

The Influence of Parent Sport Behaviours on Children's Development: Youth Coach and Administrator Perspectives

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ABSTRACT

There has been much literature and anecdotal accounts reporting poor parental behaviours in the youth sporting context. Youth coaches and administrators, who regularly interact with parents within the youth sporting domain, are potentially a key source for investigating the influence of parents' sport-related behaviours on youths' sporting experiences. Nevertheless, the voice of coaches and administrators has been limited. In this study, the authors sought to develop an understanding of youth sport coaches' and administrators' perspectives of parent sport behaviours' influence on children's development across various sport settings. Additionally, the authors explored participant awareness of and their perspectives of efficacy in relation to current parent education programs in Australia. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with twelve youth sport coaches and administrators (eight coaches, four administrators; eight males, four females) with an average of nine years experience. Coaches and administrators reported considerably more frequent negative interactions with parents than positive interactions. Participants also reported more negative observations of parent-child communications than positive observations. Four participants reported exposure to parent education efforts but all perceived these approaches to be inadequate. Recommendations, practical implications, and future avenues of research are discussed.

Key words: Self-Determination Theory, Sport Parent Education, Youth Sport Coaches

INTRODUCTION

Youth sport participation is regarded as a positive contributant to the development of desirable psychosocial attributes [1]. However, both positive and negative outcomes have been associated with youth sport participation [e.g., 2]. Indeed, several authors contend that whether sport is a positive developmental experience is contingent on the contribution of social contextual factors such as coaches and parents more so than participation itself [e.g., 3, 4]. Of these leaders, parents are commonly regarded as the key influence during children's

early sport participation [5, 6-7].

Much research investigating parental sport communications has used observational methods to report verbal feedback during competition (e.g., [8]). A significant research base has also explored parent and child perspectives of sport parenting communications [e.g., 9-11]. Exploration of child preferences of parent behaviour [e.g., 12-13], and attempts to understand how parental personality factors influence sport parenting behaviour [14] have been examined. A common finding from this research is that parental interactions can contribute both positively and negatively to youth sport experiences. For example, appropriate parental encouragement, support, and praise relate to higher levels of competence, enjoyment, and participation [2, 15-16]. However, unrealistically high parent expectations, pressure, and criticism have been correlated with increased stress, fear of failure, and dropout; and lowered intrinsic motivation, enjoyment, belief in competence, and self-esteem [2, 15-17]. Therefore sport can provide beneficial development; however, these opportunities are not assured due in part to the potential negative influence of parent-child interactions [10, 18].

While the examination of parent and child perspectives provide some insight into examining sport parent behaviours, they may limit a more comprehensive understanding. The education [e.g., 19] and child psychology literature [e.g., 20] reports that parents often do not perceive their children's subjective experiences accurately. In sport, Green and Chalip [21] found no link between child and parent ratings of child satisfaction with sport participation. Moreover, Kanters et al. [22] demonstrated that some parent behaviours perceived by children as pressure inducing were thought to be supportive by parents.

Regarding child reports, Miller [21] further suggested that children's disparity with parent views would be even larger except that children tend to describe their experiences in ways that they believe parents deem suitable. Additionally, children may lack insight as to which parent behaviours support their optimal development and functioning in some sport situations, therefore limiting the potential benefits of exploring child reports of parent behaviour. For example, a child may prefer her parent to complain to the coach when she is not selected on a desirable team. However, parents who encourage children's exposure to moderate stresses such as dealing with perceived sport adversity foster resilience development; for example, through the provision of opportunities to test and practice coping resources. This is seen to promote child psychosocial well-being and the sense of personal control in coping with greater stresses throughout development [23-24]. Overall, reliance on only parent and child reports has several shortcomings.

Given these shortcomings, it is surprising that investigation into parent-child sport communications has only occasionally included the views of other key youth sport leaders such as coaches, who are central to children's sport experience [25-26], frequently observe parent-child sport interactions, and seem particularly well placed to provide perspectives of these communications that may partially overcome the proposed limitations of parent and child reports. Moreover, as coach-child relationships develop through sport interactions, coaches can provide important insights into how parent-child sport communications influence children's development [27]. Also, the youth coaching role involves extensive interactions with parents. Exploring these interactions provides an additional avenue for advancing understanding of parent sport behaviour and resulting implications for children's development [27, 29]. For example, the nature of parent-coach communications regarding children's participation and progress likely provides coaches with unique insights into parent motivations and modeling behaviour.

