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Many athletes specialize in one sport before or during adolescence. Although specialization has benefits for skill development, many athletes face negative psychological and physiological consequences like burnout and overuse injuries, especially when they specialize early. In many cases, athletes and their families are seemingly driven by factors like college scholarships or elite performance and agree to specialization without understanding the possible harmful side effects. The purpose of this project was to investigate parents' views on specialization and to use the findings to develop more impactful and relevant approaches to educate families as they determine whether to pursue specialization. Parents, stepparents, grandparents, and guardians of adolescent club volleyball players completed surveys ($n = 184$) and/or participated in focus groups ($n = 25$) to share their understanding of sport specialization, why they might encourage or discourage it, and possible pressures and sources of information on sport specialization. The most common reasons for encouraging specialization were skill development/achieving expert status, passion for/love of the sport, and learning team sport values. The most common reasons for discouraging specialization were excluding other activities, valuing well-roundedness/other sports, and burnout/overuse injuries. Surprisingly, 90% of influential adults in this survey reported that they did not feel outside pressure for their child to specialize. Most (83%) influential adults had not received any information about specialization, and only 31% had ever discussed specialization with their child, reinforcing the need for targeted information to help educate them on the topic and provide suggestions for navigating the decision to specialize as a family.

PARENTAL VIEWS ON SPORT SPECIALIZATION
FOR ADOLESCENT VOLLEYBALL PLAYERS

by

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Committee Chair

To Dad, who always encouraged me to let my light shine, and to my mom, aunt, sister, brother-in-law, nephews, and wife for all of their love and support.

APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation written by Callie E. Phillips has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of The Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

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CHAPTER I

PROJECT OVERVIEW

Sport specialization is defined as intense, year-round training in a single sport with the exclusion of other sports (Jayanthi, Pinkham, Durazo-Arivu, Dugas, & Luke, 2011). In the late 1980s, adolescent athletes began to choose one sport on which to focus rather than participate in multiple sports as previous athletes had done (Hill & Hansen, 1988). Many reasons have been given for deciding to specialize in a given sport, and they appear to be rooted primarily in money, in the form of college scholarships (Bodey, Judge, & Hoover, 2013; Stewart & Shroyer, 2015; Watts, 2002), and pride, such as individual success and family recognition (Lindstrom Bremer, 2012; Rosenwald, 2015). Although scholarships are a major driving force behind the decision to specialize, a harsh reality is that most athletic scholarships only cover some of the costs for school, are contingent on multiple outside factors, and are strongly affected by academic performance in high school and college (Stewart & Stroyer, 2015). Others choose to specialize to keep pace with other athletes pursuing intense training or in response to society's increasing demand for excellence and recognition (Jayanthi, LaBella, Fischer, Pasulka, & Dugas, 2015; Rosenwald, 2015). Body type, overlapping high school sport schedules, and better access to camps and clinics are other long-accepted reasons to adopt specialization (Hill & Hansen, 1988; Watts, 2002). Athletes and their parents, who must guide them through the decision to specialize, have many elements to consider, so it is imperative that parents understand the potential outcomes of specialization that can affect their children in the future. Although early specialization may benefit development in a chosen sport, there are also negative consequences of early specialization, and they can be divided into physical and emotional categories. Physical

consequences are mostly in the form of overuse injuries from repetitive movements, and athletes who specialize are at an increased risk for these injuries as well as the development of chronic conditions (Bell, Post, Trigsted, Hetzel, McGuine, & Brooks, 2016; Jayanthi et al., 2011). Emotional consequences include increased potential for burnout, higher stress levels, and less involvement in sports as young adults (Jayanthi, Pinkham, Dugas, Patrick, & LaBella, 2013; Garinger, Chow & Luzzi, 2018; Russell, 2014). These physical and emotional consequences are especially evident when athletes specialize before adolescence. While many athletes and their families seem to understand and are motivated by the positive outcomes of sport specialization, they are not as aware of the potential negative consequences, leaving many athletes to lament their choice later in life (NCAA, 2015). Despite the mounting evidence on the potential pitfalls of early sport specialization, many families seem to overlook these hazards, and adolescent athletes continue to specialize in one sport (Bell et al., 2016). Moving forward, athletes and their families must have more balanced information on all the possible implications, not just the positive ones, to make informed decisions on specialization.

Relevant Literature

The impetus for increased sport specialization is largely attributed to the research of Ericsson, Krampe, and Tesch-Römer (1993). According to this research, the more a person engages in deliberate practice, the more likely he or she will achieve expert status, and 10,000 hours of deliberate practice (highly structured activity with the implicit goal of skill development) has been identified as the benchmark for elite performance. Sport specialization provides athletes with more opportunities for deliberate practice and repetitions, in addition to increased competition and play. While the Ericsson, et al. study used musicians, deliberate practice was quickly applied to athletics, although there is evidence to show that deliberate practice does not

guarantee increased reaction time, accuracy, visual processes, and other indicators of elite performance in sport (Shea & Paull, 1996).

In addition to sport specialization is sport sampling, or participating in various sport activities before and during adolescence. Côté, Lidor, and Hackfort (2009) assert that sampling can provide self-regulated investment in sport and a healthier level of elite sport participation in adolescence and beyond. Sampling is also associated with higher levels of physical activity and sport participation in young adulthood (Côté, Horton, MacDonald, & Wilkes, 2009; Russell, 2014). Athletes can use sampling to stay active and involved, even if they have a primary sport.

According to Jayanthi, et al. (2013), the prevalence of sport specialization is evidenced by the increasing number of young Olympians and travel sport leagues aimed at athletes as young as seven years old. The NCAA GOALS Study (2015), a collection of data on youth sport participation, academics, and other climate-gauging topics regarding student-athletes, reports that in some sports, such as gymnastics, as many as 87% of athletes had specialized in their sport by age 12, and that women are slightly more likely to specialize by that age than men. For women's volleyball specifically, approximately 23% of athletes had specialized by age 12, and 91% of athletes played on a club or similar team while in high school. A 2016 study reports that 36.4% of high school athletes engage in sport specialization and that school size is a primary indicator of whether athletes choose to specialize (Bell, et al., 2016). Buckley, et al. (2017) also published a study stating that 45.2% high school athletes had chosen to specialize. This increase in the number of athletes who specialize demonstrates the growth of the trend, and further research will continue to study the prevalence of this phenomenon.

Much of the research on sport specialization has been performed by medical and mental health professionals and is related to overuse injuries and burnout. Few studies have explored the priorities or understanding of the possible consequences of specialization that families consider

when deciding to specialize. As a result, few resources are available for athletes, parents, and coaches to use in this process. Because parents of athletes who are approaching or in adolescence now have increased opportunities for their children to specialize in one sport, there is a need to understand parents' working knowledge about specialization and why specialization continues to be a popular choice when sampling could provide the same performance benefits with fewer negative consequences.

Purpose and Aim

The purpose of this project was to identify the factors that parents of adolescent volleyball players consider when they decide whether to encourage or discourage their children to specialize in a primary sport. The aim was to explore parents' current understanding of and experiences with specialization and sampling and the reasons they would encourage or discourage specialization. This information can be used to develop targeted information for parents to help them evaluate options and make an informed decision for their athletes and families. It will also help coaches understand their role in the specialization decision and be better equipped to counsel athletes on pursuing one sport.

Methods

To address the purpose and aim, parents of adolescent volleyball players were invited to complete written surveys and participate in focus groups related to sport specialization.

Participants/Setting

Participants in the survey were parents, stepparents, guardians, and grandparents of volleyball players from a volleyball club in the southeast United States. The parent meeting was conducted at a high school, and the surveys were administered to the parents in groups based on their daughter's age. Another high school's commons area was used for the focus groups while the players practiced in the gym. The parents had driven their daughters to practice, so it was a

natural time for parents to discuss volleyball and their decisions about their children's sport participation.

