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Parent-child communication in sport: Integrating theory into research

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Parent-child communication is integral to the acquisition of positive developmental outcomes from sport. This position paper offers useful interdisciplinary frameworks and theories for future researchers as they investigate questions pertaining to parent-child communication in organized youth sport. We propose such work is enhanced when grounded in family, human development, and interpersonal communication theory and literature. Specifically, theoretical frameworks from these areas assist researchers in determining salient research questions, choosing appropriate methodologies, and most importantly in the interpretation of findings. As researchers attempt to further understand parental influence in sport, the role of specific family processes like communication will shed light on the potential mechanisms that drive youth's developmental outcomes. This knowledge will likely lead to better outcomes for youth participating in sport, and better relationships among family members in and out of the sport context. By gaining greater understanding of this phenomenon, researchers will have a more complete set of tools to educate parents, administrators, and coaches in an evidence-based way.

Organized youth sport is the most prominent form of amateur athletics. Indeed, millions of children participate in youth sport across the country each year (National Council of

Youth Sports, 2008). Importantly, youth sport provides a context in which children develop numerous positive physical, cognitive, and social-emotional skills (Fraser-Thomas, Côté, & Deakin, 2005).

That said, it is also a context associated with many negative outcomes, including injury, burnout, and aggressive behavior (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2005).

The outcomes that result from youth sport participation are largely dependent upon how adults manage the youth sport experience for children (Warner, Dixon, & Leierer, 2015). There is growing recognition among scholars of the vital importance of adults in youth sport. One of the most salient roles adults play within the context of youth sport is that of sport parents (e.g., Côté, 1999; Dorsch, Smith, & McDonough, 2009; Dunn, Dorsch, King, & Rothlisberger, 2016; Fredricks & Eccles, 2005; Harwood & Knight, 2009). Organized youth sport is a nearly ubiquitous extracurricular context for family interaction, and reflects the growing number of families that make sport an integral part of their collective lives. In light of this, it is important to understand the factors that impact the parent-child relationship in organized youth sport, and how this may permeate everyday life outside of sport. Communication is a salient aspect of the parent-child relationship that influences both the parent-child relationship and the child's sport experience (Holt, Tamminen, Black, Sehn, & Wall, 2008; Knight, Boden, & Holt, 2010), and it is imperative to understand and learn how to improve parent-child communication to enhance children's and parents' organized youth sport experiences. Theoretical constructs, mechanisms, and explanations provide

frameworks to understand and improve parent-child communication within the youth sport context.

Holt and colleagues (2008) highlight a significant limitation in parent sport communication research: the limited use of theoretical frameworks to ground the research. Explanatory and descriptive studies, while illuminating several important facets of parent-child interaction in sport, have failed to offer theoretical explanations for their findings (see, Bloom & Drane, 2008; Bowker, Boekhoven, Nolan, Bauhaus, Glover, Powell, & Taylor, 2009; Hennessey & Schwartz 2007; Omlil & LaVoi, 2006). Very few researchers have applied a lens informed by family, human development, and interpersonal communication theory (c.f., Dorsch, Smith, Wilson, & McDonough, 2015a; Dorsch, Smith, & McDonough, 2015b; Holt et al., 2008). These frameworks, when taken in light of the significant contributions made by more "traditional" sport psychology theories, have the potential to greatly enhance scholars' understanding of communication among family members surrounding the context of sport (Holt et al., 2008).

Communication is a pervasive context in which the development of multiple individuals overlaps and interacts. What happens in one context of an individual's life will influence their family members and the individual's development as a whole (Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Rosa & Tudge, 2013). For example, parent-child communication in youth sport settings may

influence the child's development in other domains such as academics. Therefore, it is important to understand family communication and interaction in the context of youth sport, as it will likely influence other family relationships, as well as the specific developmental trajectories of each family member. Furthermore, incongruent communication in a family system may lead to familial conflict and a lack of individual well-being (Becvar & Becvar, 2006). This suggests that if a parent is communicating negatively in the sport context it may lead to dysfunction in the family outside of sport, even if they use positive communication in other contexts. It is likely that communication plays a prominent role in the parent-child relationship on and off the field and court, and that it is important to understand parent-child communication within youth sport. In understanding these interactions, positive youth development can be fostered through sport, avoiding negative youth experiences.

In this article, we argue that scholarly work in youth sport would benefit from the incorporation of family, human development, and interpersonal communication theories. These frameworks will not only provide greater explanatory power, but could inform research aimed at fostering positive youth development as well as healthy family interaction. Our review will address what is currently known about parent-child communication in sport from recently published research studies.