To date, most exploration of coach perspectives regarding parent-child sport

communications have been conducted in tennis. Encouragingly, findings have been supportive of the proposed utility of attaining coach perspectives in advancing our current understanding of parent sport behaviour. For example, coaches appear to report perceived detrimental parenting behaviours more frequently than parents [e.g., 27-28]. Also, coach perspectives have provided a more thorough account of the influence of parent sport behaviours on child development [e.g., 27-29]. For instance, Gould and colleagues [27-28] conducted both survey and focus group research into junior tennis coaches' perceptions of parental impact on children's tennis success. Of 132 coaches surveyed, the authors found that while coaches believed that 59% of parents positively influenced their child's tennis development via the appropriate provision of emotional and logistical support, they also perceived that 36% of parents played a negative role by interfering with coach-athlete interactions, overemphasizing winning, holding unrealistic expectations, and being critical of children's playing performance. More recently, Lauer et al. [30] interviewed former professional players, along with their coaches and parents, to examine the type of parent-child relationships that facilitated successful tennis development. The study found that parents positively supported development by providing appropriate logistical, financial and emotional support, and by engaging in discussions thought to promote the ability to regulate and respond adaptively to emotions. Parent behaviours considered inhibiting for tennis development included being critical, over emphasizing winning, and using controlling behaviours to push the child toward tennis goals. Finally, in Knight and Harwood's [29] exploration of coach stress in tennis, coaches detailed experiencing stress in relation to perceptions of parents placing pressure on children to win, being involved at inappropriate levels, making excuses regarding children's performance, and having unrealistic expectations of the child. As such, this line of research has demonstrated some consistent emergent themes regarding parent contributions to junior tennis players' development. These themes align closely with the tenets of Basic Psychological Needs theory (BPN), which is a sub-theory of Self-Determination theory (SDT) [31]. BPN postulates that it is vital for social contexts to provide experiences that nurture individuals' basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness, because psychological need satisfaction contributes to optimal human development and functioning [31].

While coach perspectives in tennis have advanced the literature regarding parent sport behaviour, researchers have suggested that the social dynamics of team sports compared to individual sports may lead parents to act differently [e.g., 29; 32]. Therefore, exploration of coach perspectives regarding parent behaviour in team sports could lead to the emergence of additional contextualised insights. Also, despite the majority of previous parent sport behaviour research focusing on the psychosocial impacts of parent-child communications on children's development [e.g., 3, 5-6] the primary focus of coach considerations of parent behaviour thus far has been performance development and coach stress [e.g., 27-29]. Therefore, coach perspectives regarding how parent sport behaviour influences children's broader developmental characteristics are yet to be a primary study purpose. Finally, youth sport administrators are also key youth sport leaders who play a central role in junior sport policy and practice. For example, in Australia, school sport directors and junior development officers in sporting clubs and organisations are commonly responsible for receiving and responding to parent complaints and behavioural issues, setting parent behaviour expectations, and implementing parent education requirements. These key youth sport leaders are often exposed to parent sport behaviours that occur away from the playing fields yet still conceivably have the potential to influence child development. It is therefore surprising that their perspectives have not been garnered in previous sport parent research as

they may add to our understanding of youth sport parenting behaviour.

