiore (2003) tracked the development of youth sport in the US. Fiore (2003, p. 104) referred to the "epidemic" of incidents of "parental rage" and believed that the traditional and self- regulated backyard games once played by children began, in the 1950s, to be replaced by structured, competitive activities and leagues. Although the introduction of leagues was originally well intentioned, Fiore believed that these leagues came to be characterized by increasingly high degrees of parental control and by incidents of inappropriate and often violent behavior. Furthermore, it has been suggested that the organization of children's sport increasingly reflects the structures of adult

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professional sport, as opposed to being designed to meet the needs of the children themselves (Engh, 1999). The outcome of this highly regulated, competitive, structured approach is the development of a win-at-all-costs mentality for parents and coaches which eventually filters down and is embodied in the behaviors of the children themselves (Schuette, 2001).

A behavior related to the adoption of this win-at-all-costs mentality is verbal aggression, which has been identified as having a major detrimental effect on young athletes, especially if they are subjected to this behavior over long periods of time (Goldstein & Iso-Ahola, 2008). The negative impact of verbal aggression is not only felt by the target, but there is evidence to suggest that regular exposure to background anger is equally distressing for all children witnessing these types of behaviors (Cummings, 1987; Omli & La Voi, 2009).

The Elite Nature of Sport

Walters et al. (2011, pp. 8-9) offer an examination of research dealing with the elite aspect of youth sport. They note:

A number of studies have supported the theory that parental support plays a significant role in a child's ongoing participation and performance in higher level sport. A study of the four families of three elite junior rowers and an elite junior tennis player (age 18 years) examined the retrospective accounts of family members in relation to parenting practices (Côté, 1999). Côté divided the development stages of these athletes into the sampling years (ages 6 to 13 years), the specializing years (ages 13 to 15 years), and the investment years (ages 15 and

over). Côté found that the families of these elite athletes were predominantly supportive of their child participating in a range of sports during the sampling years, and put no undue pressure on them as they progressed through the specializing and investment years.

Evidence relating to the more negative aspects of parental behavior tended to emerge as children moved into their teenage years. Lauer et al. (2010) found that the more controlling negative parental behaviors, such as putting expectations on children, seemed to occur during the specializing years. The complexity of the parent-child relationship was acknowledged by Power and Woolger (1994), who noted that the balance between parental pressure and parental support was a difficult one to measure, detrimental effects on a child's motivation.

The focus of many of the studies on elite athletes has naturally tended to be on the significance of parental influences on achievement, as opposed to children's enjoyment of sport. However, the consensus across these studies was that parents of successful athletes generally created an enjoyable, positive, supportive, and varied environment during the early years of their child's sporting development. Parents either became more controlling or withdrew completely as their child moved into adolescence.

Although a number of studies with elite athletes have indicated that these athletes appear to benefit from exposure to a range of sports in their early years, there are also supporters of Ericsson's (2003) recommendation for early specialization in one sport involving up to 10,000 hours of deliberate practice

(Helsen, Hodges, Van Winckel, & Starkes, 2001; Helsen, Starkes, & Hodges, 1998). Côté, Horton, MacDonald, and Wilkes (2009) compared the benefits of this early specialization with the sampling of a range of sports during childhood. Côté et al. noted that not only did studies of elite athletes suggest that exposure to a broad range of sports was beneficial to long term athlete development, but also that this exposure was more enjoyable for children. Early specialization was intensive, could lead to boredom, and burnout or complete withdrawal from sport.

The Elite Club

In the document, *Ethics in Youth Soccer: A Message to Club Leaders* (n.d., [p. 4]), the following advice is offered:

Club leaders who position their organization as one aimed at the elite player must remember that they are still dealing with fragile, impressionable children who are psychologically easily bruised. The term *elite* is overused and often misused in sport. Unfortunately, the school of thought among some coaches is that "if the player wants to be part of our elite club, he/she must be able to handle the pressure. An "elite" tag is not a license to abuse players and it does not absolve responsibility for the unpleasant consequences players might suffer in the name of competition.

A club that claims elite status has a responsibility to provide the players elite level facilities, expert coaching, administrative support and, above all, a high standard of behavior and role modeling. Elite status should reflect a measurement

of what the club can do for the player in terms of character and skill development, not what the player can do for the club.

How the Coach Can Have an Influence

As reported by Walters et al. (2011, pp. 12-14):

It has been widely recognized that coaches hold considerably influential positions over children's enjoyment and ongoing commitment to sport (Jowett & Cramer, 2010; Woolger & Power, 1993). Jones (2007) highlighted the tendency for the field of coaching science to focus on delivery style and the transmission of specialized knowledge, at the expense of a more meaningful examination of the potential of the pedagogical nature of coach-athlete relationships. Jones further called for coaching to become a truly pedagogical profession, focusing on the unpredictable micro relationships that occur between coach and athlete, which would enhance the experience for all athletes and also enhance the learning process. There has been a tendency for coaching to be presented simply as the art of imparting knowledge, with little regard for the significance of the complex interactions and subsequent human relationships that exist between coaches and athletes (Jones, 2009).

However, in New Zealand, as elsewhere, the delivery of children's sport relies heavily on the parent volunteer, and it has been claimed that many youth sport coaches receive little or no appropriate training (Siegenthaler & Gonzalez, 1997; Wiersma & Sherman, 2005). With children' experiences of organized sport so heavily dependent upon the behavior of untrained volunteer coaches, aligned

with a recognition of the complex nature of the art of coaching itself (Jones, 2009), it is perhaps not surprising that the behavior of coaches in children's sport has aroused considerable concern. The reliance of coaches on simply instructing and telling children what to do, has given rise to concerns about not only the affects constant instruction has on effective learning and on the development of 13 autonomous decision-making skills, but also on a child' enjoyment of sport (Kidman et al., 1999).

Although much of the coaching literature has focused on the older teenage or competitive elite athlete, there appears to be overwhelming evidence that coaches who adopt a caring attitude towards athletes in their care and acknowledge the feelings and needs of these athletes are more able to nurture an environment where athletes can reach their potential (Jones, 2009). Caring coaches can also facilitate a climate that encourages children to become more autonomous, intrinsically motivated, and develop greater decision making capabilities than those athletes exposed to a more controlled environment where they are exposed to little choice (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003). A number of studies have shown that it is possible to change coach behavior. The considerable work conducted by Smith and Smoll (1997), in particular, has been successful in changing coach behaviors to enhance children's sporting experiences. Smith and Smoll have reportedly run workshops delivering the Coach Effectiveness Training program (CET) to over 13,000 youth sport coaches, with evidence that as a

consequence young players reported higher levels of enjoyment and self-esteem (Smith & Smoll, 1997; Topor & Gill, 2008).

As there is little evidence to suggest that volunteer coaches involved in children's sport receive formal training, it is unsurprising that they have inadequate knowledge of the psychological and psychosocial developmental needs of children (Tofler & Butterbaugh, 2005). As a consequence, Tofler and Butterbaugh (2005) noted that many coaches are outcome-driven and physically and verbally embody a harsh punitive coaching style. The findings of studies conducted with youth sport coaches show that coaches themselves acknowledge that they receive little coaching education and training (McCallister, Blinde, & Kolenbrander, 2000; Wiersma & Sherman, 2005). Wiersma and Sherman suggested that coaches are keen to receive coaching education and training, despite the time constraints that attendance at training programs would impose. Furthermore, these coaches acknowledged the significant impact that their own behavior had on both children and their parents who attended games.

Although there would appear to be a range of factors that influence childrens' ongoing commitment to sport, what consistently emerges from the literature is that children today, as they did forty years ago, participate in sport primarily for fun and enjoyment (Scanlan, Carpenter, Schmidt, Simons, & Keeler, 1993; Scanlan & Lewthwaite, 1986; Scanlan & Lewthwaite, 1988).

Developmental Approaches, Educational Needs, and Youth Sport Coaching

Hedstrom and Gould (2004, pp. 9-13) provide useful information about youth sport coaches and how they can influence their athletes. They observe:

The youth sport coach can have a dramatic influence on young athletes' development and enjoyment of sport. But who is the youth sport coach? The background and perspective of youth sport coaches can vary from inexperienced parent-volunteers to highly skilled and paid coaches of elite youth programs. Within this spectrum are millions of individuals that coach youth programs of all types. Unfortunately, research has not extensively examined who the "youth sport coach" is so our knowledge in this area is limited.