The only requirement for inclusion in the study was that participants were parents, grandparents, stepparents, and/or guardians of adolescent volleyball players. Each family member of an athlete could provide pertinent information, so inclusion was not limited to one adult per family for the surveys. A total of 184 influential adults of volleyball players aged 9-17 completed a written survey. Of those, 126 participants (68%) were female, and 58 (32%) were male. Their ages ranged from 30-68 years, with the largest number between the ages of 41-50 ($n = 125$, 68%). The sample was predominantly white/Caucasian ($n = 172$, 94%). The other races represented were Asian ($n = 1$), African American ($n = 5$), Hispanic ($n = 4$), and Native American ($n = 1$), and one participant chose not to disclose race. Most ($n = 120$, 65%) of the participants were mothers of the athletes, and 49 (27%) were fathers. The remaining participants were stepfathers ($n = 5$), guardians ($n = 4$), grandmothers ($n = 3$), stepmothers ($n = 2$), and one was both a father and a stepfather.

Focus group participants were recruited at the survey administration and at the practice sessions during which the focus groups took place. A total of 25 volunteers met in four groups containing between five and eight parents to discuss specialization and sampling and offer their current views on them. Most participants (20 of 25) had completed the survey. Sixteen women and nine men participated in the focus groups. Focus Group #1 included six women and two men. Focus Group #2 included three women and two men. Focus Group #3 included five women and one man. Focus Group #4 included four men and two women.

Measures

Parents who agreed to participate in the survey were given a prepared survey packet. The first page was an approved information sheet from the Institutional Review Board at the

University of North Carolina at Greensboro (Appendix A). Following this information was the survey (Appendix B). It contained demographic questions on age, race, and sport participation for both parents and players and open-ended questions on parents' current views about sport specialization, sources of pressure to specialize, and why they would or would not encourage their child to specialize.

Focus groups were conducted in the weeks following to discuss the topics from the written survey. After a review of the definition of sport specialization (the practice of engaging in intense, year-round participation of 10 months or more in a single sport at the exclusion of other sports), the participants were asked the following questions:

Question 1: What are some reasons that parents of adolescent athletes might encourage their child to specialize? Follow-up – What reasons apply to youth in this volleyball program?

Question 2: What are some reasons that parents of adolescent athletes might discourage their child to specialize? Follow-up – What reasons apply to youth in this volleyball program?

Question 3: Have you ever heard about or received any information on youth sport specialization? If so, what was the information, and where did it come from?

Question 4: Overall, is specialization is a good thing for adolescent athletes? Why or why not? Follow-up – Under what conditions would it be good? Under what conditions would it not be good?

Questions for clarification on a response or to further pursue a line of discussion were asked in each group, but all answered each question in the interview guide (Appendix C).

Procedures

This research project was approved by the Institutional Review Board at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro, including review of the recruitment script, survey tool, and

focus group interview guide, as well as verifying permission from the volleyball club director to conduct research at the parent meeting and at the club's practices.

Surveys. The approved surveys were administered at the parent meeting for the volleyball club at a high school in November, 2018. The adults met by their child's age group throughout the day, beginning at 1:00 p.m. After meeting with the club director and coaches in the cafeteria, they were invited to the media center and given the option to participate in the survey. If they agreed to participate, they received a raffle ticket and a pen, if needed, and were seated at the tables in the media center. The format for each group was the same. The approved recruitment script introduced the survey and its purpose. The participants took 10-15 minutes to complete the survey, and a sign-up sheet was circulated to collect volunteer information for the focus groups. After the participants finished, a ticket was drawn for a \$10 Amazon gift card for one of the participants in each session. The surveys were submitted anonymously in a box in the front of the room.

Focus Groups. The focus groups were assembled from parents at the volleyball club's practices on two dates. Two groups were conducted in December, 2018 ($n = 8$, $n = 5$) and two in January, 2019 ($n = 6$, $n = 6$) in a high school commons area. The focus group interview guide was used to facilitate the discussion, and each session was audio-recorded and transcribed. In the week following the focus groups, each participant was emailed a member check to confirm the findings of his or her discussion (Appendix D). Participants were invited to add to or comment on the information in the member check. All of the responses received indicated that the participants agreed with the findings.

Data Analyses. For data analysis, the surveys were each assigned a number, and the demographic data and sources of information about specialization were entered into a spreadsheet and then sorted to determine response frequencies. For the open-ended survey questions, the first

40 surveys were reviewed to develop initial codes from the individual responses. For the questions about encouraging and discouraging specialization, these responses were used to determine common categories into which the remaining survey responses could be coded. There was also an “other” group for responses that did not fit into a particular category. For the question about feeling pressure to specialize, the number of parents who did or did not feel pressure was recorded, as well as the source of the pressure. For the question about any discussions on specialization with their athletes, the number of adults who have discussed it was recorded as well as the topics of the conversations. The data for the questions on encouraging and discouraging specialization were prepared in chart form, and a word cloud graphic was used to depict the topics discussed in the specialization conversations.

Results/Findings

The results of this study include demographic data as well as survey and focus group responses. The results are presented by the questions on the survey.

Parents’ Participation in Youth Sport

A large majority ($n = 156$, 85%) of influential adults surveyed played sports in their youth, and 70% ($n = 109$) of those adults played multiple sports as children. About half ($n = 59$, 54%) of the adults who played multiple sports in their youth now have a child who specializes only in volleyball. Eighteen youth sports were listed by the adults: volleyball, softball, basketball, golf, tennis, cheerleading, track & field, cross country, baseball, dance, gymnastics, soccer, racquetball, wrestling, martial arts, swimming, hockey, and field hockey.

Volleyball was not an overly popular sport for the parents in this study, with 17% ($n = 31$) adults reporting playing volleyball in their youth. Just over half (55%, $n = 17$) of former volleyball players have a child who now specializes in volleyball and 45% ($n = 14$) of parents

who played volleyball have children who are playing more than one sport. Only two adults reported specializing in volleyball. One of their children specializes while the other one samples.

Of the 85 parents who indicated that their child samples sports, 40% ($n = 34$) report that their child plays two or more sports other than volleyball. The remaining 60% ($n = 51$) play only one other sport in addition to volleyball.

Information on Players

The adults completing the survey gave information on approximately 202 volleyball players aged 9-17. Space was provided for up to four children from one family, and because adults from the same families completed surveys in some cases, there likely are some duplicate numbers for the players. Sixteen parents gave data on two children, and one parent listed three. The majority of the players were 13 ($n = 46, 23\%$) and 14 ($n = 46, 23\%$). There were multiple races represented (Asian, Hispanic, Multi, and Native American), but most of the players were white/Caucasian ($n = 186, 92\%$). The following sports were listed as sampled sports: softball, basketball, track & field, golf, cheerleading, mixed martial arts, soccer, running, tennis, cross country, swimming, gymnastics, and dance.

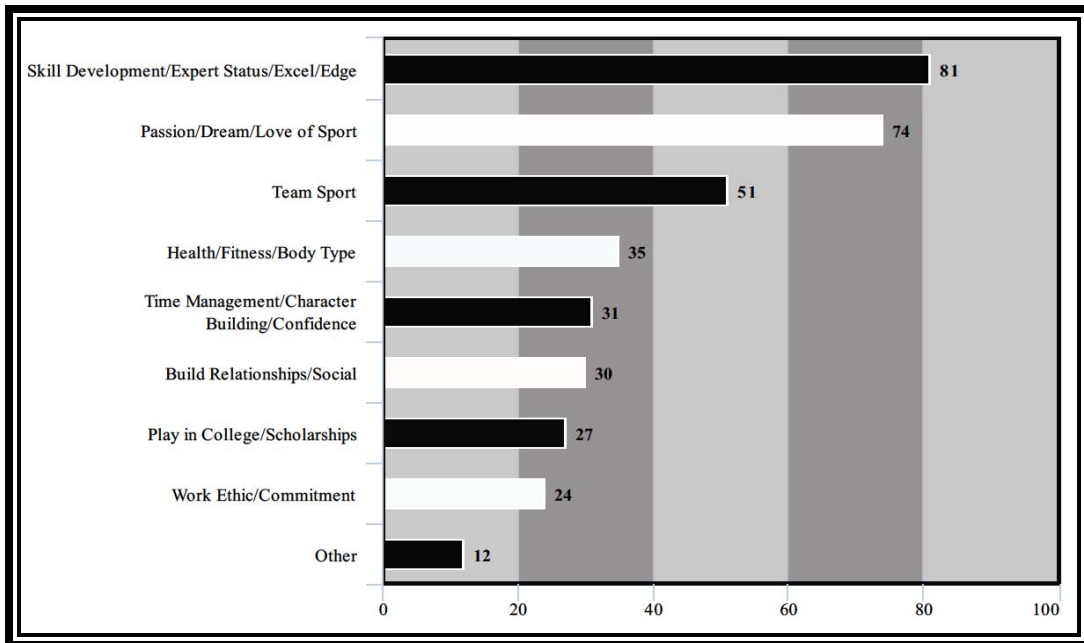
Previous Information on Sport Specialization