The detrimental impact that some parent behaviours have on children's youth sport experience has led to organizational efforts to influence parent sport behaviour. In Australia, most national sport organisations have adopted parent education approaches that combine social marketing campaigns and behavioural guidance information. Social marketing campaigns attempt to influence the audience by highlighting the benefits of adopting suggested behaviours. For example, the New South Wales Government introduced a program embracing social marketing intended to curb the poor behaviour of adults associated with youth sports [33]. One extensive attempt at shaping parent's behaviours in youth sport is the Australian Football League's (AFL) 'Kid's First: We're Not Playing for Sheep Stations' campaign. This program includes the required signing of a parent code of conduct, an educational booklet outlining preferred parental behaviours, and a recommended live parent education session designed to be held at sporting clubs [Lee Sarten, personal communication, 2012]. Such interventions provide further evidence of the importance that youth sport leaders place on appropriate parental behaviours. Further, it also supports the perception that parent sport behaviours need shaping. However, the effectiveness of such programs have not been empirically analysed and despite their presence, parent behaviour is still commonly reported as problematic [13, 34]. It is important to develop a better understanding of the effectiveness of current efforts to shape parent behaviour and it seems likely that in their roles, youth coaches and administrators may be well placed to comment on the use and effectiveness of current programs.

The current study aimed to advance the literature regarding the impact of parent sport behaviour on children's development by: a) garnering coach perspectives across various sports (including team sports); b) exploring coach perspectives regarding the influence of parent sport behaviour on children's broader developmental characteristics; and c) including key youth sport administrators in the study participant group. A secondary purpose of the study was to explore coach and administrator perspectives regarding awareness of and the perceived effectiveness of current organisational efforts to influence parent behaviour in Australia.

METHOD

PARTICIPANTS

Participants were recruited via phone through contacts with coaches and administrators of various schools and sporting clubs in Australia. Participants were purposively sampled with variation in sports and roles (coaching/administration) to develop understanding of a diverse array of parent-related experiences [35]. With regard to sample size, Gratton and Jones [36] advocated reaching a point of "saturation". This refers to the stage at which further data collection will not provide any different information from that which has already been collected. In accordance with this approach, data analysis began at the conclusion of the first four interviews and continued thereafter throughout the interview process. Content saturation was reached when 12 coaches and administrators (eight males, four females; eight coaches, four administrators) from a variety of sports (tennis, cricket, rugby union, football, swimming) completed their interviews. Coaches and administrators discussed parent interactions relating to children aged 8 to 17, competing at school to national levels. Eight study participants reported on contexts including children of both sexes while four reported only on male contexts (cricket, rugby union). Participants had a mean age of 42 years and averaged nine years experience in their role.

PROCEDURE

Firstly, an institutional ethics committee approved the study. Qualitative research such as this allows the researcher to capture qualities such as feelings, thoughts, and experiences, which are difficult to ascertain through other approaches [35-36]. Specifically, this approach involved the gathering of data via semi-structured participant interviews relating to coaches' and sport administrators' (sports directors, managers) interactions with sport parents, and participant observation of parent-child sport communications. The first author conducted individual interviews with each participant lasting between 30 and 45 minutes. The interview was designed to facilitate participants' ability to discuss their interactions with parents, and observation of parent-child sport communications in their role. The interview guide was created and initially piloted (n=2) to refine questions. At the beginning of the interview participants completed consent forms, were reminded of study purposes, and were asked for permission to record the interviews.

Participants were asked three main questions that were complemented with several probing questions that sought to clarify and elaborate on responses. This format was employed to provide a consistent framework of operation across participants, but to also allow opportunities to explore participant responses when appropriate [35]. The main questions focused on participants' interactions with parents, and observations of parent-child sport communications in their role (i.e., "Could you discuss your personal interactions with parents in your role/Could you discuss your observations of parent-child communications in your role?"), along with their exposure to sport parenting education efforts ("Have you experienced organizational attempts regarding parent education efforts in your role?"). Probing and follow-up questions were used to encourage participants to add to their reflections and elaborate on their perceptions of previously discussed experiences [37]. Examples of follow-ups included: "Could you provide an example of that type of interaction/observation?" "What impact might have that interaction had on the child?" A transcriber blind to the nature of the study transcribed the interviews. The completed transcript was then checked by the researcher and mailed to the participants for their comments and amendments. No participants requested amendments to their interview responses.