Next, suggestions will be made regarding specific family, human development, and interpersonal communication theories that are ideally positioned to enhance sport theory and research. One theory from each domain will then be used as an exemplar to demonstrate how integration can occur. Scholars are then tasked with utilizing these frameworks to discover ways to enhance the positive development of children and families. Applying family, human development, and interpersonal communication theories to parent-child communicative processes in sport will enrich research findings and offer directions for the improvement of parent-child communication in multiple amateur sport contexts.

Parent-child communication in sport

Research suggests that parents' sport-related communication occurs in many different contexts, including before, during, and after children's competitions. Although most research has examined parent communication on the sideline at children's sporting events, important interactions also take place while riding to and from practices and competitions, or at other times when the parent and child are together (e.g., at home or between games). A corpus of emerging research has shed light on what parents are communicating during these interactions (e.g., Dorsch et al., 2015a; Holt, et al. 2008; Jeffery-Tosoni, Fraser-Thomas, & Baker, 2015).

Parent-child interactions can range from positive and uplifting to negative and demeaning (Holt et al., 2008; Jeffery-Tosoni et al., 2015). Contrary to anecdotal evidence and suggestions that parents shouldn't be involved in youth sport (Pink, 2015), parent-child communication in youth sport settings has been described as largely positive, with only 5-10% of parent communication during games being classified as negative (Bowker et al., 2009; Dorsch et al., 2015a; Holt et al., 2008). Moreover, it is important to consider that parent comments cannot simply be dichotomized as positive or negative; rather, they may also be direct and instruct performance (Holt et al., 2008; Omli & LaVoi, 2006). The motivation behind why parents make certain comments varies, and previous literature has identified that empathy with a child, parent goals, the sex of the parent and the child, the competitive level, the emotional intensity of the situation, and a parent's knowledge of sport can all impact parent-child communication in organized youth sport (Bowker et al., 2009; Dorsch et al., 2015a; Holt et al., 2008).

Beyond parents' observable behavior, it is also important to understand how children *perceive* parental communication during competition (Jeffery-Tosoni et al., 2015; Knight et al., 2010). Gottman, Notarius, Gonso, and Markman (1976) expressed that how a message is received is more important than how it is delivered. It is plausible, then, that the way a child *receives*

a message is more salient than the way the parent intended it to be received. In a study designed to assess these perceptions, Omli and LaVoi (2006) found that children perceive parent communication differently (and often more negatively) than the parents themselves. Indeed, researchers have found that a significant proportion of communication during competition is either instructive and performance contingent (Holt et al., 2008), or corrective (Bowker et al., 2009) in nature. Findings consistently indicate that children want their parents to refrain from giving specific and repeated advice (e.g., in-game adjustments or strategies), blaming others for a loss, yelling after mistakes, arguing with others, encouraging cheating, and saying mean things or cursing (Knight et al., 2010; Omli, LaVoi, & Wiese-Bjornstal, 2008). While adults may interpret this range of comments as neutral, or even positive in some cases, children may in fact perceive them as negative or degrading. In support of this, parental instruction from the sidelines at sporting events has been found to lead to negative outcomes for children (Teques, Serpa, Rosado, Silva & Calmeiro, 2016).

Children tend to prefer certain forms of communication behaviors from their parents in sport (Jeffery-Tosoni et al., 2015; Knight et al., 2010; Knight & Holt, 2014). Specifically, while refraining from repetitive or negative direction, children prefer that parents are present and positive at the competition and cheer loudly (Jeffery-Tosoni et al., 2015; Knight et al., 2010).

Specifically, children report that they want their parents to communicate their goals, comment on effort and attitude, provide practical advice, be encouraging, and to match nonverbal behavior with verbal comments (Knight et al., 2010; Knight & Holt 2014). Knight and Holt (2014) found that when parents and children communicated their goals effectively, children reported having better experiences in sport, as indicated by higher self-reported enjoyment and success. In an earlier study, Knight, and colleagues (2010) interviewed children about the behaviors they wanted their parents to engage in during tennis competitions. Children expressed that they wanted their parents to comment on things under the athlete's control, such as hustle and attitude. In addition, athletes indicated that parents should focus communication on broad themes like effort, instead of specific instruction targeting skill and technique. Results highlight the children's desire for parents to offer positive and practical advice (e.g., how to prepare for competition), while still affording their children autonomy of sport-specific behaviors (e.g., warm-ups and cool-downs) in lieu of instruction and/or criticism.