Most ($n = 152, 83\%$) of the adults surveyed had not received any type of information or talked to anyone previously about sport specialization. Those who reported some familiarity with the topic listed word of mouth with other parents/coworkers ($n = 10$) as the primary source of information. Others mentioned the Internet/media ($n = 6$), or journal articles ($n = 3$), and two work in athletics. High school and college coaches ($n = 3$) were also mentioned multiple times, as well as medical professionals ($n = 2$), peer experiences ($n = 2$), and other sports ($n = 4$).

Reasons to Encourage Sport Specialization

Survey participants were asked an open-ended question to identify reasons why adults would encourage their children to specialize in a particular sport. Responses were grouped with similar answers to form categories.

Figure 1. Reasons to Encourage Specialization



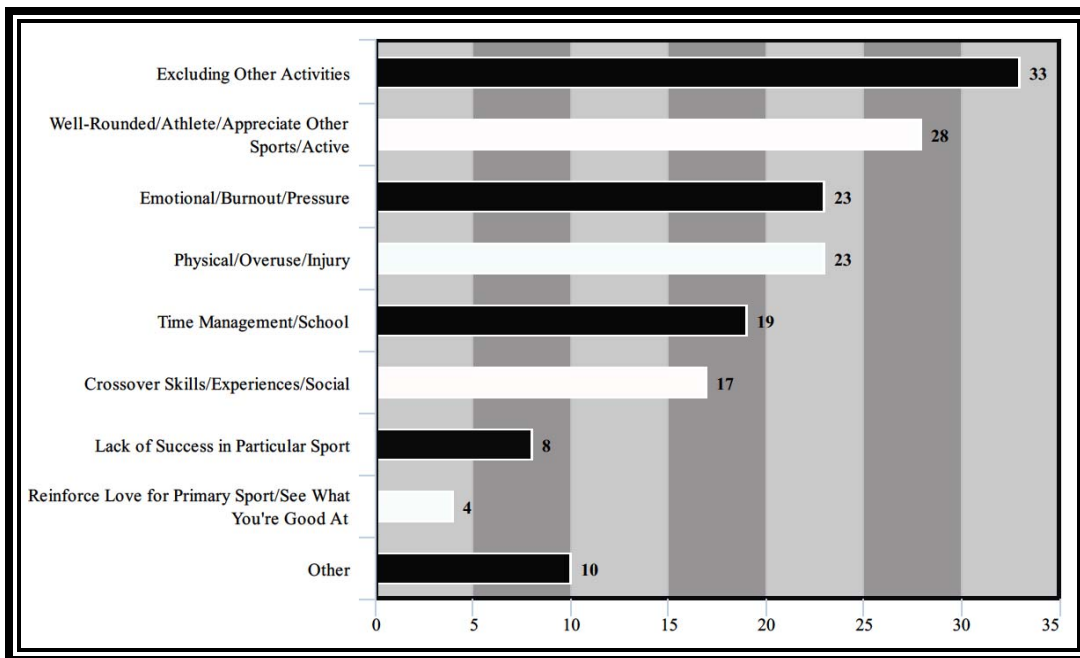
Skill development and the desire to reach expert status, excel at the game, or gain an edge over the competition was the leading reason, given by 81 adults in the survey. Their child's dream to play and/or her passion/love for the sport was the second most-mentioned reason, with 74 adults listing it. Playing a team sport and learning from it was the third most-common response, with 51 mentions. Staying in shape or taking advantage of being tall, learning time management and character building, socializing, playing in college/earning a scholarship, and learning work ethic and commitment were the other main categories. Responses in the "other" category included family reasons, learning more positions, to make up for not excelling in school,

considering volleyball as a career, one sport with academics is enough for one child, hard to switch between sports, parent loves volleyball, parent specialized and benefited, no interruption from other sports, and access to quality coaches, not volunteers. Without being asked specifically, 6% ($n = 11$) of participants offered that they would not encourage their children to specialize.

Reasons to Discourage Specialization

Survey participants were asked to identify reasons why adults would discourage their children from specializing in a sport. Responses were grouped with similar answers in categories.

Figure 2. Reasons to Discourage Specialization



Excluding other activities was the main reason participants gave for discouraging their child from specializing, with 33 mentions. The desire for their child to be well-rounded, active, and an athlete while appreciating other sports was the second most popular reason, offered by 28 participants. Emotional issues (burnout, pressure) and physical issues (overuse injuries) each had 23 mentions. Time management and school, learning crossover skills and having multiple

experiences, lack of success in one sport, and reinforcing love for the primary sport and seeing what their child is good at were the other main categories. Responses in the “other” category included cost, placing too much value on one sport, politics on the school team, sport is not a top priority, not getting playing time, the child should specialize in something other than a sport, do not be afraid to try new things, and high school and college coaches want athletes (not specialists) on their teams. Forty percent ($n = 74$) of participants volunteered without being asked specifically that they would not discourage their child from specializing.

Pressure to Specialize

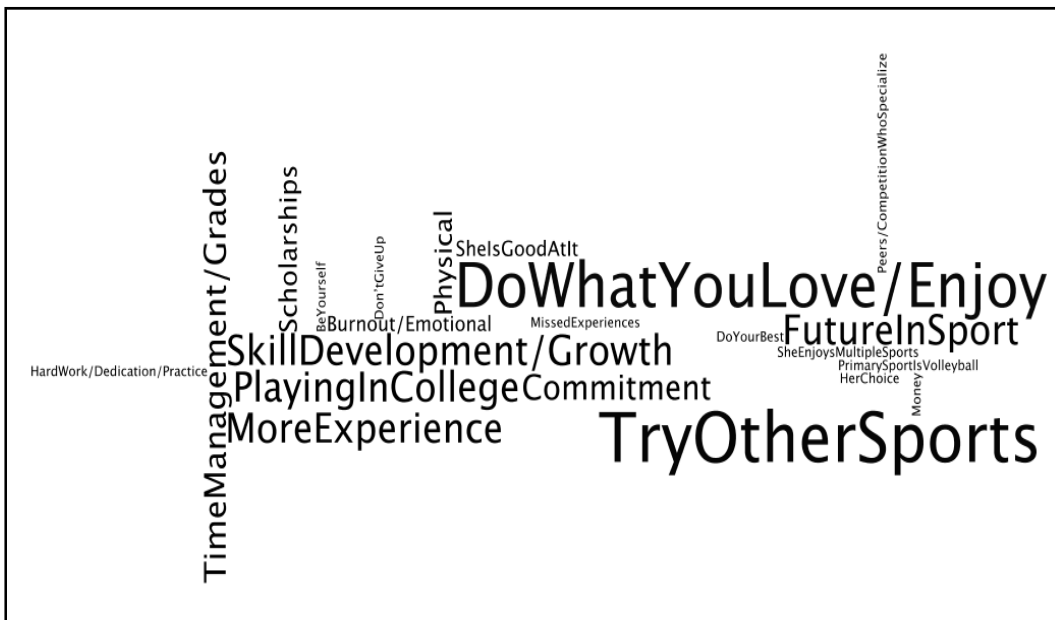
Survey participants were asked if they had ever felt pressure from any source for their child to specialize. Most (90%, $n = 165$) indicated that they had never felt pressure, while 10% ($n = 19$) gave reasons for feeling pressured. The largest source of pressure mentioned was coaches as an expectation for their school teams ($n = 7$). Their child, perceived playing time, and family pressures all were mentioned three times. Other reasons included skill development, competition to make and choose better travel teams, peer pressure, networking in the sport, travel schedule conflicting with school ball, other parents, pressure from other sports to drop volleyball, and wanting to see their daughter grow and not fail.