DATA ANALYSES

Guidelines established by Patton [35] and Tesch [38] were used to conduct a hierarchical inductive content analysis. Over several readings of the transcripts, meaning units (i.e., text segments containing a specific idea or piece of information) were identified and coded [38]. A comparison of meaning units was then undertaken and those with like meanings grouped, resulting in the abstraction of themes. Themes were then analysed and compared to abstract a broader conceptualisation of the data resulting in the grouping of themes into categories. Higher order categories contained broad themes related to coach and administrator experiences and observations, while lower order themes were more specific in nature. Due to our aim to achieve a wide-ranging understanding of parent-related experiences across a varied group of coaches and administrators, we attempted to report all meaning units in the results [39]. To ensure the trustworthiness of the data, three experienced researchers familiar with qualitative analysis first independently analysed the data. These independent analyses were followed by discussions to explore, compare, and resolve differences in meaning units, themes, and categories, which facilitated triangular consensus.

RESULTS

Participant responses were organized as either coach and administrator interactions with parents, or coach and administrator observations of parent-child communications. Responses were further divided into positive and negative categories accordingly. Participant reports were categorized as positive if the coach or administrator perceived them to directly or indirectly support the positive development of the child. Coach reports were considered to be negative if they were perceived to directly or indirectly thwart the positive development of the child. For example, a coach-parent interaction may directly influence a child's development through modelling, or have an indirect influence through affecting the coach-child relationship, or providing insight into parent motivations regarding the child's sport participation. Positive interactions were grouped into three higher order categories related to appreciation (one theme), support (two themes), and personal relationships (two themes). Negative interactions were grouped into two higher order categories related to complaints (four themes), and athlete progress (two themes). Coach and administrator observations of parent-child communications were also grouped positively and negatively. Positive observations were grouped into four higher order categories related to unconditional support (one theme), involvement (three themes), autonomy (two themes), and competence (two themes). Negative observations were grouped into three higher order categories related to conditional support (two themes), competence (two themes), and involvement (two themes).

POSITIVE INTERACTIONS 1: PARENTS WERE APPRECIATIVE

Appreciation for coaches' and administrators' efforts (n = 9, coach = 6, administrator = 3).

Nine participants discussed parents who communicated an appreciation for coaches'/administrators' efforts in supporting the adaptive development of children. They spoke of this most often occurring at the end of the season. One participant reported, "There were quite a few parents who let me know, 'job really well done', and things like that, especially after the season was over" (P5).

POSITIVE INTERACTIONS 2: PARENTS PROVIDED SUPPORT

Logistical support for club (n = 9, coach = 5, administrator = 4).

Nine participants discussed how parents lent support in various ways that ensured competitions could be held. They spoke of parents who volunteered to coach teams, to umpire/referee, to work in the tuck shop, to fundraise, or to help transport children other than their own; for example, "You're sometimes spellbound by how generous people are, those who don't have an agenda or don't see their son as the only kid in the program; so those parents who give up time to do the down-to-earth work" (P11).

Constructive feedback (n = 2, administrator = 2).

Two participants mentioned the importance of parents who gave constructive feedback to coaches and administrators that assisted the provision of a more positive sporting experience for children. Participants suggested this was an important aspect of club life: "Sometimes parents will give suggestions to benefit the whole club so feedback from parents can be helpful when it is not too forward or pushy not just about benefiting their own child" (P6).

POSITIVE INTERACTIONS 3: COACHES AND ADMINISTRATORS DEVELOPED CARING RELATIONSHIPS WITH PARENTS

Sharing of children's sport experiences (n = 4, coach = 3, administrator = 1).

Four participants discussed how the sharing of children's sporting experiences with parents facilitated caring relationships between themselves, parents, and children. They spoke of watching children improve, achieve, and have fun. One participant commented, "I think it's the sharing of all the different emotions that kids, parents, and coaches go through that ends up actually building those relationships" (P12).

Non-sport related conversations (n = 3, coach = 2, administrator = 1).

Three participants discussed gaining pleasure from day-to-day conversations with parents that were unrelated to work topics. Participants suggested that this indicated that parents were interested in them as people and increased their motivation to help their child: "Our conversations would be about everyday life. They would get the child to swimming and if they stayed they would chat to other parents and myself about topics other than swimming" (P2).

NEGATIVE INTERACTIONS 1: PARENTAL ANGER/COMPLAINTS

Regarding parental complaints, participants believed that these interactions negatively influenced children's development directly via modelling. Participants also reported that complaints indirectly hindered the coach-child relationship. Finally, participants suggested that parental complaints were an indication that parents were likely thwarting children's resilience development during parent-child communications.