With increased sports participation in private, non-scholastic, and agency-sponsored programs and the finding that quality coaching is critical for ensuring the beneficial effects of youth sports participation there is a great need for better understanding youth coaches. Initial survey research (Gould & Martens, 1979; Martens & Gould, 1979; Michigan Youth Sports Institute, 1978) on the characteristics and attitudes of volunteer youth coaches showed that the major objectives relative to coaching young athletes focused on physical, psychological, and social development, as well as fun. Winning was the objective rated as least important. At the same time the coaches reported that while winning is not overemphasized in their programs, problems with overemphasizing competitive outcomes sometimes occurred in youth sports. Most of the surveyed coaches were male, married, and untrained and the majority became involved in coaching

because of their child's participation. Hence, they had little knowledge of sports safety, training and conditioning, and child development. On average these coaches worked with 22 youngsters for approximately 11 hours a week during an 18 week season.

Unfortunately, this research is over two decades old, so we do not know if the characteristics of these coaches and their attitudes have changed. However, more recent studies have identified some commonality among those that have coached at the youth level for several years:

- In an observational and interview study with 50 coaches it was found that most youth sport coaches have had some athletic experience but not necessarily in the sport(s) they are coaching (Sage, 1989).

- Most youth sport coaches who remain coaches for numerous years found that being an assistant coach or having a mentor was vital to their longevity (Bloom, Durand-Bush, Schinke, & Salmela, 1998; Sage, 1989).

- When asked about the experience, most youth sport coaches revealed that coaching was a more difficult endeavor than anticipated. In one study utilizing in-depth interviews with eight youth sport coaches some of the challenges in coaching were limited practice time, negative interactions with parents, and league structure (Strean, 1995).

While these are common considerations for the structure of a youth sport setting, it has been found that few programs address these concerns. First, coaches who have not participated in the sport are rarely given effective instruction, even

though this guidance is what surveyed coaches ask for the most (Houseworth, Davis, & Dobbs, 1990). Secondly, many youth sport coaches are left to coach an entire team without other individuals to help or do not have a network for mentoring. Finally, while coaches continue to discuss concerns like time, parents, and structure, few youth sports programs seem to be willing to implement necessary changes.

Some of the most important and methodologically sound youth sports research conducted to date has focused on the approaches coaches take while interacting with children. Ron Smith, Frank Smoll, and their colleagues (see Smith, Smoll, & Curtis, 1979; Smoll, Smith, Barnett, & Everett, 1993) have been the leading researchers in this area. In this line of both correlational and experimental research the investigators have looked at how the feedback and behaviors exhibited by a coach influences athletes' sense of satisfaction with the coach, season, and teammates. More specifically, it was found that youth coaches who underwent Coach Effectiveness Training (CET) to learn techniques for encouragement, effective skill instruction, and avoiding punishment were perceived in a different way than those coaches who did not undergo the training. Coaches trained in "positive coaching" techniques were better liked by their athletes and these athletes had more satisfaction with their teammates and season. Athletes of CET trained coaches also exhibited higher levels of motivation. Further, those children who started the season with lower self-esteem and played for a CET trained coach showed a greater increase in self-esteem over the season

than those with lower self-esteem playing for non-trained coaches. An interesting note on this line of research is that the win-loss records of the team seemed not to impact athletes' perceptions of satisfaction with coach and season. Thus, this research has shown that training coaches to be more positive and encouraging leads to a number of positive psychosocial consequences.

Coaching style training such as CET has also been found to affect attrition rates in youth sports. In a follow-up investigation, it was found that those athletes who played for untrained coaches reported an attrition rate of 26% (typical rate in youth sports); whereas those athletes playing for a CET trained coach reported rates of only 5% (Barnett, Smoll, & Smith, 1992). Players who had played for these positively oriented coaches also exhibited lower anxiety levels (Smith, Smoll, & Barnett, 1995). These findings clearly substantiate the powerful affect of positive coaching behaviors on both keeping youth active in sports and ensuring positive psychosocial consequences such as enhanced esteem and lower anxiety.

While this line of research on "positive coaching" has made an impact on understanding feedback and coaching behaviors, there are also several implications for youth coaching education. The literature is clear that coaching education is not being fully embraced in all youth sport settings (Houseworth, Davis, & Dobbs, 1990; Stewart & Sweet, 1992). Numerous studies have investigated coaches' perceptions of educational opportunities. Survey and questionnaire data from samples of coaches, ranging from 39 to almost 800 respondents depending on the study, found some interesting results. First,

programs are not perceived to benefit most coaches. Further, coaching education material is not seen as comprehensive, not effective, or not adequately preparing these coaches for their myriad roles (Houseworth, Davis, & Dobbs, 1990; Silvestri, 1991; Stewart & Sweet, 1992). As stated earlier, many youth sport coaches are volunteers who do not have time to give to coaching education. Despite much concern about the educational needs of these coaches, experts agree that youth sport coaching education should focus on the following:

- A comprehensive approach providing both strategies for sport development (e.g., skills and drills, growth and maturation, training techniques) and strategies for dealing with social issues (e.g., communication, feedback, parents) (Silvestri, 1991).

- Providing ongoing education that allows for not only the foundational knowledge but also strategies for dealing with sport and league specific concerns. This process would allow coaches to refresh previous knowledge and learn updated practices.

- In a series of interviews with coaches it was found that an environment allowing coaches to network with, learn from, and mentor each other was critical for development (Bloom, Durand-Bush, Schinke, & Salmela, 1998). Peer learning and evaluation can greatly enhance coaching education formatting.

    Due to the scope of youth sport experience, the development and background of the typical youth sport coach has not been easily identified. While

some research has examined the general background and needs of these coaches, more research would aid in understanding the overall role and needs of the youth sport coach. Positive approaches to coaching have been identified through research of feedback patterns and coach-athlete interactions. Furthering this line of research into application of all youth sport contexts would be beneficial. Finally, coaching education practices have had limited success but have not found much support on a wide-scale effort (Gilbert & Trudel, 1999). Identifying educational needs have helped researchers in better understanding formats to reach this diverse audience.

Effects on Child Athletes

Cumming and Ewing (2002) noted, "Athletes who feel that they have little say or control over their decisions to play sports typically report less interest in sport, lower levels of enjoyment and satisfaction, and are more prone to drop out of sport."

Tremblay (2001, p. 3) cites a Michigan State University Youth Sports Institute study about the primary reasons to explain why many youngsters give up sports:

- They lost interest
- They were not having fun
- It required too much time
- The coach played favorites
- The coach was a poor teacher
- They got tired of playing
- Too much emphasis on winning

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- They wanted to participate in other non-sport activities

- They needed more time to study

- There was too much pressure.

He goes on to say: "The reasons kids quit are proof that youth sports organized by adults have clearly failed our children. Adults have assumed control of every aspect of youth sports, and in the process have taken the games and the fun away from the children" (p. 3). Further, as Hedstrom and Gould (2004, p. 26) point out, "The feedback and behavior of a parent can affect how long a child stays involved in a sport as well as how a child perceives his or her abilities."

As Shields et al. (2005, p. 44) explain about their study dealing with sport, "There were three sets of participants involved in investigations: youth, coaches, and parents." Three questions were posed to "youth sport participants, coaches, and parents in three regions of the United States" (p. 44):

(1) How frequently do athletes, coaches, and spectators exhibit ethically problematic behaviors in youth sports, as perceived by the young athletes themselves and by parents and coaches? (2) What are the normative expectations for these same behaviors among athletes, parents, and coaches? And (3), what attitudes toward sportsmanship behaviors are held by youth, parents, and coaches? In addition to focusing on potential problem areas, we inquired about the frequency of selected sport-related pro social behaviors.

The present study was designed as a pilot survey of the self- and other-reported behaviors of youth, coaches, and parents. The focus of the survey was on

ethically-relevant behaviors, expectations, and attitudes tethered to issues of fairness and respect (Shields et al., 2005, p.44).

In another study by Murphy (2009), 35% of the young athletes in a recent survey of 1,183 athletes aged eleven to eighteen planned to stop playing the next year. Nearly half of the parents of 418 athletes aged six to ten surveyed reported that their child was not interested in sport any more.