Discussions About Specialization

Almost one-third of adults surveyed ($n = 57$, 31%) had discussed specialization with their child. Figure 3 was generated using Wordle.net and shows the topics discussed in those conversations. All of the responses were organized into common themes using a related quotation and entered into the word cloud generator. The more times a topic was mentioned and entered, the bigger the font appears in the figure. The main discussions were about trying other sports and the child doing what she loves. Other conversations discussed skill development, playing in college, getting more experience, and demonstrating commitment, among others.

Parents seemed much more likely to discuss sampling and playing other sports with their daughters, but there were also some conversations about playing in college, burnout, and getting more experience that pointed to discussions on specialization.

Figure 3. Topics of Family Discussions on Specialization



Focus Groups

The first question asked participants to identify reasons that parents would encourage sport specialization. The majority of the responses aligned with the categories from the surveys, including skill development/excelling, building relationships, health and fitness, love of the sport, college scholarships, and teaching commitment. Other responses not in those categories were not risking injury from another sport, better/more specialized coaching, conflicting schedules between school seasons, family time/road trips together, cost for equipment, and not enough time for multiple sports. Skill development/excelling was highlighted in each group, with responses like, “It makes you stronger at that one sport”, “I just want her to enjoy it at the highest level she

can possibly play,” and “the athlete may excel at one sport as opposed to another, and they may enjoy that sport, exclusively.”

The next question asked participants to identify reasons that parents would discourage sport specialization. Again, many of the responses aligned with the categories from the surveys, such as excluding other activities, overuse injuries, being well-rounded, appreciating other sports, burnout, and crossover skills and experiences. Other responses not in those categories were the ability to grow mentally by thinking different ways, developing different parts of one’s character, keeping them engaged in case they quit their primary sport later in life, learning individual competition vs. team competition, cost, and letting their child develop decision-making skills by making her own choice on sport. The parents acknowledged that athletes want to specialize, but they lamented that their children would have to give up other sports. One parent noted, “She could have been a great softball player and never know it.”

The third question asked if the parents were aware of sport specialization as a phenomenon in sports. Not many of the parents in the focus groups had heard about sport specialization, but the ones who had were able to offer their sources. Four parents mentioned a medical link to sport specialization, pointing to physical therapists, orthopedic surgeons, and pediatricians as sources of information on the subject, and one participant who is a physical therapist confirmed that the topic is current in the field because of overuse injuries. One parent was a former gymnast and had encountered the issue herself as a child, and another studied physical education in college and read information on specialization. Coaches were discussed by two different groups, but one group felt that “all coaches want their athletes to specialize” while the other spoke about how coaches do not want their athletes playing for too many other coaches and learning things the wrong way or “picking up bad habits.”

The final question for the parents was whether sport specialization is a good thing or a bad thing for adolescent athletes. Focus Group #1 was divided on the idea, noting that specialization is hard to fight against because of schedules, that they do not want their children to miss out on good opportunities, that parents should know by the time their child is in middle school whether they should be specializing, and that family support is key. They also agreed that specialization was required if an athlete expected to play NCAA Division I volleyball. Focus Group #2 acknowledged the change to specialization and is generally against the idea, but they also know that their daughters love volleyball, and they are not going to force them to play another sport if they do not want it. One parent said, “I wouldn’t totally encourage my kid to do just that. If that’s what she decides and wants to do, then I feel like that would be her decision.” Focus Group #3 felt that specialization should be the child’s decision, but that is was not the right choice for everyone. Parents should support the child in making her own choice, with one parent noting, “Yeah, I mean you have to take their cues. If they don’t want to go to practice, you have to question why.” They mentioned burnout as a possible concern, but said that they could not force their child to do something else if she did not want to do it. Focus Group #4 was largely in favor of specialization for skill development, time management, and love of the sport, as long as the child is involved in the decision and has tried other things. One parent was “on the fence” and wondered about the current value of being well-rounded and possibly not meeting goals in a single sport and experiencing regret, but he understood the viewpoints of the rest of the group who supported specialization and said that had told his daughters, “Whatever, I support whatever y'all wanna do.”

Discussion

While most parents in this study were multi-sport athletes, there is a clear movement toward specialization with their children. The parents report that they still see the value in

sampling sports, but many times, their children are the ones who want to play volleyball year-round and exclude other opportunities. If the decision to specialize is largely left to the child, parents must know the possible negative implications of specialization so they can intervene if needed. Information on overuse injuries, burnout, perfectionistic tendencies, and less physical activity later in life must be shared with parents so they can evaluate their child's physical and emotional well-being if she specializes or encourage her to sample if she shows interest.

The parents in this study were very clear that specialization should be an individual decision based on the wishes of the child and her individual traits. They did not identify many sources of outside pressure to specialize and indicated that much of the drive to specialize comes from the child herself. Parents must be able to ascertain whether their child is choosing to specialize for reasons that match her personal qualities and not because of peer pressure, comparing herself to her teammates, or an unrealistic or unhealthy pursuit of elite performance. Frequent dialogue with children can ensure that their sport participation continues to be healthy.

Skill development/the desire for elite performance was the primary reason parents gave for encouraging their children to specialize. This is in line with the research on deliberate practice from Ericsson, et al. (1993), and specialization allows players to get more repetitions and time on the field of play. It also feeds the child's desire to improve at her chosen sport through more intense training. Parents must be cautious if their child allows one sport to define her youth sport experience. Athletes who specialize assume their chosen sport as a part of their identity, and they may not take feedback and criticism as well as those who have other sport experiences. Multi-sport athletes have other outlets in which they can succeed and gain recognition and are susceptible to short-term stressors rather than long-term ones (Garinger, et al., 2018). Receiving negative feedback on one of many sports has a different impact on a multi-sport athlete. While

sampling is also linked to elite performance (Côté, et al., 2009), many families are still looking to specialization as their primary option for skill development.

The child's love of the sport was the second-most mentioned reason to encourage children to specialize, and nearly all of parents in the focus group – even those who were personally opposed to specialization – were willing to concede to their daughter's wishes to specialize for the sake of her happiness. Garinger and colleagues (2018) point to perfectionistic tendencies and higher stress levels in athletes who specialize in comparison to multi-sport athletes. The constant drive to improve in their sport with no breaks or other opportunities for success provides longer periods of stress and can predispose athletes to burnout and higher stress in general. While specializing in volleyball may make their children happier in the short term, parents must evaluate the long-term consequences and be able to intervene if their child needs a break from her sport.

Forty percent of the parents in this study indicated that they would not discourage their children from specializing, and this was not even a direct question on the survey. Some of the responses were even indignant about this, stating, "I would never discourage my child from doing anything." This reinforces that the children are the primary factors in the decision to specialize, and their desire for more time in their sport and constant engagement is key to this decision. Only 6% of parents indicated that they would not encourage their child to specialize because of their own knowledge and opinions on the subject. This suggests that many parents are not aware of the potential negative consequences associated with specialization and allow their children to drive the decision to specialize.

Only 10% of the parents surveyed felt like they had been pressured for their child to specialize. This number was much lower than anticipated, and while parents indicated that coaches were one of the sources of pressure to specialize, they were not a big factor in the

parents' decisions given that so few of them mentioned feeling pressure. In the focus groups, some parents related that their child's coach expected specialization, and others said that their child's coach did not want the players to play for another coach and learn bad habits. It is important for players to understand their coach's views on specializing and ask if necessary, but it would appear that that primary source of pressure to specialize comes from within the family itself through the daughter's desire to play.