Anger/Complaints about selection issues (n = 12, coach = 8, administrator = 4).

Twelve participants discussed parents who became angry and complained about team/squad selections. Most participants agreed that parental complaints regarding selection were a regular occurrence. In two cases, this involved threats to withdraw the child from participation; for example, "I rang the father to let him know that his son was going to be dropped to the B's, and he wanted to pull him out of rugby; Dad wanted to pick up his bat and ball and go home" (P5).

Anger/Complaints about coaching issues (n = 10, coach = 6, administrator = 4).

Ten participants reported regular parental anger and complaints regarding the quality of training provided. Participants spoke of complaints about a perceived lack of coach investment in coaching practice, coach ability and the quality of coaching activities. One participant, for example, reported that, "I had a father call me during training to have a go at the coach about the training session saying that they were poor drills yet I know this parent has very limited understanding of the game and doesn't have the coaching knowledge to know what drills the kids should be doing" (P6).

Anger/Complaints about differential playing opportunities (n = 5, coach = 2, administrator = 3).

Five participants also spoke of parental anger and complaints about children's playing positions in team sports such as cricket and rugby and differential opportunities to "stand

out". One participant reported, "This poor kid demands that he be wicketkeeper in cricket and halfback in rugby and when he doesn't get his way he sulks and it is a reflection on the parents, they complain when it hasn't gone his way and he is the same. The acorn doesn't fall far from the tree and that is a pretty good example of the parents' and children's behaviour that I see (P5).

Anger/Complaints about umpiring/refereeing decisions (n = 3, coach = 2, administrator = 1).

Three participants also discussed anger and complaints about perceived incompetent umpiring/referring decisions. This was reportedly common in sports such as tennis and cricket: "The most common one is probably the unfairness of umpiring decisions or the perception of being cheated, but what parents can't see is that getting bad decisions helps kids develop resilience in the long run" (P1).

NEGATIVE INTERACTIONS 2: PARENT INTERACTIONS REGARDING CHILDREN'S PROGRESS

Interactions reflecting pressures on child (n = 6, coach = 5, administrator = 1).

Six participants spoke of the pervasiveness of parental pushiness regarding athletic progress of their children. Coaches and administrators discussed parents who became obsessed by their child's progress which was believed to thwart coach and administrator motivation, and negatively impact on children's psychosocial development: "There was just a continual feeling of pressure when you were around them, so then the kid can't relax because they feel they are under constant scrutiny, and can't have a laugh with other kids so they pull away socially as well" (P9)

Interference in coaching (n = 4, coach = 2, administrator = 2).

Four participants mentioned parents who interfered in the coaching process during practice and/or competitions. Participants emphasized that the advice given by parents was often incorrect and therefore negatively impacted on children's performance development: "You also see parents who come in and try to coach their kids and they are giving advice that is way off the mark" (P11).

POSITIVE OBSERVATIONS 1: PARENTS COMMUNICATED UNCONDITIONAL SUPPORT/ACCEPTANCE OF CHILDREN

Provision of unconditional support (n = 7, coach = 4, administrator = 3).

Seven participants spoke of parents who acted calmly and appeared positive during competition and affectionate after competition regardless of performance outcomes. Participants believed these behaviours helped foster children's self-esteem: "You could see that they were there to provide what the child needed but not creating a pressure environment and you could see the difference in the kid compared to some others, always relaxed and happy" (P2).

Positive Observations 2: Parents were appropriately involved in logistical support for child (n = 5, coach = 3, administrator = 2).

Five participants described parents driving their child to training and competitions that allowed the child to participate in sport: "One parent who gave up an enormous amount of time by getting away from work early to make sure his son would get to sessions on time yet he didn't ever interfere with any of the sessions" (P3).

Competition attendance (n = 4, coach = 2, administrator = 2).

Four participants discussed parent attendance at competitions as communicating positive messages of support and caring to children: “I think that being hands on by coming and watching, kids know that their parents care about their sport and kids also are proud that Mum and Dad are around to see them play” (P4).