In sum, parent-child communication can be very impactful in the context of youth sport. However, when considering the impetus for parent communication, it is important to note that many parents' stated goals do not align with their observable behaviors (see Dorsch et al., 2015a). If one assumes that open communication should

enhance the parent-child relationship (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002a), incongruence in parents' expectations and communicative behaviors may undermine those same relationships. Although the corpus of research demonstrates that most parent comments are positive (Bowker, et, al., 2009; Dorsch et al., 2015a; Jeffery-Tosoni et al., 2015; Omli & LaVoi, 2006), negative comments can be powerful, having been shown to impact the child's overall experience (Jeffery-Tosoni et al., 2015; Omli, et al., 2008). As suggested by Omli and colleagues (2008), parents should be "supportive parents" instead of "demanding coaches" or "crazed fans" (p. 31). Indeed, scholars suggest that parents and children should regularly discuss the goals the child holds in sport, then act and communicate in a way that is consistent with those goals (Dorsch et al., 2015a; Knight et al., 2010).

Building from the Extant Research

Research on parent-child communication in youth sport has bolstered understanding of what parents are saying and what children are hearing during competition. However, it is our position that such work would be enhanced if it were grounded in the family, human development, and interpersonal communication literature. Specifically, theoretical frameworks from these areas could assist researchers in determining salient research questions, choosing appropriate methodologies, and most importantly, in the interpretation and

applicability of findings. We suggest that future researchers interested in parent-child communication in organized youth sport adopt a theoretical and/or analytical approach grounded in one of these three domains.

Past research examining parent-child communication in organized youth sport has largely failed to explicate a theoretical lens through which parent-child communicative interactions are viewed. Although a range of survey, interview, and observational research has greatly enhanced present understanding of parent-child communication in sport, findings are limited due to the lack of reliance on a theoretical framework. Theory provides a rubric of understanding, both for the reader, and for scholars who wish to extend the work in the future (Ravitch & Riggan, 2016). For example, Dorsch and colleagues (2015a) drew conclusions on the management of parental goals via the multiple goals perspective from the interpersonal communication literature (Caughlin, 2010). Holt and colleagues (2008) made assumptions about the youth sport context in general, and how it influenced parent communication via implementation of bioecological theory (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). These studies offer rich conclusions and multi-layered discussions – largely due to the fact that they were grounded in extant theory and understanding. Future research should follow this lead, examining parent-child communication in sport

through family, human development, and interpersonal communication theory lenses.

Family Theories

Due to the nature of the family as a system, youth sports can influence everyone in the family not just the child participant (Blazo, Czech, Carson, & Dees, 2014; Dorsch, et al, 2009, 2015b; Hellstedt, 2005). Researchers should examine the influence of communication in sport within family theory frameworks to better understand why certain communication styles emerge, and the effect of communication on the family. Although there are many family theories that could be used to examine parental communication in youth sports (e.g., social exchange theory (see Emerson, 1976) and symbolic interactionism theory (see Reynolds & Herman-Kinney, 2003)), family systems theory lends itself well to the research of youth sport communication.

Exemplar: Family systems theory.

Families have been described as interconnected social systems (Broderick, 1993; Cox & Paley, 1997). White and Klein (2008) describe a system as a set of objects (e.g., family members) and the relations between those objects and their attributes. Further, they address the influence of the environment (or suprasystem; e.g. youth sport) on the interactions of the family system. Each member of the system is assumed to be interdependent, and continuously influenced by and influencing the other members, both directly and indirectly. Family systems theory intuitively

lends itself to parent-child communication because of its focus on attributes, interactions, and reciprocal influence. Indeed, family interaction in the context of organized youth sport may impact the parent-child relationship as well as specific relational and individual outcomes for the parent and child.

Family systems theory has several tenets that can appropriately applied to an analysis of parent-child communication in the sport context. A primary assumption of the theory is holism (Broderick, 1993), which stresses that systems (families) and the associated qualities of each member should be looked upon as “whole” and not collections of the individual parts. Therefore the communication and parenting styles, as well as the personality and interactive feedback of children can all be seen as part of one big whole, a system that can be assessed integrally. The ups and downs associated with family interactions tend to return to a homeostasis or equilibrium in negative feedback loops (Broderick, 1993). Like perspiration to assist the body in cooling off, family members can diffuse or ameliorate problematic interactions by way of improved communication skills, apology, and forgiveness.