In a survey by Murphy (2008), of 5,800 children who had recently stopped playing a sport, the top five reasons for stopping were: I lost interest, I was not having fun, it took too much time, the coach was a poor teacher, too much pressure. When asked what changes might get them involved in sports again, frequent responses included: "If practices were more fun," "if I could play more," and "if coaches understood players better." "What these findings suggest," says Murphy (2008), "is that the way our youth sports programs are organized and run fail to meet the needs of children: in other words, they are adult- rather than child-centered."

Outcomes and Emotions

Hedstrom and Gould (2004, pp. 28-30) provide recent information regarding youth sport and emotions. As they reveal:

In addition to motivation and competence, parents have been shown to be tremendously influential in shaping children's emotional outcomes from sport participation. Parents have been identified as a common theme in research examining sources of stress for youth sport participants (Gould, Eklund, Petlichkoff, Peterson, & Bump, 1991; Gould, Wilson, Tuffey, & Lochbaum,

1993; Scanlan & Lewthwaite, 1984). Thus, research on children's emotional outcomes has focused on and been linked to how children perceive parental pressure, expectations, and evaluation.

The most frequently studied emotional responses to sport participation for youth have been anxiety and enjoyment, which parents commonly influence. Administering anxiety assessments before and after matches, Scanlan and Lewthwaite (1984) examined the factors that influenced competitive stress of 9- to 14-year-old wrestlers. Children's perceptions of significant adult influences were shown to be a predictor of pre- and post-match anxiety. Specifically, the authors indicated that "pre match worries about failure and perceived parental pressure to participate" were predictors of pre-match stress (p. 208). Young wrestlers who perceived high levels of parental pressure to wrestle were found to have high state anxiety prior to competition, thus, emphasizing the influence parents can have on their children's emotional and affective responses to sport participation.

In addition to perceived parental pressure to participate in a sport, parents can influence their children's emotional responses through evaluation, particularly unfavorable evaluations, and the expectations they have for their children. Passer (1983) found that "fear of failure and fear of evaluation are significant sources of threat in competitive trait-anxious children" (p. 172). In particular, children with high competitive trait anxiety (a personality orientation that predisposes one to see evaluative situations as threatening) worried more often about receiving

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negative evaluations from significant others than their low competitive trait anxious peers. It was also found that players with high trait anxiety worried more than players with low trait anxiety about "not playing well, losing, and being evaluated by parents, coaches, and teammates" (p. 172), which emphasizes how significant others, including parents, can influence a child's affect related to sport participation.

A young athlete's emotional response was further shown to be related to his or her perceptions of parental pressure by Hellstedt (1988). Hellstedt (1988) found that the "degree of parental pressure is related to the type of affective reaction from the young athlete" (p. 143), with high levels of parental pressure related to negative athlete response. The athletes were also shown to be apprehensive about how their parents would react emotionally, such as with disappointment or disapproval, when they did not perform well. In addition, according to these young athletes, continued sport participation was due, in part, to the desire to please their parents, further emphasizing the strong influence parents have on their children's sport participation as well as their emotional responses to such participation.

Although parental influences and behaviors can have negative effects on a young athlete's sporting experience, these behaviors can also be perceived as encouraging and positive and result in positive affective responses. For instance, even though Hellstedt's (1988) study on parental pressure on young ski racers found negative affective responses to parental pressure, he also found that those

skiers who perceived their parent's involvement as supportive and positive had more positive reactions to sport participation. Skiers that indicated they were "very pleased" with their parents' attitude and involvement felt that their parents would not be upset when they did not perform well and showed enthusiasm for sport participation.

In addition, Scanlan and Lethwaite (1986) found that the youth wrestlers who perceived "greater parental and coach satisfaction with their season's performance… and more positive adult sport involvement and interactions" felt greater enjoyment and satisfaction throughout the season whereas those wrestlers who did not have the same perceptions of significant others did not enjoy those benefits (Scanlan & Lewthwaite, 1989, p. 25). Furthermore, the researchers also found that if wrestlers perceived less pressure from their mothers as well as fewer negative maternal reactions to their performance, they experienced more season-long enjoyment.

In summary, the role that a parent plays in his or her child's youth sport experience can have a profound influence on the child's reaction to sport participation. The amount of parental involvement and pressure perceived by a child as well as the importance children feel parents place on participation in sports can have a negative or positive effect on a child's emotional responses, goal orientations, competence, as well as length of sport participation.

Youth Sports and the Problems of Parents

Continuing with their research, Hedstrom and Gould (2004, pp. 30-31) offer this take on past studies dealing with the degree of involvement parents have towards youth sports:

While most of the research on parental involvement in youth sports has focused on examining how parental expectations and behaviors influence involvement, motivation, and emotional reactions of young athletes, studies looking at problems parents might create in the sport experience are only now being conducted. This is an important area of new research because of the increased media accounts of parents arguing with coaches, confronting referees, and even fighting at youth sports contests.

In a survey of 154 varsity high school sport coaches, representing seven sports, it was reported that problems with parents were one of the most frequently cited issues encountered in coaching high school athletes today (Gould, Chung, Smith, & White, 2006). Similarly, in a national survey study of junior tennis coaches (Gould, Lauer, Rolo, Jannes, & Sie Pennisi, 2005), it was perceived that 36% of parents hurt their child's tennis development. On a more positive, note it was reported that 59% of parents were perceived to have a positive influence on their child's tennis development. Finally, it was found that the five biggest parent-child interaction problems perceived included:

- overemphasizing winning
- holding unrealistic expectations

- coaching one's own child

- criticizing one's child and,

- pampering their child too much

Parents, then, are seen to have both positive and negative influences on the youth sports experience.

Specializing in Youth Sport

Developing Young Athletes

Hedstrom and Gould (2004, pp. 34-39) provide a useful perspective regarding the development of youth athletes:

Youth sport participation not only provides a developmentally sound and rewarding experience for children in which they can develop numerous physical, social, and psychological benefits, but for some children it serves as an important opportunity to develop athletic talent. It is ironic, then, that the athletic talent development process is seldom understood and this often results in inappropriate practices (Gould & Carson, 2004).

While more research is needed in this area, especially in relation to how athletic talent is cultivated and developed by parents and coaches, several large-scale studies (Bloom, 1985; Csikszentmihalyi, Rathunde, Whalen, & Wong, 1993) on talent development across a variety of domains (e.g., music, art, science, sport) have provided a foundation to this knowledge base.

Bloom (1985) was one of the first to study talent development in world-class performers. Specifically, 120 individuals (renowned artists, academicians,

musicians, mathematicians, swimmers, tennis players) at the top of their fields were studied. A good deal of consistency was found across domains in terms of the investments of tangible and intangible resources found to be essential in nurturing promising individuals with talent. In addition to financial support and transportation to numerous competitions and performances, parents found ways to provide social-emotional support (e.g., facilitating a disciplined involvement while avoiding excessive expectations and pressure). The parents also served as models for disciplined independence and fostered disciplined independence in their talented children. That is, parents often modeled hard work while supporting their children; parents reinforced their children for working independently and expected those behaviors from them. Bloom's results, then, clearly show that talent development is a long-term process that involves more than just the talented person, but also a strong support system with parents playing a primary role.

Interestingly, Bloom (1985) also found that these talented individuals' careers fell into three distinct stages:

- The early years, or what has been labeled the Romance Phase;

- The middle years, labeled the Precision Phase; and,

- The later years or the Integration Phase.

In the early years (Romance Phase) the child developed a love for the activity, had a great deal of fun, received encouragement from significant others, was free to explore the activity, and achieved a good deal of success. Parents also instilled the value of hard work and doing things well during this time.

In the Precision Phase, an experienced coach or teacher promoted long-term systematic skill learning in the talented individual. The focus was on technical mastery, technique, and excellence in skill development.

Finally, in the later years or the Integration Phase an individual continued to work with a master teacher (coach) and practiced many hours a day to turn training and technical skills into optimal performance. There was a realization that the practiced activity was significant in one's life. These phases occurred over a 15 to 20 year time period and each person moved through each phase in a developmental sequence, without skipping phases.