Encouragement of participation (n = 4, coach = 2, administrator = 2).

Four participants reported observing parents encouraging children’s sport participation. They spoke of verbal interactions in which parents encouraged children’s participation as well as parents simply enjoying watching competitions which was thought to implicitly communicate messages of encouragement: “We had a lot of parents enjoying themselves and encouraging to have a go which is why I think we had very few girls drop out throughout the whole season” (P7).

POSITIVE OBSERVATIONS 3: PARENTS FOSTERED CHILDREN’S AUTONOMY

Provision of appropriate space (n = 5, coach = 3, administrator = 2).

Five participants reported observing parents that allowed their children autonomy during training and competition. This autonomy included allowing coaches to coach without intervening, and allowing children to be alone directly after competition. This was thought to foster children’s development of independence and problem solving ability. One participant highlighted this theme, “Helping the kid self reflect by not rushing up and being all over him. He will come to parents when required and a lot of parents do that really well you know don’t go smothering the child” (P11).

Exposure to challenges (n = 2, coach = 2).

Two participants described parents who allowed children to experience difficulties, setbacks, and unfairness common to sport, which was thought to foster children’s ability to overcome these challenges. One participant reported, “When you have tours there are always a couple of kids who miss out when they could have easily been selected and this parent was understanding in that situation which will help the kid not develop a victim mentality” (P9).

POSITIVE OBSERVATIONS 4: PARENTS SUPPORTED THE DEVELOPMENT OF COMPETENCE

Fostering of self-belief (n = 3, coach = 2, administrator = 1).

Three participants discussed parents who focused on strengths in sport. These participants thought that this developed children’s self-belief: “You get some parents who just get it, you know, they know that if they are more positive with their kids in the way they react that is going to rub off on the kid over time” (P8).

Focus on controllable performance factors (n = 2, coach = 2).

Two participants discussed observing parents who encouraged their child to focus on factors such as long-term participation and hard work when faced with adversity. This was believed to further foster children’s resilience, and therefore competence: “A gentleman who coaches in the program, his son is not overly talented, he talks about resilience and making sure his son knows that the longer you play the game and work hard the better off you will be” (P11).

NEGATIVE OBSERVATIONS 1: PARENTS COMMUNICATED CONDITIONAL SUPPORT/ACCEPTANCE

Disapproval of performance (n = 7, coach = 5, administrator = 2).

Seven participants discussed observing parental communication of disapproval in response to poor performance that they considered to thwart children's self-esteem and performance development. They spoke of anger, verbal criticism, and non-verbal communications of disapproval: "A kid who struggles mentally now if the kid failed you would see Dad put his head down. The kid had ability but the strain of having the old man be more disappointed than he should have been took its toll" (P11).

Abusive actions (n = 6, coach = 5, administrator = 1).

Six participants discussed parental abusive communications such as verbal abuse in the form of yelling from the sidelines or after competition. Three participants also described infrequent physical abuse in the form of pushing, or hitting children: "I have seen parents be physically abusive to children when they don't perform to expectations, and we've currently got a father who was throwing water bottles, swearing at his son, and we have had to ban that father from games" (P1).

NEGATIVE OBSERVATION 2: PARENT'S HINDERED CHILDREN'S DEVELOPMENT OF COMPETENCE

Focus on children's weaknesses (n = 4, coach = 3, administrator = 1).

Four participants discussed parental focus on incompetence after competition and training and the tendency to point out what children were doing wrong and conversations on children's weaknesses: "I just think of one father who was always so hard on his girl, I actually never heard him say a positive thing to her in all the time I spent with them" (P10).

Lack of accountability (n = 3, coach = 2, administrator = 1).

Three participants reported parents who didn't hold children accountable for agreements that were made regarding sport participation, or made excuses for children's sporting outcomes either directly to the child or to other parents, coaches, or administrators: "So when he played a poor shot and got out his parents would be like that's wasn't out son, so not owning the behaviour" (P7).

NEGATIVE OBSERVATION 3: INAPPROPRIATE INVOLVEMENT LEVELS

Over-involvement (n = 4, coach = 3, administrator = 1).