A specifically communication-based assumption of systems theory is that ambiguous and/or confusing communication can lead to relationship problems (Becvar & Becvar, 2006). A specific example that is commonly observed in sport family communication, is double-

bind communication (i.e., when verbal and nonverbal communication do not match; Mehrabian & Wiener, 1967). Knight and colleagues (2010) found that young athletes desire parents’ nonverbal communication to match their verbal communication. This finding lends support to the appropriateness of family systems theory as an explanatory model in the sport parenting literature. Future research could adopt a family systems lens to more clearly explain the effects of parent-child communication in organized youth sport. For example, such a study may examine not only how parent-child communication in sport influence child outcomes, but parent and familial outcomes as well. Does parent-child communication influence parental and/or marital well-being? Does parent-child communication in sport effect the parent-child relationship, or does it only influence sports related outcomes? Such questions may be answered through the integration of a family systems theory lens.

Human Development Theories

Youth sport researchers are primarily interested in the development of individuals within sport (Dorsch et al., 2009; Fraser-Thomas et al., 2005; Vierimaa, Erickson, Côté, & Gilbert, 2012). This youth sport research is generally occupied with understanding developmental outcomes as they occur for individuals through their sport participation. This interest may lie in the general acquisition of life skills, or in the achievement of sport-specific skills related

to the domain of youth sport. Either way, human development theories are useful in determining how parent-child communication influences such outcomes. Although human development theories like sociohistorical theory (see Vygotsky & Luria, 1930) and social cognitive theory (see Bandura, 1989, 1999) could be used to examine parental communication in youth sports, we recommend that bioecological theory lends itself particularly well to the framing of research investigating youth sport communication. Human development theories, especially the bioecological perspective, provide personal and contextual mechanisms and constructs that explain development and communication within youth sport. It is likely that there are factors both within and outside and individual that influence communication in sport, and these theories provide explanatory tools for understanding both factors.

Exemplar: Bioecological theory.

Proposed by Urie Bronfenbrenner in the late 1970s, bioecological theory has undergone consistent change over the years (Rosa & Tudge, 2013). The most mature form of the theory specifies the Process-Person-Context-Time (PPCT) model of human development (Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). Within the PPCT model, four components are said to influence the developmental trajectory of an individual. The primary tenet of this model is that development results from the enactment of proximal

processes, which are defined as “interactions between ... a human organism and the persons, objects, and symbols in its immediate environment” (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994, p. 572). Communication can be thought of as the most common of these interactions, and therefore may be of great import to scholars aiming to address proximal process between parents and children in sport. Bronfenbrenner described three environmental levels in which individuals experience the interactions known as the proximal process, these levels include the *Person*, *Context*, and *Time* (Rosa & Tudge, 2013). The person, context, and time all influence and are influenced by the proximal processes of a developing individual. The parent and child’s personal characteristics, environment, and developmental and historical timing likely influence parent-child communication.

Framing future research through the lens of bioecological theory would help researchers understand how the intersection of the family and sport microsystems, and the proximal process of communication in that context, can influence a child’s outcomes. For example, research could be done to examine how Côté and colleagues’ developmental model of sport participation (DMSP) predicts parent-child communication in sport (Côté, 1999; Côté, Baker, & Abernethy, 2007; Côté & Hay, 2002). The DMSP suggests that children in the sampling stage participate in many sports, and the many reason for playing is to have fun. Children move to the specializing

stage where they focus on one or two sports, and, although having fun is important, the primary focus is on the acquisition of skills. The final stage is the investment stage where children participate in one sport and the focus is on skill development and performance. According to bioecological theory, the proximal process of parent-child communication will likely change across these stages because of the different contexts, timing, and goals of participation. For example, a parent with a child in the sampling stage may focus on encouragement and effort through their communication, whereas a parent in the specialization stage may focus on instruction. The proximal process of communication will also influence children's development within these stages, and determine whether they continue to progress through the three stages of participation. Negative and demeaning communication may lead a child in the sampling stage to never move on to the specialization and investment stage. Bioecological theory provides the specific constructs and mechanisms to determine how parent-child communication will influence the general and sport-specific development of children within these stages.

Future work could also build upon Holt and colleagues (2008) study by examining additional personal and environmental characteristics that influence parent-child communication in sport. Holt and colleagues' (2008) findings suggest that parental characteristics such as empathy and

expertise influence how supportive parent-child communication is during competition. They also suggest that contextual factors like the emotional intensity of the game and league policies will influence parent-child communication during competition. Future work grounded in bioecological theory could build upon this work by examining how parental characteristics like gender, age, and personality influence parent-child communication during competition. This work could also examine how additional contextual factors like sport-type, team culture, and location influence parent-child communication before, during, and after competition.