Time management is a topic that came up on both sides of the specialization issue. Juggling multiple sports and academics is a great way to teach and reinforce time management skills, and many parents mentioned that as a reason to discourage sport specialization. However, many other parents voiced that time management was a good reason for athletes to specialize because there was not enough time to entertain multiple sports, and overlapping schedules made it virtually impossible to participate fully in multiple sports. Parents of children who play multiple sports most certainly must be able to model and teach good time management, but parents need not use this as a means to limit sport participation.

The pursuit of athletic scholarships has been a primary reason given for the number of athletes engaging in specialization (Bodey, et al., 2013; Stewart & Shroyer, 2015; Watts, 2002). While scholarships and playing in college were mentioned in the surveys and focus groups, the majority of responses indicated that they were not a driving force behind the desire to specialize for the parents in this study. Parents generally mentioned them as a nice possibility and outcome of the specialization, but overall, they were not a clear and consistent reason to specialize for this group. The adults surveyed spoke more fondly about family time and trips together as a result of specialization than they did about scholarships or playing in college. Some of the parents in the focus groups admitted that they did not think that their children were good enough to play in college, but that did not stop them from helping them get to the best level of competition they can

at this time. The parents still indicated that they felt that specialization was required if a player intended to play in college, especially in the higher divisions of the NCAA. This is not the case with many schools, and many college coaches do not subscribe to requiring specialization from their recruits. Parents should be encouraged to have their children initiate dialogue with potential college coaches to gauge their expectations rather than assume that specialization is required. They should also reinforce academics so that their child is prepared for whatever college experience awaits her, regardless of athletic opportunity. All colleges offer academic awards, so a player is likely to receive a better financial aid package with an impressive academic transcript.

Word of mouth was the primary source of information about sport specialization from the survey participants. Very few parents had received information from other sources or had heard of the issue formally. This points to a definite need to better educate parents on this topic so that they can fully understand the positive and negative implications of specialization for their child.

This study is not without limitations. First, the sample was limited to one volleyball club, and both parents and players were primarily white/Caucasian. In some cases, parents from the same family participated in the surveys and different focus groups, which may have been double counted in the results. The geographic region limited this study in some ways, as it included parents from multiple, somewhat rural counties in a southern state. The competition level of the club may have limited the study as it is not an elite club that features full rosters of college-bound athletes. This study only looked at volleyball as the primary sport, while other sports could have different outcomes. Club volleyball players may be predisposed to specialize by their willingness to play for a club. Finally, the word “discourage” was used in the surveys, and the negative connotation of that word may have provoked negative responses from the participants.

Conclusion

In this study, the athletes themselves were the greatest determining factor in the decision to specialize. Parents were largely unaware of many of the potential negative consequences of specialization and gave many more reasons to encourage it than discourage it. Few parents had any formal knowledge about sport specialization, and the information they had was from medical professionals or other parents. Less than one third of parents had discussed the implications of specialization with their daughters as a family. These findings can help kinesiologists better educate the parents and coaches on the facts about specialization so that families can make an educated decision on their child's sport participation.

CHAPTER II

DISSEMINATION

The dissertation findings will be disseminated in the form of recommendations for parents and coaches as their athletes consider specialization. Based on cited research and my findings, it is presented here as a letter to parents and coaches. It will be posted on the volleyball club's website and converted to a handout for professional presentations.

What Should We Know About Sport Specialization? A Letter to Parents and Coaches

Dear Parents and Coaches:

When we were younger, many athletes played multiple sports during their middle and high school years. With increased opportunities to play year-round, our youth athletes today are often choosing to pursue one sport for the majority of the year and excluding others in the process. Sometimes specializing in one sport can enhance performance and foster a lifelong love and appreciation for the sport, but other times, it can lead to negative physical and emotional consequences. I have seen these consequences firsthand in my nearly 20 years in the coaching field, and this has led me to pursue this as a dissertation topic. As a parent or a coach, when your athletes reach the time to decide to specialize, here are some points to consider:

For Parents

First and foremost, **the decision to specialize should be an individual decision.** Do not feel the need to cave to pressure from other parents, coaches, family, your child's peers, or anyone else. Only you and your child can make the decision to specialize, and it should be done when it is right for you as a family. One of most common responses I received in my surveys and

focus groups was that her chosen sport was “her passion”, “her dream,” or simply what she loved. Making your child happy in the short term by enabling her to play one sport throughout the year can lead to long-term benefits like preparing to play in college, building a career in the sport, and having a lifelong appreciation for sport, but it might also lead to negative long-term outcomes. Be aware of these possible negative consequences and continue to evaluate your child’s emotional and physical wellbeing as you move through the seasons. Specializing too early can increase the likelihood of the negative consequences, so specialization should only happen when your daughter understands what she would be giving up to play year-round and can contribute on her own behalf to a conversation about specialization.

Specialization can lead to burnout and loss of enjoyment in their chosen sport.

Because specialized athletes do not get a break from their sport like their multi-sport counterparts, they are more likely to experience burnout from long-term stressors (Garinger, Chow, & Luzzi, 2018). As some of the parents in my study mentioned, playing other sports can help reinforce love in a primary sport while giving an athlete other sport and social experiences. However, if she does not engage in another sport, initiate dialogue with your athlete to ensure that the pursuit of her chosen sport remains a healthy one and that she does not place too much pressure on herself.

Overuse injuries can occur from the increased repetitive movements involved with specialization. Many of the parents surveyed and in my focus groups had not received any formal information about specialization, but several of those who had mentioned medical professionals who cautioned them against overuse injuries caused by repetitive movements. Athletes who specialize are more subject to repetitive micro traumas indicative of their activities in a particular sport (Smucny, Parikh, & Pandya, 2014). Monitor your child’s physical wellbeing

and seek advice from medical professionals when necessary to catch overuse injuries early or prevent them when possible.

Make sure that your child is ready to dedicate herself to one sport and that your wish for simpler planning does not take away valuable experiences from your child. Several parents in my study mentioned that simpler logistics were a reason for their child to specialize. Transitions between different sports can be taxing, and having only one sport to manage and buy gear for can make things easier for you, so you may be inclined to encourage her to specialize for these reasons. If she is ready to jump into one sport, then go for it and enjoy the simpler details. If she still wants to play multiple sports, embrace the insanity for a bit longer because your child will never get the opportunity to play youth sports again, and they can help her develop physically and emotionally.

Specializing is not a requirement to play at many colleges. Some of parents in this study mention playing in college and the potential for earning a scholarship as reasons to specialize, and they have been linked to specialization for a long time. Some coaches may prefer that their athletes specialize; however, many of the colleagues in various levels of the coaching world I have talked with do not require their athletes to specialize. In fact, even a majority of NCAA Division I athletes report playing more than one sport in their senior year (Martin, Ewing & Oregon, 2017). If your athlete is in talks with a college coach, make sure you understand his or her personal expectations on specialization, but do not assume that all college coaches demand specialization from recruits.

Playing multiple sports instead of specializing provides more options and outlets. When an athlete has other sport experiences, it can make it easier to take criticism or defeat in a given sport. By contrast, any criticism or failure in a specialized sport becomes her only feedback on sport and physical activity. Personally, I have noticed this in my athletes who have specialized

in volleyball versus the ones who have varied sport experiences. My athletes who have played other sports are generally more confident, resilient, and willing to adapt than those who have specialized in volleyball. Russell (2014) also points to negative experiences in a specialized sport as a contributor to decreased involvement in physical activity in adulthood.

Last but not least, **do not get so caught up in sports or specializing that academics take a back seat.** Academics should always be the priority for all athletes. If your family's goal is for your athlete to play in college, academics will be a key factor in her ability to achieve that goal. Merit scholarships are based on academic achievement and can help a coach recruit your child when academic and athletic money can be combined. However, 39% of NCAA athletes compete in Division III with no possibility of athletic aid, and only 59% of athletes in Division I and 62% of those in Division II receive any form of athletic aid (NCAA Recruiting Fact Sheet, 2018). Please do not let your child cut corners on academics for the sake of sport as grades are the primary basis for admission into college and remain your child's best chance for financial aid as a student-athlete.