Four participants discussed parents' tendency to do 'too much' for children; e.g., becoming overly involved in emotional and logistical support such as competition preparation which was perceived to thwart children's opportunities to develop autonomy: "Today parents do so much for kids, they get the kid so prepared, I know they think it is helpful but I think doing too much for the kid is a big problem" (P8).

Lack of involvement (n = 3, coach = 1, administrator = 2).

In contrast, participants reported observing children who do not have parents who are involved in their sport participation which was thought to communicate a lack of interest: "Some parents we call the 'drop off' parents who never come to games and aren't involved, they don't show much interest in the child's development" (P6).

Exposure to Sport Parenting Education Efforts (n = 4, coach = 3, administrator = 1)

Exposure to parent education efforts was reported that these experiences were a combination of behavioural guidelines and social marketing information implemented by state or national sporting organisations. However, these coaches and administrators all perceived education efforts to be largely ineffective in influencing parent sport behaviour; e.g., one participant reported: “Swimming Australia has this ‘GoSwim’ parenting handbook that we give to parents which tells them what they should be doing and parenting tips, but the problem is that I can honestly say I have never seen a parent who is not doing the right thing change their behaviour in any way after reading that booklet” (P2). Three participants reported that they believed the education material lacked the rigor required to influence parent sport behaviour. One participant said, “It’s like the people producing the parent education stuff have not been out their actually experiencing what it’s like to deal with parents and trying to change parents” (P5).

When asked about suggestions to improve the education process three participants suggested that parent education approaches needed to be more thorough in addressing the elements that influence parent behaviour. One participant said, “Anyone who has been doing this for a while knows it’s not as simple as telling parents what they should be doing. The majority of parents know what they should be doing, some just can’t do it when it gets emotional” (P2). Another participant reported, “They need help doing the behaviours, and so that’s what I try to do in my day to day interactions, trying to get to know them and why they might struggle, and give them tips on how they might get better at acting the way they want, and this is something the education programs should be dealing with” (P7).

DISCUSSION**DETRIMENTAL SPORT PARENT BEHAVIOUR**

A primary aim of this study was to advance previous exploration of parent sport related behaviour by considering coach and administrator perspectives of parental impact on children’s development across various sports. Study participants recalled various positively and negatively perceived parent behaviours, but alarmingly, detrimental parent behaviours were more commonly reported. Of the noted detrimental behaviours, coaches and administrators most frequently recalled anger and complaints targeted at them, and conditional support for children dependent on performance. It is commonly regarded that parent behaviours such as these potentially thwart children’s optimal development. For example, an emerging body of work contends that parental anger in sport contexts has particularly harmful effects on children’s emotional well-being [32, 40]. Further, parent conditional regard in performance domains, seen as the tendency to respond with less affection and attention when children do not meet parent expectations, has been found to promote an internal compulsion in children to avoid failure at the cost of feeling disapproved by and resentment towards parents, in addition to shame, guilt, and lowered self-esteem in the case of failure [41].

Given the widespread agreement regarding the deleterious role poor parent-child sport communications play in children’s development, motivations for, and mechanisms of, poor parent behaviours require careful consideration. There is little sport-specific research that has focused on why sport often overwhelms parental ability to respond in ways that nurture children’s positive development. Omli and colleagues [34, 40] argued that traditional assumptions that assume that parents act inappropriately at youth sport events because they are living vicariously through their children are overly simplistic and empirically untested

[34, 40]. Given the contention that due to the realities of human evolution, all people are the same in some ways [42], it appears appropriate that evolutionary perspectives, previously not considered in the sport parenting literature, may be useful to inform postulations regarding detrimental sport parent behaviour. The experience of interpreting some aspects of competition like life threatening situations appears to be one such commonality. Where surviving real life threats results in relief so does winning in sport. Likewise, losing in sport can feel like a real battle lost. It may be that our human brains have a hangover from evolution's adaptations to life threatening battles that now generalizes to sport [43-44].