Communication Theories

Patterns and styles of interpersonal communication (i.e., two individuals creating meaning through communication by sharing the roles of sender and receiver; Trenholm & Jensen, 2013) are becoming increasingly prevalent in the sport and exercise psychology literature (c.f., Cranmer, Brann, & Weber, 2016; Dorsch et al., 2015a), yet many theories generated in the communication literature have been underutilized in explaining communication in sport. Several theories could be used to examine parent-child communication in sport, such as confirmation theory (see Dailey, 2006; 2010; Ellis, 2002) and advice response theory (ART; see Feng & MacGeorge, 2010). We find the most promise in family communication patterns theory as it offers researchers the most

explanatory and predictive power in the youth sport context.

Exemplar: Family communication patterns theory. Family communication patterns theory (FCP) is considered one of the “grand theories” of family communication (Koerner & Schrod, 2014). The theory explains that how individuals are socialized to communicate within their families as children will have some effect on their interpersonal interactions for the rest of their lives (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002b). FCP describes communication patterns within a family and predicts child outcomes based on these patterns (Koerner & Schrod, 2014). FCP suggests that family communication can be categorized along two dimensions (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002a; Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002b; Ritchie & Fitzpatrick, 1990). The first dimension, *conversation orientation*, refers to the degree in which a family allows all members to participate in communication across a variety of topics (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002b; Koerner & Schrod, 2014). Family members in high conversation orientation families feel free to share their thoughts and feelings with one another. The second dimension, *conformity orientation*, refers to the degree that a family expects compliance with familial beliefs and attitudes (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002b; Koerner & Schrod, 2014). Children of high conformity families are expected to adhere to their parents’ views. All families fall somewhere on a continuum on each dimension.

Crossing these two dimensions results in four different types of family communication environments, with varying degrees of conversation and conformity orientations (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002a). First, *consensual* families are high in both conversation and conformity orientation, meaning that these families value open and frequent conversation but decisions are ultimately made by the parents. *Pluralistic* families, high in conversation but low in conformity orientation, value open and frequent communication along with group decision making that involves parents and children alike. Third, *protective* families are marked by low conversation orientation and high conformity orientation. Children in protective families are expected to follow their parents’ rules without discussion or questioning their authority. Finally, *laissez-faire* families are low in both conversation and conformity orientation. Communication in this type of family is infrequent and hierarchy in decision making is not highly valued. Based on the descriptions of these family types, predictions can be made about how youth sport is handled differently in each one. Consensual families are likely highly involved in their children’s sport activities and discuss their enjoyment levels and how they can improve frequently. On the opposite end of the spectrum, laissez-faire sport parents are likely very hands-off when it comes to their children’s involvement in youth sport.

The two dimensions of FCP and the four family types meaningfully predict

family processes and psychosocial outcomes for children, as well as long lasting impacts into adulthood (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2004). For example, children who come from families high in conversation orientation tend to experience positive outcomes such as higher relational satisfaction, closeness with others, and better mental health (Schrodt, Witt, & Messersmith, 2008). Children whose families were high in conformity orientation while growing up are more likely to avoid conflict as well as use more questions and be more self-oriented in conversation (Koerner & Cvancara, 2002; Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 1997). Koerner and Fitzpatrick (2005) argue that children from families high in conversation orientation are more likely to be resilient in the face of stress because children in these families are able to confide in and seek support from their parents. This is important to understand in the youth sport context as sport involvement can put pressure on children, making resilience a useful characteristic for athletes. Children from protective families (low conversation, high conformity) on the other hand are least protected from stress and are more likely to show signs of aggressiveness and suffer from “severe assaults on their self-esteem, high levels of verbal aggressiveness, little comforting, and little acceptance of their self-disclosures” (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2005, p. 25). These youth athletes may benefit from more support from their coaches or teammates

since they are not getting the support they need at home.