More recently, Csikszentmihalyi, Rathunde, Whalen, and Wong (1993) chronicled the development of 208 outstanding high school students who were identified by their teachers as having strong talent in art, athletics, mathematics, music, or science. These students were tracked from their first to final years of high school for the purpose of determining how they differed from their peers whose talents were more average. These investigators also wanted to determine why some of the students developed their talent and others failed to do so. Based on their findings, it was concluded that talent must be viewed as a developmental process rather than an all-or-nothing phenomenon and it cannot be developed unless it is valued by society and recognized and nurtured by parents, teachers, and coaches. Specifically, these investigators suggested that for talent to develop information or knowledge relative to the tools of the domain must be provided. Motivation is also needed and is greatly influenced by support and encouragement

of those in the field and family members. Finally, discipline is needed that allows the talented teen to study their domain long enough to acquire the skills needed for superior performance.

Csikszentmihalyi and colleagues' (1993) also found that talent development involves the acquisition of a mature personality during the teenage years—a personality that allows the individual to cope with all the opportunities and obstacles that they will face in their chosen endeavor. To nurture his or her gift, the talented teen must have discipline, as well as talent. Talented individuals were also found to spend more time practicing the activity, less time working outside of school, less time socializing with friends, more time on hobbies, and less time doing chores than their less talented counterparts. The investigators also concluded that:

- Teenagers cannot develop talent unless they are intrinsically motivated and enjoy the activities of their domain while working hard to achieve their goals;

- Conflicts inherent in the development of talent (e.g., making difficult choices and coming to terms with the implications of their individuality) cannot be avoided; and,

- No child succeeds unless he or she is supported by caring adults.

Talented teens were also attuned to the quality of teaching in their talent area, giving very specific details about positive and negative behaviors of their

most and least favorite teachers and coaches. Lastly, talent development came easier to youngsters who learned habits conducive to talent development.

Côté (1999) studied four elite athletes and their families (mothers, fathers, siblings) and found that families, particularly parents, play an important role in elite athlete development as athletes progress through what were identified as sampling, specializing, and investment years. Results of in-depth interviews revealed that during what they labeled the sampling years (ages 6 –13) the child participated in multiple sports for fun. Parents encouraged such involvement, fueled by a belief that sport contributed to the child's overall development, allowing and encouraging the child to sample a wide variety of sports. During the specializing years (ages 13-15), parents became committed supporters as their child focused on a limited number of sports. Little pressure was placed on the child to participate in any one sport and parents took on more of a follower/supporter versus a leadership role, making financial and time sacrifices to optimize their child's participation. Lastly, during the investment years (ages 15 and over) the child focused on deliberate practice in an effort to pursue performance excellence. In this phase parents also provided important sources of social support, especially when their child faced adversity or had to deal with setbacks. Little pressure was placed on the child in these years.

Finally, Gould, Dieffenbach, and Moffett (2002) recently examined the development of psychological talent in Olympic champions. Specifically, 10 U.S. Olympic champions (winners of 32 Olympic medals) were interviewed, as were

one of their coaches (n = 10), and a parent, guardian, or significant other (n =10).

A battery of psychological inventories was also administered to the athletes. It

was found that the athletes were characterized by: the ability to cope with and

control anxiety; confidence; mental toughness/resiliency; sport intelligence; the

ability to focus and block out distractions; competitiveness; hard work ethic; the

ability to set and achieve goals; coachability; high levels of dispositional hope;

optimism; and adaptive perfectionism. Results also revealed that a number of

individuals and institutions influenced the athletes' psychological development

including the community, family, the individual him or herself, non-sport

personnel, sport environment personnel, and the sport process. Coach and family

influences were perceived to be particularly important. Ways in which parents and

coaches influenced the athletes were both direct, such as teaching or emphasizing

certain psychological lessons and indirect, involving modeling or unintentionally

creating certain psychological environments. Results supported Bloom's (1985),

Côté's (1999) and Csikzentmihalyi, et al.'s (1993) talent development research,

demonstrating the important roles parents play in athletic talent development.

While this initial research on athletic talent development is encouraging,

much more research is needed. Particularly useful would be studies that examine

positive and negative effects of parental involvement and ways parents interact

with coaches. Along these lines Gould, Lauer, Jahnnes, Rolo and Sie-Pennisi

(2005) recently studied the careers of young professional tennis players (by

interviewing the players, their parents and coaches) for the purpose of identifying

parenting practices across one's career. Most interesting was the finding that parental support and commitment was critical to player development. Parenting practices were also reported to differ across Bloom's phases of talent development. Especially interesting was the finding that fun and fundamentals were emphasized during the early years and that parents had few expectations or goals relative to a career in tennis.

The above finding is important because some experts (Gould & Carson, 2004) have argued that many parents are taking a professionalized approach to initial youth sports involvement by skipping the critical romance phase, and overemphasizing winning, rankings, single sport involvement and downplaying the role of fun. At this time, the long term ramifications to such an early professionalization orientation are not known. However, from what is known about the talent development literature, a concern is that without developing the love of the game children will not have the motivation to sustain the effort needed to pursue excellence that has been found to take as many as 10,000 hours or 10 years of deliberate practice to develop (Ericsson, 1996).

Specializing Early

Finally, Hedstrom and Gould (2004, pp. 39-41) present their take on the issue of when youth athletes start to solely focus on a single sport early on:

A topic related to talent development in young athletes is early specialization and year round training in one sport. Over the last two decades the practice of specializing in a single sport on a year-round basis has increased. In a survey of

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152 high school athletic directors, for example, over 70 percent of the respondents felt that sport specialization was on the rise (Hill & Simons, 1989). Moreover, the most important factors identified as contributing to the increased emphasis on specialization included:

- Pressure from coaches;

- High parental expectations;

- Athlete's desire to participate in championships;

- Encouragement from college recruiters; and,

- A societal emphasis on specialization.

While specialization is certainly on the rise, the exact number of young athletes specializing is not known and research on the topic is badly needed. In one of the few studies conducted on the topic, Hill and Hansen (1987) found that 101 high school football coaches felt that athletes who specialize are more likely to have refined athletic skills, participate in an all-star game, and receive a college scholarship. However, these same coaches also indicated that athletes who specialize are under more pressure to excel, experience fewer meaningful social interactions, and experience a less diversified high school sports experience.

Other concerns voiced in response to specialization include the fact that athletic performance at one age in childhood does not accurately predict performance at a later age. Thus, one might not specialize in the sport they have the ultimate potential, seeing that 98% of athletes who specialize will never reach the highest levels of the sport (Wiersma, 2000). From a sociological perspective,

early specialization is thought to isolate the young athlete from peers and interfere with normal identity development. Finally, early specialization is thought to be related to an increase in burnout or withdrawal from sport as a result of chronic stress (Wiersma, 2000).

Some of the most interesting studies on early sport specialization were conducted in the former Soviet Union, which extensively practice the early identification of athletes and selection into single sports. Barynina and Vaitsekhobvski (1992) reported that age group swimmers who specialized at a later age advanced at a greater rate than swimmers who specialized early. Similarly, Bompa (1995) cited several Soviet studies that showed early sport specialization did not lead to the performance advantages people thought, and in fact, there was an advantage to early sport diversification.

This literature does not suggest that individuals not specialize in sport. Indeed, given Ericsson's (1996) work on the amount of time it takes to develop expertise (10 years of 10,000 hours of deliberate practice) and what has been learned from tracking stages of elite athletes' development (Bloom, 1985; Côté, 1999) in order to develop their talents, athletes must and should specialize. The critical question is at what age young athletes should do so. Professionals are concerned that specialization is occurring at too early of an age. Moreover, little scientific evidence is available to support or refute the risks that may be involved in early specialization. Preliminary evidence does indicate that while early specialization has some distinct advantages, it may have negative physical,

psychological, and social effects on a child. For this reason, groups such as the American Academy of Pediatrics (2000) urge caution when it comes to early sport specialization. They also stress the importance of making efforts to provide young athletes, their parents, and coaches with knowledge and recommendations that will help them avoid the pitfalls of early specialization.

Summary

Given the various topics and concerns addressed in this review of related literature, Murphy (2008) puts it best:

Despite [the] problems, I still believe that youth sports programs can do a great deal of good for children and for families. There are many positive aspects of organized sports for children.

But if we are to improve the programs we offer to our children, we need to acknowledge and confront the problems. Not only do we need to understand that youth sports are not just "games for kids," but we also need to understand the important roles they play in our society and the powerful psychological pressures they exert on children, families, and communities. We need to realize that youth sports programs are for adults as much as children—perhaps more so. Until we recognize this fact, we will not be able to organize programs that meet the needs of these involved adults and best meet the children's needs (Murphy, 1999).