For Coaches

Be open to working with other sport coaches when scheduling off-season workouts and required developmental sessions. Conflicting schedules between sports are large contributors to specialization (Watts, 2002). Off-season workouts are now the expectation and are required for participation, and athletes feel as though they must choose because they cannot attend every required session while playing multiple sports. If you coach a fall sport and hold workouts in the spring, plan your sessions around the spring sport schedule or make your sessions optional so that athletes are not excluded from another sport. It is also helpful for club coaches to be respectful of athletes who participate on other sport teams for their schools.

Do not pressure your players to specialize or make them feel guilty for playing other sports. By playing other sports, athletes are learning crossover skills and gaining valuable social and teamwork experiences that can help them when they play for you. They are protecting themselves from overuse injuries and burnout in your sport, and playing other sports will help them prepare for your next season too.

Treat your players as individuals. Specialization may be the right choice for some players, but it is not for everyone. Do not make blanket statements about specialization; talk with each of your players and help them make the right decision for their individual situations. If they decide to specialize, it should be because they love the sport and want to pursue it with all of their time and energy, not to keep up with their teammates or to meet your expectations.

Understand that youth sport is building a foundation for a lifelong enjoyment of the sport and physical activity. If young athletes become disenchanted with their sports experience as children, they are less likely to enjoy and engage in sports as adults (Russell, 2014). Do not forget to allow them to be athletes and do what they find interesting and fun, regardless of whether they specialize.

Remember that coaching is about your athletes, not you. We as coaches are judged by our coaching records, but we know that coaching is about the athletes we lead. Commit yourself to be an advocate for your athletes and not your personal interests. If you pressure your athletes to specialize for your own reasons, you are putting yourself in front of the athletes who trust you to guide them. Yes, more reps and playing on a travel team can help them improve for your next season. However, so can playing another sport with another coach, different teammates, and complimentary physical skills. Do not take away an athlete's chance to play a sport for his or her high school. That is an experience that they will never have again.

Conclusion

My research on specialization has opened my eyes to many things about our athletes today. The opportunity to specialize can afford young athletes the chance to pursue a sport year-round to develop her skills and follow her passion, but it can also lead to burnout and overuse injuries that can decrease their overall enjoyment in physical activity. Our job as parents, coaches, and other influential adults is to help young athletes understand all the ways specializing can positively and negatively impact their future in sport and activity. As advisors, we can make sure that each of our athletes makes the best choice for herself by weighing all of the options and potential outcomes and frequently evaluating her emotional and physical wellbeing to ensure that it remains the best option for her.

Resources for Parents

- Institute for the Study of Youth Sports at Michigan State University – <https://edwp.educ.msu.edu/isys/>
- Aspen Institute’s Project Play – <https://www.aspenprojectplay.org>
- I Love to Watch You Play – <http://ilovetowatchyouplay.com>
- Changing the Game Project – <http://changingthegameproject.com>
- State high school athletic associations

CHAPTER III

ACTION PLAN

Legendary athletes, like Peyton Manning, Michael Jordan, Mia Hamm, and Abby Wambach all report sport sampling before remarkable careers in professional sports, and the specialization of Olympic stars Lindsey Vonn and Michael Phelps had significant negative impacts on their families (Stewart & Shroyer, 2015). There are an estimated eight million high school student-athletes, but fewer than 500,000 of them will compete at an NCAA school, and still fewer will play at the professional level, with ice hockey having the highest probability of playing professionally at 6.8% (NCAA, 2015). Furthermore, many athletic scholarships are partial in nature, renewable by year based on performance, highly dependent on academic success in high school, and in conflict with some degree programs athletes may want to pursue (Stewart & Shroyer, 2015). Despite these facts, parents of athletes are being inundated with increased opportunities for their children to specialize in one sport and pursue it above all others. The objective for this research was to determine parents' current understanding of sport specialization and their possible reasons for encouraging and/or allowing their children to specialize in a sport. The findings can be used to develop targeted information for parents who are considering specialization to help them better evaluate their choices and make an informed decision for their athlete and entire family.

Plans for Professional Impact

My first step is to get the information out to the parents who participated in the research. I will share my findings with them via the volleyball club's website, which sends updates to all parents by e-mail. I will thank the club for its participation in my study and include the letter

from Chapter II of this dissertation. I will also ask the club directors if I may post these findings on a tab in their website so that they are available by Internet search and visible to others who are looking for information on specialization.

As a college coach, I am asked to serve on coaches' panels two or three times a year. These panels are usually a part of clinics or showcases, where players and their parents can ask questions about the recruiting process, scholarships, and playing volleyball in college, and get coaches' opinions on various topics, including specialization. A question on specialization was asked in every panel I worked last year. When the topic is introduced at future coaching panels, I can ensure that families understand that specialization should be an individual decision. I will acknowledge that specialization is a popular choice with the possibility for positive experiences, but I will reflect on my research and other publications on the possible negative outcomes of specialization and the positive link between sampling and elite performance. I will also encourage the other coaches on the panel to share their views on specialization and how it is or is not a determining factor for them in the recruiting process.

As an adjunct instructor at my current university, I teach a course on coaching and athletic administration when enough students request it as an elective. I also hope to pursue other teaching opportunities outside my current university. I will include my research and related articles in my teachings in a unit on specialization and ensure that future coaches who take my class understand the possible physical and emotional effects of specialization and that they should help athletes make an individual decision on whether to specialize. I will also reinforce their role as coaches, whose primary focus is their athletes' wellbeing and appreciation for sport, not their own interests or glory.

I have been asked to address high school and college classes at my university and other schools throughout my career. In addition to sharing my experiences as a coach, I can now speak

on my research and offer guidance to athletes looking to play at the college level or advise athletes in the future. By understanding what parents report as factors for deciding to specialize, I can advise these students on how to weigh their quest for elite performance and love of the sport against excluding other activities that may also offer the same value or similar results. I can also speak about what the statistics say on the numbers of college athletes who specialize, the expectations for specialization of college coaches I know, and how to determine whether specialization is a requirement for participation at their intended college or university.

Looking beyond local opportunities to present these findings, I can also apply to be a clinician or general presenter at the North Carolina Coaches Association coaching clinics that are held in Greensboro, NC each summer. This is a meeting of coaches from all sports at the middle and high school levels. Because some athletes feel that their coaches expect or even pressure them to specialize, it is important for coaches to understand how this decision can impact their athletes in the future. Possible speaking points would be working with other sport coaches to schedule practices and workouts, the implications of pressuring athletes to specialize, how to treat athletes as individuals as they decide on specialization, recognizing the possible physical and emotional warning signs from negative specialization experiences, and remembering that the focus of coaching should be the athletes and their love of sport. This could be a good way to reach many coaches of various sports at once as this is a meeting of coaches of all high school sports.

At the national level, I could apply to be a speaker at the American Volleyball Coaches Association (AVCA) national convention, which is held in December in a different host city each year. I am a member of the AVCA, and I will likely join other professional organizations as my career continues where I can share this information. Because this would be an assembly of volleyball coaches of all age groups, I could share the information on why parents would

encourage or discourage specialization and how we can implement my suggestions for coaches to help our volleyball players make the best individual decision they can. The specific information on volleyball participation would be especially relevant to this group as well.

Additionally, my current university is a member of the United States Collegiate Athletic Association (USCAA), which hosts a national convention each summer. The convention features professional development sessions presented by members or outside vendors, so I could also apply to present at this convention to speak to coaches and administrators from colleges and universities similar to my own. I could present my findings about parents' knowledge of specialization and how the athletes are usually the ones driving the specialization trend. This could allow me to gain a greater insight on how specialization has affected the athletes at schools in our association.