FCP also provides insight into why different children react to the same message in different ways (Dorrance Hall, Ruth-McSwain, & Ferrara, 2016; Koerner & Schrodt, 2014). According to Dorrance Hall and colleagues, “the same memorable message may be interpreted differently...depending on a family’s communication patterns” (p. 248). For example, families that emphasize conformity orientation likely have stricter rules and higher expectations that their children follow their advice than families low in conformity orientation. However, these rules coupled with high conversation orientation (i.e., consensual families) might result in a discussion about the reasons *why* the child should follow the advice. As such, the same parental message (e.g., encouragement or criticism) may be interpreted very differently depending on where the family falls on the family communication patterns dimensions. This understanding is important to administrators, coaches, and practitioners as they seek to create programs and interventions. The communication patterns of the family must be taken into account when determining how to organize and implement these programs, because the communication patterns of the family will determine the effectiveness of the program’s ability to gain a response from the children involved.

Youth sport communication research would be enhanced by use of family communication patterns theory based on its descriptive and predictive capabilities. For example, Holt and colleagues (2008) describe a model of parental communication in sport that depicts a continuum from autonomy supporting to controlling. This model has enriched our understanding of parental communication in organized youth sport. However, if future work were to use this model within a family communication patterns theory framework, findings could be even richer in detail and explanatory power. Using this frame, the model could be understood within the context of the family's communication patterns. It would also allow for communication to be understood along two dimensions, instead of a single continuum. For instance, communication that supports autonomy likely relates to families who score high on conversation orientation due to the independent thinking and speaking that is allowed to take place within those families. Controlling communication is likely related to a high conformity orientation because the parents expect the child to adhere to the parents' standards and expectations. If the family communication patterns dimensions were integrated with Holt and colleagues' model additional dimensions may provide more depth of understanding about communication patterns in youth sport.

This review provides an in depth look at the ways in which family communication

patterns theory can be useful in understanding parent-child communication in the youth sport context. Despite our proposal that FCP is likely the most applicable communication theory in this context, researchers should continue to assess the usefulness of a wide range of theories to determine which theories would be the most beneficial to their studies

Discussion

Sport is an important context in which family communication and individual development takes place. Many youth participate in organized youth sport over the course of development, making it an important context to understand. Because of its widespread acceptance as a primary context of family leisure, organized youth sport can positively impact child development, but sport's impact on youth is largely determined by adult participation. This article was intended to review parent-child communication in sport literature, while offering insight into the integration of communication and family theory into this field of research. Parental communication in sport can be very impactful to children, and thus greater understanding of this phenomenon is needed to provide the best developmental outcomes sport can provide. Current research has significantly added to our understanding of parent-child communication in sport, but this niche area could be greatly enhanced via the integration of family and interpersonal communication theory.

Despite anecdotal evidence from sport parents and popular media's portrayal of overly involved parenting in organized youth sport, most research studies suggest that parents are quite positive in the context of their child's sport participation (Bowker et al., 2009; Holt et al., 2008; Omli & LaVoi, 2006). Despite this, children's perceptions of parent involvement remain more equivocal. Many children still perceive negativity and are not pleased with some of their parent's communication during games (Holt et al., 2008). This negativity is commonly aimed at other adults, but is still unwarranted and unwanted. Current research is determining what children are hearing and what they want to hear during their sport competitions. Parents would do well to consider what messages they are sending to their youth in the sport contexts, and the affect it has on their children. Although current research has provided a base of knowledge about parental communication, future research would benefit from integrating family, human development, and communication theory to frame research questions and methodology, to interpret data, and make suggestions to practitioners, coaches, and parents.

Very little research has explicitly integrated theory into the study of sport parent-child sport communication. Importantly, the family, human development, and interpersonal communication literatures offer potentially useful lenses to do just that. As communication in the context of the family

is the very phenomenon many contemporary researchers are seeking to understand, there are many available theories that can be used to frame research on parent-child communication in organized youth sport. These theories provide frameworks for organizing conceptual ideas, methodology, and data analysis. They provide lenses through which researchers can interpret findings, and they provide underlying mechanisms through which sport family communication can be understood. Future work in sport parent-child communication will be strengthened through the adoption of family, human development, and interpersonal communication theory frameworks. Research that integrates theory not only has the potential to explain phenomena, but specifically test theories themselves. Doing so will help future researchers make decisions concerning the best theoretical frameworks to use in subsequent research.

As Côté (1999) noted, parents are an important influence on their children's outcomes in the youth sport context. As researchers, we must further vet this influence using available and appropriate theoretical understanding. The resultant knowledge will lead to better outcomes in sport, and better family relationships in general. Through gaining greater understanding of parent-child sport communication, researchers will have a broader kit of tools to educate parents, coaches, and sport administrators. This understanding will be greatly enhanced

using communication theory in research. By implementing theory from the family, human development, and interpersonal communication literatures, researchers will foster the advancement of family science and the positive development of children in youth sport

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