The emphasis on winning gets out of control when overzealous parents become aggressive in their quest for being number one. Throughout previous written works, recent events have shown that parents have become increasingly

hostile at youth sports events, and as we see, the results can be devastating. As stated previously, the most notorious example of adult violence in youth sports was ten years ago in Reading, Massachusetts. Michael Junta was convicted of beating fellow hockey parent Michael Costin to death during an argument (Kurtz, 2002).

Throughout the literature review, one recurring theme is prevalent: The worst thing about kid's sports? The parents! Remember, parents can either make or break a child's sporting experience. Children are always watching, observing and learning. They are more likely to do what you do than do what you say!

Kids play sports because they are fun, and the related literature clearly documents that kids quit sports when it stops being fun. When adults overemphasize performance and winning, it creates more pressure on kids, which leads to a "zero fun factor" and yet another by-product: sport attrition. The reality is that kids can and do burnout because of the over involvement of their parents.

"Sport," according to Hanson (2009), "provides an important opportunity to teach vital life skills to children. Parents have the opportunity to enhance the experience for their children and to promote these positive lessons. From what we hear from sports associations and clubs, the reality of many sports today, is parents promoting the wrong lessons to their children."

While it is a small minority of coaches, parents, and players who cause trouble and perpetuate violence, it is prevalent. Bob Bigelow (as cited in "Problem," 2010), a nationally known youth sports speaker and counselor, stated: "These are children playing

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games. . . . You are a visitor and a guest to their games. You are not competing for your children. They are competing against each other. This is a very hard message to sell."

The presence of "Mr. and Mrs. Sideline" can cause tension to the point of negatively impacting a child athletes' athletic performance. As Murphy (2008) observes, "Parents who [behave] in ways that upset [a] young athlete or that upset the coaches or officials, can create tension not only for the family, but also for all the children on the field, and often for all the parents watching." A young athlete (as cited in Murphy, 2008) stated: "It wasn't even my mom and dad yelling all the time that made it miserable; it was the other parents screaming at the coach and the referee that took the fun away."

A recurring mantra in the literature is to "keep sport fun for kids." Parents are afforded a great position to offer constructive criticism to their young athletes, coaches, and officials (Murphy, 2008). Parents serve multiple roles for their child: role model and hero. Children learn and emulate self-control by watching adults display good self-control skills sets. The age-old saying is true: actions *do* speak louder than words. As Murphy opines, "If you tell your child to display self-control and to respect authority but your child sees you losing your temper and yelling at an official at his game, all your efforts will be undermined." Parents need their own preseason, a primer if you will.

Children are visual and they learn and mimic what they see. "A parent or coach who remains calm and thoughtful [in stressful, high intensity, and (at times) confrontational] situations [can provide] young athletes with an appropriate role model for handling emotional situations," according to Murphy (2008). Children are prone to

learn from their own observations of adult behavior than they are through verbal

instructions on how to behave appropriately.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

The aim of a secondary analysis is to address new research questions by analyzing previously collected data. In addition this is a research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text or data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns" (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1278).

Parental involvement in the lives of young athletes is increasing. After setting the stage for the sometimes intrusive role of parents and reasons why children may halt their sports participation, a multitude of related research concerns were identified in Chapter 2. In Chapter 3, I explain how relevant research was acquired. Then I furnish a description of the qualitative/rhetorical methodology which addresses my research question and how the analysis was conducted.

Grounded Theory

I utilized grounded theory with regards to my methodology. Grounded theory is used to generate or discover a theory. Its focus is to obtain an abstract analytical blueprint of a phenomenon related to a particular situation (e.g., how parents are impacting youth sports and what can be done). Regarding units of data, I searched through a disparate selection of relevant academic and popular articles, sports films, and newspaper accounts. I decided to concentrate on scholarly (e.g., books, journal articles) and popular media (e.g., newspaper, magazine, internet-based articles). The primary method of my analysis

was a continuous coding process. Analysis began with line by line open coding of data and comparing incidents to each other in the data. I was able to "code the data in every way possible and [ask] a set of questions of the data: 'What is this data [showing]?', 'What category does this incident indicate?', What is actually happening in the data?', 'What is the main concern being faced by the participants?', and 'What accounts for the continual resolving of this concern?'" (Glaser, 1998, p. 140). This coding analysis led to refining and specifying any borrowed "stand out concepts" (Strauss & Corbin, 1994).

In short, the method used a reflected, inductive process of breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing and categorizing data. The labeled phenomena were "violence," "not fun anymore," and "dropout rates."

With regards to examining literature, I entered phraseology, brief titles and sentences such as sideline rage, adults ruin youth sports, child athlete burnout, history of parental violence at youth sporting events, and problems with youth sports into websites such as Google, Google Scholar, library.gmu.edu/articles/ (within Pro Quest, EBSCO Host, SPORTSDiscus), and www.law.gmu.edu/library/catalog.

The next step in analysis involved axial coding aimed to make conceptual connections between a category and its subcategories. Data were assembled in new ways after open coding, by making connections between categories moving from inductive to deductive analysis.

Then, concepts and sub-concepts were further defined by selective coding, an integrative process of selecting the core category, systematically relating it to other categories, validating those relationships by searching for confirming and disconfirming

examples, and filling in categories that needed further refinement and development (Strauss & Corbin, 1994).

The process of identifying relevant research was really more of a variation of a case of qualitative data: using existing data to find answers to research questions that differ from the questions asked in the original research (Hinds et al., 1997, p. 408).

Rhetorical Cluster Criticism

Qualitative content analysis involves a process designed to condense raw data into categories or themes based on valid inference and interpretation. This process uses inductive reasoning, by which themes and categories emerge from the data through the researcher's careful examination and constant comparison. But qualitative content analysis does not need to exclude deductive reasoning (Patton, 2002). Generating concepts or variables from theory or previous studies is also very useful for qualitative research, especially at the inception of data analysis:

- To condense extensive and varied raw text data into a brief, summary format.

- To establish clear links between the research objectives and the summary findings derived from the raw data and to ensure these links are both transparent (able to be demonstrated to others) and defensible (justifiable given the objectives of the research).

- To develop of model or theory about the underlying structure of experiences or processes which are evident in the text (raw data).qualitative research methods introduced in this book are often employed to answer the whys and how's of

human behavior, opinion, and experience—information that is difficult to obtain through more quantitatively-oriented methods of data collection.

Rhetorical cluster criticism was the method used to analyze recurring themes in the secondary data discourse. Sonja Foss (1996, p. 3) defines rhetorical criticism as "a process of thinking about symbols, discovering how they work, why they affect us, and choosing to communicate in particular ways as a result of the options they present." Specifically, rhetorical cluster criticism is used by the critic to "discover a rhetor's worldview" (p. 63). Further, "in cluster criticism, the meanings key symbols have for a rhetor are discovered by charting the symbols that cluster around those key symbols" (pp. 63-64). The idea of how certain words and ideas coalesce was first introduced by Kenneth Burke. To help critics, through examining a rhetor's language, one can begin to make identifications and discover a persuader's world views. Since "the equations or clusters that a critic discovers in a rhetor's artifact generally are not conscious to the rhetor" (p. 64), it is the job of the analyst to locate critical insights about explicit or implicit connections between terms and concepts. Guided by the spirit of grounded theory and the tools of rhetorical cluster criticism, Chapter 4's analysis will address the research question previously advanced in the introduction: *What do recurring discourse patterns regarding violence in youth sports and the genuine lack of "fun" reveal about the pervasiveness of these concerns addressed in the youth sport literature?*

CHAPTER FOUR: CLUSTER ANALYSIS OF YOUTH SPORT DISCOURSE

Sport participation tends to drop off around age 12, a critical time for developing social skills and self-esteem. Some studies (e.g., U.S. Anti-Doping Agency, 2012) estimate that roughly 35 percent of children drop out of sport each year, although some might join another sport or return years later.