Finally, this research certainly leads to other opportunities to study sport specialization and its impact on today's athletes. I can appeal to national organizations like The Institute for the Study of Youth Sports (ISYS) at Michigan State University and The Aspen Institute's Project Play to help publicize my research and identify ways in which it can be expanded to more sports and a larger audience. Working with a national organization can help me find research partners for more data collection on this topic and gain access to complementary research to reinforce my findings. It would also allow me to expand this research to other sports and populations to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of how and why specialization continues to be a popular choice. It would also be interesting to see how parents look back on their children's decision to specialize with regard to burnout and overuse injuries and see whether they would have encouraged them to make a different choice.

Many opportunities to share this research are available, and I can certainly find ways to share these findings with parents and coaches. Using this list as a guide, I now have a plan to

disseminate this information to many audiences in hopes of a significant professional impact. I am pleased to have been able to make progress in exploring the topic of parents' knowledge of sport specialization, and I will pursue these possibilities to share this information as much as possible.

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APPENDIX A

IRB INFORMATION SHEET

Project Title: Parental Knowledge of Sport Specialization for Adolescent Volleyball Players

Principal Investigator: Callie Phillips

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Diane Gill

What is this all about?

I am asking you to participate in this research study because I am investigating what parents know about an important topic in kinesiology, sport specialization. This research project will only take about 10 minutes (for the survey) to an hour (for the focus group) and will involve you completing a survey and possibly volunteering for a focus group to be conducted later. Your participation in this research project is voluntary.

How will this negatively affect me?

Other than the time you spend on this project there are no known or foreseeable risks involved with this study.

What do I get out of this research project?

There are no direct benefits to you for participating in this project. The information collected here will help us understand what is currently known about sport specialization.

Will I get paid for participating?

There is no compensation for participating in this study; however, there will be a drawing for an Amazon giftcard after the surveys have been completed.

What about my confidentiality?

We will do everything possible to make sure that your information is kept confidential. All information obtained in this study is strictly confidential unless disclosure is required by law. We will not ask for any identifying information, and all responses will be anonymous. The completed surveys will be stored in a locked filing cabinet. If you are participating in a focus group, those responses will also be kept anonymous, and only the focus group transcripts will be included in the data analysis. However, because your voice will be potentially identifiable by anyone who hears the recording, your confidentiality for the things you say on the recording cannot be guaranteed, although the researcher will try to limit access to the recording.

What if I do not want to be in this research study?

You do not have to be part of this project. This project is voluntary and it is up to you to decide to participate in this research project. If you agree to participate at any time in this project, you may stop participating without penalty.

What if I have questions?

If you have questions, want more information or have suggestions, please contact Callie Phillips, who may be reached at (980) 598-1842 or cephill4@uncg.edu or Dr. Diane Gill, who may be reached at (336) 334-4683 or dlgill@uncg.edu.

If you have concerns about how you have been treated in this study call the Office of Research Integrity Director at 1-855-251-2351.

APPENDIX B
SURVEY MATERIALS

Survey Recruitment Script

Hello and thank you all for attending the parent meeting this evening. It is very important to have the support of our parents during club season, and we appreciate each one of you.

For those of you who don't know me, my name is Callie Phillips, and I will be coaching a 16s team this year in my second season with the club. I am also the head volleyball coach at Johnson & Wales University, and I am currently pursuing my doctoral degree in Kinesiology from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. I am in the final year of my program, and I am conducting my research for my dissertation. As I collect data on what parents think about youth sport participation and specialization, I am hoping that you will help me by completing a written survey tonight before you leave. The survey includes demographic questions and asks about views on youth sport participation and specialization. Completion of the survey is entirely voluntary and is not required as part of your paperwork for the club. However, your participation would be valuable to my research and very much appreciated. Preceding the survey is a consent form from my school. All parents, step-parents, grandparents, guardians, and other influential adults of club players are welcome to complete this survey. I only ask that you complete it honestly without discussing the questions with others or looking up information on your phone. (It really is about your views, and there are no right or wrong answers.) I will be available to answer any questions you have and to collect the surveys as you finish them.

In addition to the survey, I will be conducting focus groups with any of you who would be willing to participate. In these groups, we will discuss the topic of youth sport participation and specialization together as a collective. I anticipate that these focus groups will be scheduled

during team practice times, so they will be convenient for you. If you would be willing to participate in a focus group, please put your name and contact information on the sign-up sheet I will pass around or see me at the end of the parent meeting. Thank you in advance for your assistance with these groups.

As you complete your surveys, please place them in the box at the front of the room. Thank you again for your assistance with my research.

Youth Volleyball Parent Survey

Your Demographic Information:

What is your age?

What is your gender?

What is your race/ethnicity?

Did you play sports in your youth? ___Yes ___No

*If yes, what sport(s) did you play?

Information on Your Club Volleyball Player(s):

What is your relationship (e.g., mother, guardian, grandfather to the player(s)?)

Player 1_____ Player 2_____ Player 3_____ Player 4_____

What is your player's age?

Player 1_____ Player 2_____ Player 3_____ Player 4_____

What is your player's race/ethnicity?

Player 1_____ Player 2_____ Player 3_____ Player 4_____

How many years has your player played school volleyball?

Player 1_____ Player 2_____ Player 3_____ Player 4_____

How many years has your player played club volleyball?

Player 1 _____ Player 2 _____ Player 3 _____ Player 4 _____

Does your player currently play any other sports? 1) ___Yes ___No

*If yes, what sport(s) does she play?

Player 1 _____ Player 2 _____ Player 3 _____ Player 4 _____

Questions on Youth Sport Participation and Specialization

The following questions ask about your views on youth sport participation and specialization. Sport specialization is the practice of engaging in intense, year-round (10 months or more) participation in a single sport at the exclusion of other sports. Please answer the questions honestly based on your knowledge and personal experience. There are no right or wrong answers.

Have you ever heard about or received any information on youth sport specialization? ___Yes
___No If so, what was the information, and from what source did it come?

As an influential adult in the life of your athlete, why might you encourage her to specialize in volleyball?

As an influential adult in the life of your athlete, why might you discourage her to specialize in volleyball?

Have you ever felt pressure to have your athlete specialize in volleyball? If so, what were the circumstances?

Have you discussed specialization with your athlete? If so, what were the key points of the conversation?

Thank you very much for your participation in this survey.
If you would like to sign up to participate in a focus group discussion on this topic, you may sign up on the list going around or contact Coach Phillips at the close of the meeting.

APPENDIX C

FOCUS GROUP MATERIALS

Focus Group Interview Guide

Introduction: Thank you for agreeing to participate in this focus group on youth sport specialization. This is an extension of the survey you completed at the parent meeting and will allow us to discuss the topic as a group. As this is an effort to collect information on parents' views about sport specialization, there is certainly room for varying opinions. As we move through the questions, everyone will have the opportunity to contribute to the conversation. There are no right or wrong answers, but rather differing points of view. Please answer the questions honestly based on your personal experience and feel free to share your opinion even if it differs from what others have said. This discussion is being recorded and will be transcribed to ensure accuracy, but names will be removed from transcripts, and no names or identifying information will be used in any reports.

As a reminder, our topic today is youth sport specialization. As you may remember from our survey, sport *specialization* is the practice of engaging in intense, year-round (10 months or more) participation in a single sport at the exclusion of other sports.

Question 1: What are some reasons that parents of adolescent athletes might encourage their child to specialize? Follow-up – What reasons apply to youth in this volleyball program?

Question 2: What are some reasons that parents of adolescent athletes might discourage their child to specialize? Follow-up – What reasons apply to youth in this volleyball program?

Question 3: Have you ever heard about or received any information on youth sport specialization? If so, what was the information, and where did it come from?

Question 4: Overall, is specialization is a good thing for adolescent athletes? Why or why not? Follow-up – Under what conditions would it be good? Under what conditions would it not be good?

Thank you again for your participation. Your feedback is invaluable to our research. After an analysis of our discussion today, I will e-mail a summary for your review to make sure I have captured it accurately. Thank you again for your assistance.