Seefeldt et al. (1991) studied reasons for dropping out among youth sport programs. The leading reasons were: (1) no longer interested in the sport (2) it was no longer fun (3) the coach played favorites or was a poor teacher; and (4) desire to participate in other activities. Studies by Chambers (1991) revealed that lack of playing time, dislike of the coach, too much competition, too many other activities in which to participate, and lack of enjoyment are reasons for youth ending their sport participation. Other researchers have found similar reasons why girls and boys dropout of organized or team sports—for example, family/money issues, health problems/ injuries, or interest in other activities. Other reasons may include lack of playing time, dislike of the coach, or too much competition. It is from this backdrop that I examine the sorts of stated and implied reasons for these issues associated with why youth athletes cease sport participation. Based largely on youth sport participation literature reviewed in this Project, a rhetorical cluster analysis of two recurring themes—violence in youth sports

and the genuine lack of "fun" associated with sport. Key terms are identified as are associated clusters, and a comparison and discussion of the discovered clusters is offered.

Cluster Theme 1: Violence in Youth Sports

Key Term: *Violence*

Parents and caregivers have consistently emerged in the research literature as one of the most significant positive influences on children's play and sport. There are cases, however, where parents and caregivers put excessive pressure on their children to excel, through abusive and violent behavior towards children, or at times ignoring or showing indifference towards them. In extreme cases, parents have been involved in homicide related to youth sport (UNICEF, 2010).

One example of how parental sport violence has been described is by Amy Shipley (2013) of the Ft. Lauderdale *Sun Sentinel.* Noting the rising occurrence of such events in Florida, she observes, "Once considered isolated and unusual, parental violence now erupts more than once a month—and with surprising severity—on South Florida's youth ball fields." Interestingly, "parental violence" is clustered around the term *erupts*. This conjures synonyms like *explodes* and *blows up*. Speaking to the parental environment at many youth sporting events, Shipley reports:

At the youngest levels of serious competition, parents perch their lawn chairs and umbrellas at the edges of unpatrolled ball fields sized to fit the smaller participants.

The result, referees and umpires say, can be a free-for-all of behavior. They say the new youth sports landscape has created a generation of parents who

have invested so much time, cash and emotional energy in their kids' careers

some feel entitled to belittle, argue and—in the most extreme cases—act out with

violence.

Here, the idea of parental violence is explained in a "new youth sports landscape." This

landscape is also referred to as "unpatrolled ball fields." Such language suggests a

wilderness metaphor. It is on the edges of this landscape where "parents perch their lawn

chairs and umbrellas." This location is rife for a "free-for-all behavior" environment. So

when things do not go as parents wish—"parents who have invested so much time, cash

and emotional energy in their kids' careers"—this can lead to boorish behavior. To put

another way, it is a case of parents "acting out" or *behaving badly*. Ironically, the parents

frequently exhibit "acting out" behavior normally associated with children.

Fear is often clustered with the discourse clustered around descriptions of

parental sport violence. Notes Shipley (2013), "Threats or verbal abuse, game officials

say, are far more common than physical attacks, yet they can be just as frightening. More

than a half-dozen local referees and umpires told the Sun Sentinel they had been

threatened or followed to their cars by incensed parents." While Shipley's article did not

report on instances of physical violence, it must be reiterated that those local referees and

officials did express concern about their safety because of "threats or verbal abuse." This

is reinforced by parental actions like being "followed to their cars by incensed parents."

And while physical attacks were relatively rare in the state, "a spike in verbal and

physical abuse prompted one Florida youth soccer league to vow this month to suspend

coaching staffs when parents misbehave. Yet most leagues lack formal policies for

dealing with out-of-control parents on the sidelines." A telling cluster around parental sport violence is with the idea of the futility of punishment against the "out of control parents." Still, the incentive to "suspend coaching staffs when parents behave" makes controlling incidents more of a priority.

Even though very little about negative parental violence is actually reported in the press, Shipley (2013) reminds us that:

Arrests are rare and few cases are publicized. Embarrassed victims often decline to press charges. Sport officials wary of bad publicity downplay misconduct. Leagues and tournaments uncertain whether they have the authority to discipline moms and dads try to restore order and move on.

Shipley's language choices demonstrate the reasons why many incidents of parental sport violence are seldom in print or else broadcast. Indeed, why would a victim of such an event come forward because of being "embarrassed"? Since there is no clear cut answer to the punitive authority youth sport leagues have to reprimand parents, they "try to restore order and move on." *Moving on*, then, is the typical course of action when it comes to badly behaving parents. Shipley goes on to describe the conditions that conspire to create negative parental behavior: "Sports officials said problems with moms and dads peak at ages 8-12, the youngest levels of competitive youth sports, where the parent presence is high, security is sparse and fields are small enough to ensure that no provocative remark goes unheard." Especially with several fervent parents in attendance and little in the way of safekeeping, it is little wonder why they act out in public.

As a final consideration of parents who provoke or incite violence at youth sport venues, Shipley (2013) discusses the current state of affairs:

Though there is no comprehensive national or local data on parental misbehavior at youth games, the South Florida United Youth Soccer Association, which has taken a hard-line stance against misconduct for nearly a decade and publishes data on alleged offenders, offers rare insight into the phenomenon. The association, an affiliate of the state governing body that has 700 member teams, suspended just four parents from 2004 to 2007.

It's banned 40 since.

Yet the number of suspended parents has declined since peaking in 2011, which officials say suggests parents are beginning to absorb the league's zero-tolerance message.

Here, Shipley's concern is with not only the incidence of unruly sports parents but with doing something about it. More specifically, she advocates the potential for disciplining parents. But if the South Florida United Youth Soccer Association only "suspended just four parents from 2004 to 2007," then it points to the difficulty in making punishment more frequently. While there seems to be a sliver of hope because "it's banned 40 since," it is problematic to rely on the numbers. The positive takeaway would be the suggestion that "parents are beginning to absorb the league's zero-tolerance message."

A final article by Keith Perry (2014) is instructive. While Amy Shipley's (2013) account lamented the fact that little punishment was inflicted upon parents, the situation is different in the United Kingdom. Parental maltreatment at youth sporting events is not

just a phenomenon seen stateside, but the problem seen worldwide within juvenile athletics.

As Perry (2014) reports:

Helen Grant, the [UK] sports minister, has warned overzealous 'touchline parents' they face being arrested if their support for their children at football matches gets out of control and the Football Association has launched a new course to educate people about the perils of causing disturbances at matches.

Again, this course of action greatly differs from the simply-shrug-and-move-on approach so common in the United States. Perhaps the threat (or promise) of arrest will make those parents think twice about engaging in violence. The UK parents are termed *overzealous*. But even overzealous parents can take advantage of a "course to educate people about the perils of causing disturbances at matches." So even though legal action can happen, parents can also be taught about what is acceptable behavior. This would be along the lines of *anger management*.

Perry (2014) addresses the numbers of recent incidents: "Last season (2012-13) there were around 4,000 misconduct charges and 491 referee assaults at both adult and junior level, figures from the FA show." Because of such cases, "the new FA 'awareness' course for people found guilty of a misconduct charge is similar to motorist awareness courses for speeding drivers." This language is revealing because it is associated with other types of offenses—not unlike the cases of *road rage* as previously mentioned in the review of literature. *Awareness* is key in understanding the perspective being taken in the

UK; if sport parents are cognizant of their behavior at events, then it is hoped that it will be avoided in the future.

Other instances of bad sport parent behavior are reported by Perry (2014). His article begins with this observation:

Watching your child score the winning goal only then to be denied glory by a referee can be a crushing blow for children and adults alike. But as emotions run high, disagreement about a referee's decision can turn to violence at junior matches—with parents marching onto the pitch to confront and abuse linesmen.

By introducing the situation as he does, Perry is able to entice reader interest while putting into context the very real dangers associated with violence at youth sport events. The terms which cluster around violence are *disagreement*, *emotions running high*, *parents marching onto the pitch*, and *confront and abuse linemen*.

When it comes to repercussions from behaving badly, "Clubs where parents or managers are found to have committed misconduct can be fined or face other sanctions" (Perry, 2014). Instituting the new program promises an initial rollout: "The FA 'awareness' pilot scheme, will take place across 10 county associations including Essex, Surrey and Oxfordshire." Perry brings up the kinds of punishment that can be handed down for misbehavior (e.g., "fined or face other sanctions"). Again, it is hoped that being taught about the consequences of negative parental actions will be done via the "awareness" program.

On a positive note, Perry (2014) offers his take on the reduction of bad parental incidents: "The Football Association said bad behaviour across all affiliated football has

improved. It said the 4,000 charges should be put in the context of 113,000 teams and 1.6 million players involved in matches last season." By bringing up the actual charges and number of teams and players, the effect is to suggest a relatively small occurrence of such events. Still, laments Ms. Grant (as cited in Perry, 2014), "sadly, there are still occasions where we see bad behavior at junior matches from adult spectators on the touchline, which is absolutely unacceptable." She goes on to say,

> Parents should "set an example" and instead focus their energy on encouraging players rather than getting carried away and abusing officials. She said offences committed by parents watching matches would "remain a matter for police."

Cluster Theme 2: Fun

Concerns have been expressed about children's organized sport experiences for some time. Originally published in 1975, the book *Every Kid Can Win* notes, "Participation in sport has tremendous potential for personality development and socialization. Sport and games present countless opportunities to reinforce society's desirable norms and values" (Orlick & Botterill, 1975, p. 34). Interviews by Orlick (2002) with children showed that children played sport primarily for fun and for the action. As sport became more serious, these children clearly indicated that they did not like being yelled at, getting little game-time, or feeling as though they were failures. The authors also cited evidence that showed that children, as they grew older, were already withdrawing from a range of organized sports.

Concern over attrition rates in children's sport has been ongoing for researchers, and a number of studies have focused on children's attrition rates and reasons for

withdrawing from sport. However, conflicting evidence has emerged (Gould, 2007; Weiss & Amorose, 2008) and many of these studies have focused on the older teenage age group. Children appear to have multiple reasons for either participating or deciding not to participate in organized sports (Biddle, 1999), and Gould (2007) noted that other larger scale studies (e.g., Sapp & Haubenstricker, 1978) have suggested that children may temporarily withdraw from sport, engage with other sports, or withdraw for reasons that differ from the more negative ones referred to by Orlick and Botterill (1975). Although there are a range of reasons as to why children withdraw from sport, studies have consistently shown to varying degrees that a lack of fun, an over-competitive sporting environment, and perceived low levels of competence are regular contributing factors to early withdrawal (Gould, 2007).

Key Term: *Fun*

Fun is most often associated with pure enjoyment, or play for play's sake. For instance, Orlick and Botteril (1975) observe, "for a lot of kids, winning isn't everything—*being able to take part and have fun means much more* [authors' emphasis]" (p. 31). When listing reasons addressing "pro-style" justifications for the sometimes-abrasiveness of coaches towards young players, the authors note that youngsters are disappointed "because it isn't any *fun* [authors' emphasis]" (p. 31). The emphasis here and associated terms is on the idea of fun and children simply not being allowed to have it.

Similarly, Stenson (2004) reports on Avery Faigenbaum's take on why youths cease sport participation: "'It's not fun anymore.' They wanted to have a good time,

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make friends and learn something new…. But they make the game all about hard-core training and the final score, and many kids will sideline themselves." Cumming and Ewing (2002) caution, "Parents must not lose sight of why youth participate in sport. A study of over 25,000 children from across the US revealed that the most popular reason for playing youth sports was 'to have fun.'"

Continuing with the concept of fun, Lisa Cohn (2002) makes the case for "playing for the love of it." Regarding parental figures, she says "savvy sports parents not only strive for balance, they try to ensure kids take part in baseball, hockey, or soccer for the joy of it." Of course, children who play sports experience conflicting advice on whether to indeed play "for the joy of it." As cited by Jane Weaver (2004), the National Council on Youth Sports reports that "almost 30 million boys and girls under 18 play some kind of organized sport like Little League or soccer." Further for many of them, "it's a way to make new friends and play a game they enjoy." But well-meaning parents can push their children to play sports in hopes of being a future professional athlete. To put another way, Bruce Svare (as cited in Weaver, 2004) surmises, "more parents view their kids as an economic investment that has to be translated into something later on." Reinforcing the refrain from a National Alliance for Youth Sports 2001 study, Weaver (2004) says "70 percent of American kids who sign up for sports quit by the time they were 13. The reason? They said it wasn't fun anymore."

The fun aspect of youth sport participation cannot be ignored. It is something, as has been identified in different ways through key terms, that is important to youngsters. Take for instance an essay by Catherine and Loren Broadus (1978), former coaches and

parents of Little Leaguers. After their 10-year old was dejected when his coach would not allow him to take part in batting practice—even though he had attended other practices—he made up his mind to quit the team: "'Mother, I'd like to quit Little League and play minor league for fun'" (p. 357). As the authors explained:

He was satisfied with his decision. He really wanted to play baseball for fun. He was tired of watching the other dancers at the ball, even though he was dressed for the occasion and listed as an honorable guest. He would rather dance in the honky-tonk than watch at the ballroom (p. 357).

Interestingly, the *fun* term is used with the dancing terms (i.e., *honky-tonk, ballroom*). The message is clear: youth participants want to enjoy themselves.

While burnout is not one of the primary key terms considered, it bears mentioning that Shane Murphy (2008) opines on a recent survey reporting on why so many children simply drop out of sports. The top reasons were: "I lost interest; I was not having fun; It took too much time; Coach was a poor teacher; and Too much pressure." As for what changes might encourage them to rejoin sports, among the responses most often provided were "If practices were more fun; If I could play more: and "If coaches understood players better." In this case, fun is clustered around *dropout, burnout, pressure, having more fun, and playing more*.

In his extensive review of children's sport attrition, Daniel Gould (2007) discusses descriptive and theoretically based research on the topic while developing a conceptual model. There is one component of his model which bears notice—the

motivation for sport withdrawal. He supplies both personal and situational factors as variables. As he says:

> Personal reasons include psychological factors like interest in other activities, no fun, and competitive stress. Physical factors include such items as a lack of skill improvement and injury, and situational factors include things like program emphasis, poor organization, and social support from significant others. Finally, although the reasons cited for withdrawal are subdivided into categories, they do overlap considerably (p. 408).

While Gould's research is complex, even this excerpt notes *fun* along with *competitive stress*, *lack of improvement*, and *program emphasis*. In many ways, these reasons and terms resonate with others found in different sources.

"Having fun," according to Murphy (1999, p. 60), is the main reason for playing sports given by children ages five to seventeen. He goes on to say:

> Although pleasure and enjoyment are obviously critical factors in a child's decision to keep playing a sport, fun is very difficult to define; and it is difficult to build fun into all youth sports programs. For example, is it fun to be a runner, to go out on two- and three-mile runs, and to work hard at improving speed over longer and longer distances? Many students I speak to feel that it is. They love running, and it becomes a passion for them. But many other children feel differently. They dislike running. It makes them feel slow and clumsy and tired, and they avoid it whenever possible, even if it is part of training for another sport they enjoy. So is running fun? The answer is, it depends. That's why it is

important to understand for each individual child what it is about the sports program they enjoy that makes it fun (p. 60).

Here, fun clusters with phrases associated with the activity. But, more to the point, is the non-definitive term *depends*. It alludes to the very problem of identifying a single construct for fun. However, it allows both the term and concept to be variable.

But make no mistake about it; the continuance of fun is a central tenet for many who opine on youth sport. Orlick and Botterill (1975, p. 106) are explicit about it:

It's gotta be fun!—whether it is during practices, games, teaching of fundamentals, drills, exercises, scrimmages, or whatever. In order to achieve our goals and to get the impact we want out of these activities, we have to find creative, innovative, interesting, and different ways of presenting them. Ironically, diverting the focus from winning to fun results in happier, more enthusiastic youngsters, who inevitably perform better and do more winning. It's usually much easier to do a good job if you enjoy doing it.

And a final except from Griffin (2014) is instructive. Citing research done by student leadership development expert Tim Elmore, he offers supportive statements parents can make while they watch their children participate in sports:

Before the Competition:

- Have fun.

- Play hard.

- I love you.

After the Competition:

- Did you have fun?

- I'm proud of you.

- I love you.

Fun is clustered with *parenting, happiness, and love*.

CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The advantages and perks of participating in youth sports are many: from the physical benefits of getting daily exercise to the fellowship forged from working hard and working together to achieve a common goal. But mostly, participation is about having fun while learning about sports.