APPENDIX D

FOCUS GROUP MEMBER CHECKS

Focus Group #1 Member Check

Once again, thank you so much for your help with my focus group on Sunday. I am learning so much about the parent point of view on this topic, and this will assist me in preparing information for coaches and other parents who are making this decision. As I mentioned at the close of the focus group, I am sending you the key points of our discussion so that you can confirm that these are as we discussed:

1. Why parents would encourage specialization:
 1. Mastery of one area
 2. It makes them stronger at one particular sport -- more touches make you better
 3. Camaraderie
 4. Sense of responsibility and personal accountability
 5. Exercise all year
 6. Coaches can get to know their players better
 7. Your daughter wanted to play year-round
 8. Boredom/Keep them out of trouble
 9. They'll regress if they take a season off
2. Why parents would discourage specialization:
 1. Learn other physical skills
 2. Work different muscles
 3. Variety of activities to increase abilities in all sports
 4. Try other activities to see what they like best
3. Sources of information about specialization:
 1. One pediatrician had discussed it with a parent
 2. Others had not discussed it as a phenomenon before
 3. Parents agree that coaches expect their athletes to specialize
4. Is specialization a good or bad thing for adolescent athletes?
 1. Bad, but the sport seasons make it hard not to.
 2. Good, because we can tell by middle school if an athlete should specialize or not
 3. Bad, because if they only specialize and never try another sport, they could miss a huge opportunity in another sport
 4. It can be good, but only with family support
5. Miscellaneous points:
 1. Many times, the decision to specialize comes from the athlete herself and her desire to play year-round
 2. Parents agree that specialization (along with physical gifts) was absolutely necessary to play at the D1 level
 3. School work and education is a primary factor in determining the direction a player will go for college

Thank you again for your participation. Please read over these points and let me know if you have anything else to add or comments on these conclusions. Happy Holidays!

Focus Group #2 Member Check

Once again, thank you so much for your help with my focus group on Sunday. I am learning so much about the parent point of view on this topic, and this will assist me in preparing information for coaches and other parents who are making this decision. As I mentioned at the close of the focus group, I am sending you the key points of our discussion so that you can confirm that these are as we discussed:

1. Why parents would encourage specialization:
 1. Chance for scholarships
 2. Boost their competitiveness in one sport
 3. She's better at one sport than the others
 4. She won't get injured playing another sport
 5. The time commitment is too much to do for multiple sports
 6. Teach commitment
 7. Familiarity with a program and coaches
2. Why parents would discourage specialization:
 1. More well-rounded
 2. They will know what other sports have to offer as well
 3. Developing different muscle groups
 4. To keep from getting burned out
 5. To grow mentally by thinking in a different way
 6. To get different perspectives
 7. Develop different parts of their character
 8. Plain old exercise, being active, and keeping busy
 9. To avoid repetitive use injuries and stress fractures
 10. To keep them engaged because they may quit their chosen sport later in life
3. Sources of information about specialization:
 1. The physical therapist was aware from his professional experience
 2. The former gymnast understood specialization from that viewpoint
 3. Some coaches discourage specialization so they don't learn things the wrong way or pick up bad habits
 4. It becomes more of an issue in high school where athletes get pressure to specialize in one sport and one position
4. Is specialization a good or bad thing for adolescent athletes?
 1. I know my kid loves volleyball, and that is all she wants to do even though I like the idea of multiple sports
 2. It might be better to specialize at the older time, but if my daughter wants to, I'm not going to stop her
 3. I would say a bad thing, but I'm not going to make my daughter play multiple sports
 4. I want my daughter to learn about people and specializing would limit that
 5. I don't want them being miserable doing something else
5. Miscellaneous points:
 1. This group is generally in favor of multiple sports, but if their daughters want to specialize, they wouldn't stop them
 2. They have not felt pressure from anyone in particular to specialize, but they understand the inclination

Thank you again for your participation. Please read over these points and let me know if you have anything else to add or comments on these conclusions. Happy Holidays!

Focus Group #3 Member Check

Once again, thank you so much for your help with my focus group on Sunday. I am learning so much about the parent point of view on this topic, and this will assist me in preparing information for coaches and other parents who are making this decision. As I mentioned at the close of the focus group, I am sending you the key points of our discussion so that you can confirm that these are as we discussed:

1. Why parents would encourage specialization:
 1. Better/more specialized coaching
 2. More advanced experiences
 3. College scholarships
 4. Logical “next step” after recreation and school offerings
 5. Sports are becoming year-round sports at the middle and high school level, and schedules conflict between sports
 6. One sport is my child’s passion
 7. Limit the possibility of getting injured playing another sport
 8. Family time/road trips together
2. Why parents would discourage specialization:
 1. Locking in to one sport too early keeps them from experiencing others to know what they like
 2. Athletes may develop physical limitations that would keep them from being good at a particular sport
 3. It costs money to specialize and constantly pursue opportunities to play year-round
 4. Overuse injuries
 5. Being well-rounded is valuable
3. Sources of information about specialization:
 1. Physical therapist
 2. Orthopedic surgeon
4. Is specialization a good or bad thing for adolescent athletes?
 1. Depends on the child – it should be an individual decision
 2. If the child loves it, then it’s best so they can continue to improve
 3. Parents should not push participation; it should come from the child
 4. Parents can be a positive or negative force in a child’s passion for a sport
 5. Burnout is a concern, but we can’t make them participate in something else if they don’t want to
5. Miscellaneous points:
 1. Multi-sport athletes are a thing of the past
 2. Social media is a huge driving force behind specialization and the desire to do more to achieve more
 3. Pressure from family can be significant in specialization – parents try to live through their children’s experiences

Thank you again for your participation. Please read over these points and let me know if you have anything else to add or comments on these conclusions. Happy New Year!

Focus Group #4 Member Check

Once again, thank you so much for your help with my focus group on Sunday. I am learning so much about the parent point of view on this topic, and this will assist me in preparing information for coaches and other parents who are making this decision. As I mentioned at the close of the focus group, I am sending you the key points of our discussion so that you can confirm that these are as we discussed:

1. Why parents would encourage specialization:
 1. Cost – Equipment needs for one sport are less than for multiple sports
 2. Time – Participating in multiple sports is very time-consuming for families
 3. Aspirations of playing in college
 4. Their child is that much better at/exclusively enjoys one sport
 5. Keeping them busy
 6. Limiting injuries from playing other sports
2. Why parents would discourage specialization:
 1. Multiple sports develop hand-eye coordination and different complimentary skills
 2. They enjoy different activities
 3. Keeps them in shape
 4. They meet and interact with different people
 5. Other sports help with conditioning and athleticism
 6. Playing other sports lets them find out what they like and don't like
 7. Learning individual competition vs. team competition
 8. Child can make her own choice and develop decision-making skills
 9. Fear of burnout on one sport
3. Sources of information about specialization:
 1. In college as a physical education major
4. Is specialization a good or bad thing for adolescent athletes?
 1. Good – It's the fastest way to do well and really develop as a player
 2. Good – It's the best way to maximize the family's time
 3. Good – If the child has tried different things and makes her own choice
 4. Good – My child wants to play in college and will be competing against other players who specialize
 5. Good – Unless they are a naturally gifted athlete, the time and commitment of specialization is essential to play in college
 6. Good – As long as the child has goals tied to specialization and continues to enjoy the sport
 7. Not sure – Is it better to be a well-rounded athlete or risk not achieving your goals and having regret?
 8. Good – They've tried other things and get frustrated when those interfere with their chosen sport
5. Miscellaneous points:
 1. Coaches have encouraged specialization
 2. More players playing club ball has put pressure on players to pursue volleyball year-round
 3. A lot of the pressure to succeed comes from what the players put on themselves

4. Sometimes opportunities to specialize are more rooted in money than in the players' best interests
5. Specialization should be an individual choice with parents serving as a guide
6. Scheduling is a big factor in players choosing one sport

Thank you again for your participation. Please read over these points and let me know if you have anything else to add or comments on these conclusions. Happy New Year!