There are three problems identified with regard to parents and youth sports, where each phenomenon is a conduit to the next. Violence which leads to lack of fun, which often leads to a cease in participation (i.e., burnout). Has the incidence of violence in organized youth sports actually reached epidemic proportions? Yes. What is the primary reason that youth burn out or else drop out of sport? Again, it is because it is no longer "*fun*," one of the recurring themes throughout both the youth sport literature and my cluster analysis. While winning is certainly an objective most youth sports teams hope to achieve, the more important goal is for children to discover the pleasures of sport; and if their overzealous mother or father is taking the game, and winning too far by berating an opposing coach, referee or umpire, oftentimes the child can learn bad habits, resort to violence themselves, and get turned off by a sport. In short, a child can simply burn out, barely into their formidable years.

Communication scholar Sonja Foss (1996, p. 19) explains that the conclusion of a rhetorical analysis ends "with a discussion of the contribution the analysis makes to

answering the research question that generated the analysis." Originally, I posed the question: *What do recurring discourse patterns regarding violence in youth sports and the genuine lack of "fun" associated with sport reveal about the pervasiveness of these concerns addressed in the youth sport literature?* By examining how words and phrases "cluster" around youth sport venue violent events and the mere act of enjoyment (or fun) as discussed in the youth sport literature, I think it is telling just how often the language reinforces recurring concepts. Certainly, the word choice used in association with *violence in sport* and *lack of fun* serve to reinforce the frequency and intensity of descriptive terms in relation to identified themes. There is little doubt of the advantages of youth sport participation. Despite the negatives associated with such participation ceasing to be an enjoyable endeavor, the bulk of the literature would seem to bear out the overall rewards for youngsters who endure. Thus, this rhetorical cluster critique has provided an alternate way of confirming much of what has been written on youth sport participation.

Future Research

In this analysis, I focused on two recurring themes from a rhetorical cluster perspective: youth sport violence and lack of fun. Specifically, my cluster analysis of youth sport literature focused on violence and fun themes. Had time permitted, a study of burnout themes would have been useful. So it would be beneficial for researchers to examine clusters related to *burnout*. Related to the youth sport literature, further research should focus on the root(s) of the problem (e.g., sideline rage). Are parents who may be former athletes with failed dreams now trying to harness those long forgotten glory days

vicariously by way of their children? Do parents realize that the percentage of kids making it to the big leagues or even a starting lineup within a Division I school slim? What goes on at home, behind closed doors? Is there the potential for abuse or background anger? With the "win-at-all-costs," "go-go-go deadlines to be met," and trying to "one-up-the-Johnsons'" mentality, are parents seeing their children's athletic failures as a indictment on themselves—a reflection of who they are? Do children have and are they prodded into non-sports interests? Or is sports participation, in particular with males, seen as the manly thing to do—something to "make the old man proud?" These are questions that, I believe, have been answered to some extent; but future research inquiries are needed to further understand and develop strategies to stem the tide of sideline rage.

Recommendations for Sport Parents

There is no shortage of books addressing the topic of what parents can do to be better, ideal sport parents. As Fish and Magee (2003, p. 1) observe:

> Today more than ever sports-playing kids need their parents to be aware of the many pressures and pressures they face on the playing field-including a relentless pressure to win that parents may or may not have experienced. Sports playing kids need moms and dads to be aware of their own motivations and desires, which motivate them as sports parents.

While I reviewed the youth sport literature and performed a rhetorical cluster analysis of two recurring themes, I also have a number of recommendations and suggestions based on both the literature and my own experience as a youth sport participant. First, when a

parent's life revolves around sport and competition, the stress and frustration can display itself in the child athlete and the parent. Second, efforts to help parents behave better at youth sporting events must continue. In my opinion, it must be mandatory for parents to attend classes or sign a behavior contract before the season commences. These parents and other adults need a "preseason" for parents—a primer, if you will. Third, preseason summits and subsequent contracts of good behavior serve those parents who are trying to set good examples for their children and care about good sportsmanship. What does a contract mean to them, the sports parent? Will they take it seriously? If they sign their name, they are giving their word that they will adhere to its guidelines. As least the contract gives coaches, referees, other parents, and anyone looking to uphold good sportsmanship a goal standard. This, essentially, provides a leg to stand on when parents and other adults act like children themselves. While calling for a contract is a good idea in theory, it may be more difficult in practice to enforce one. "Even the most effective prevention programs cannot prevent 100% of targeted misconduct," says Doug Abrams (2013, para. 17). Further, "the best that these programs can do is to make misconduct the isolated exception rather than the rule. When a parent or coach fails to respond appropriately to education efforts designed to prevent abuse of . . . officials who are doing the right thing, the league or association should react with suspension or other disciplinary action" (para. 17).

Fourth, as the case of Thomas Junta illustrated, there must be serious legal ramifications when the sideline verbal rage turns to physical assault and, at times, death.

Fifth, cameras are everywhere, and "Mr. and Mrs. Sideline," mom and dad, need to remain cognizant that every move they make and every word uttered can and will be recorded for all to see if such legal recourse is needed post-sideline rage. Much parental rage is aimed at referees and officials. They are almost as essential to the functioning of the game as they drop the puck, prepare for tip off, and signal the first pitch. Indeed, referees are under siege, subject to constant verbal insults, physical threats, chased off the field, attacked, hospitalized and, tragically, killed.

Sixth, within a preseason summit/parental primer, the referee crew(s) must be present as they are an integral component to the game itself. Official crews tend to rotate and there is turnover; hence, new umpires will be thrust into the competitions. If possible, at pre-game meetings, parents, coaches, and referees should be introduced. Expectations and outcomes/penalties must be stated. Whether such policies would curtail parental violence is speculative. An extensive search for evidence of parental sanctions in the UK as mentioned in Perry's (2014) article failed to come up with conclusive cases. However in Wilmington, Delaware in November 2013, a father was arrested after assaulting a referee at his son's soccer game ("Police," 2013). Marcos Jimenez "was charged with abuse of a sports official/assault in the third degree, harassment, conspiracy in the third degree and offensive touching. Jimenez was arraigned and released on $2,500 unsecured bail" ("Police," 2013). Perhaps sports officials and law enforcement authorities are beginning to take such incidents more seriously. Regardless, at pre-game meetings, the lines of communication should be open. There has to be a go-to official or representative

at every event to serve as a conduit/liaison between all involved so that cooler heads prevail.

Seventh, in the end, it must be remembered that these are *games* played by *children*, with the words "game" and "children" highlighted in bold letters. For most, if they win or lose every game or match of the season, it will not impact what college they attend or their future regarding potential income. And eighth, remember: athletes, parents, and coaches participate in youth sports because they love it! Do not ever forget to have fun and provide a positive experience. Enjoy the ride that is FUN!

In closing, despite the negatives, there is immense value of youth sport participation. As stressed throughout this analysis, the key is fun and social/physical development for young athletes. To be sure, there are a number of issues associated with youth sport participation. In this study, the two major ones were violence in sport and the sheer lack of fun for youngsters. The same issues also emerged as self-identified rhetorical cluster themes. Finally, it would seem that there is a need to develop strategies to maintain the sense of fun, or playing for play's sake, and minimize incidents of violence. Sport sociologist Jay Coakley (2007, p. 149) offers this assessment:

> No sports program can guarantee that it will make children into models of virtue, but the adults who organize and control youth sports can make improvements to existing programs. This means that organized sports for children *are* worth the effort—when the adults put the children's interests ahead of the programs' organizational needs and their own needs to gain status through their association with successful and highly skilled child athletes.

I believe Coakley is correct; youth sports *are* worth the effort. Hopefully parents get the

message and remember to keep sport a fun and worthwhile endeavor for kids.

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BIOGRAPHY

Jason E. Carlson was born in Fairfax, Virginia in 1970. He grew up in San Diego, California and moved back to Virginia in 1989. Jason attended Northern Virginia Community College in the early 1990s before taking an extended break prior to returning to school at George Mason University in 2007. He earned his Bachelor of Science degree in Health, Fitness, and Recreation Resources with a concentration in Sport Management in 2011. He then pursued the Master of Science degree in Sport and Recreation Studies with a concentration in International Sport Management, graduating in Summer 2014. Jason contributed a biographical article on Harold "Red" Grange in 2012 which appeared in Volume 3 of *Sports Around the World: History, Culture, and Practice (*edited by John Nauright and Charles Parrish, Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, pp. 245-247). He also presented a paper on his preliminary findings (with R. Pierre Rodgers), "The Kid vs. 'Mr. and Mrs. Sideline Parent': A Rhetorical Cluster Analysis of Youth Sport Participation Discourse" from this Project at the Communication and Sport Summit, New York City, in March 2014.