Accordingly, Gurland and Grolnick [45] suggested that parents generally perceive significant danger to children in performance-related situations such as competing against peers. Further, given conditions of uncertainty in this perceived danger, parents naturally err towards excessive protection in the form of controlling behaviours such as power assertion, pressure, and coercion to act in ways that lessen the perceived threat [45-46]. In youth sport, the threat of loss or lack of success may therefore result in excessive parental expectations for achievement, solving problems for children, or the communication of disapproval in the case of failure [17, 45]. While these behaviours may have been adaptations in evolutionary design during life threatening battles, they can come with significant developmental costs in the sporting environment where survival is not actually on the line [45]. Consider a parent who angrily complains to a coach or administrator with the intention of solving the perceived problem of her child not being selected on a desired team. This action may implicitly communicate her lack of belief in the child's ability to overcome obstacles, thus inhibiting optimal development. Also, many participants in the current study reported the belief that parent-communicated disapproval of poor performance negatively impacted children's self-esteem.

While specific sporting situations likely present common challenges to all parents due to evolutionary contributions, we can also consider how some parents face increased vulnerabilities to implementing controlling parenting techniques due to individual adaptations to personal learning histories [42, 47]. Parents' own life experiences, especially interactions with their own parents, shape how they perceive and react to their child's experiences [47-48]. Specifically, for parents who had especially difficult childhood communications with their own parents in performance domains, challenging sport parenting situations likely trigger implicit memories in the form of difficult perceptions, emotions, and sensations without being accompanied by an awareness of past influence on one's present experience [47]. Parents then become vulnerable to taking sport parenting actions that are dominated by, or unconsciously designed to reduce, these memory elements [34, 47].

With these processes in mind, we can propose how a parent may come to unintentionally implement controlling behaviours in the form of anger directed at a coach, who doesn't select a child in a team, or anger aimed at a child whose performance does not meet the parent's expectations. If a parent's own history of sport participation was situated in an environment of conditional parent regard, the sense of disapproval that he/she felt then will likely be evoked when his/her child is not selected on a desired team, or when he/she watches his/her child perform poorly in sport. Through this process (sometimes called transference) [47], the parent may come to have similar difficult internal experiences to those of his/her childhood in these situations; e.g., a likely internal experience in this context is shame [41]. Shame has been described as one of the most painful emotions to experience where the whole self is viewed as bad and therefore painfully scrutinized and negatively evaluated [49]. In response, an individual may enact coping mechanisms designed to reduce this emotion. The externalization of anger and blame is one common means to cope as it often serves as an ego

defence in reducing our most uncomfortable internal feelings [49-51]. So, a parent who is feeling shame may attempt to reduce this internal experience by looking for someone to blame such as the coach or child. With a target of blame identified, anger is likely to surface and become externalized through behaviours such as communicated disapproval towards the target [49]. This behavioural response likely gives some temporary relief from the global, self-condemning experience of shame by sparing the self from the sense of further judgment [49]. Since this process occurs at an unconscious level, it is particularly difficult for parents to gain insight into the underlying factors that contribute to the angry reaction [51]. It seems reasonable to conceive that through repetition and the strong negative reinforcement of shame reduction (or other unwanted internal experiences) this pattern tends to become more automatic and unconscious to the point where the parent may not be aware of the initial feeling of shame at all, rather only having conscious access to the angry adaptation [52].

Supporting this hypothesis, Goldstein and Iso-Aloha [14] found that among 340 soccer parents approximately 50% reported experiencing anger while watching their child participate. Control-oriented parents were more likely to perceive their child's on field errors as a personal affront and feel more anger compared to autonomy-oriented parents, with ego defence being reported as the primary cause for resulting parental aggression. It may be that parents with more difficult learning histories unconsciously develop a control-oriented sport parenting approach in part to avoid or reduce the difficult aspects of implicit memory that would arise if they were to be more autonomous in parenting communications.

POSITIVE SPORT PARENT BEHAVIOUR

In accordance with previous research, coaches and administrators in this study highlighted the importance of parent-child sport communications that nurture children's sense of acceptance, autonomy, and competence [e.g., 27-28, 30]. Regarding acceptance, participants reported the perceived positive impact on children's self-esteem when parents provide logistical and emotional support for children regardless of competition outcomes. This finding aligns with previous coach reports that unconditional parent regard is an important element in the performance development of tennis players [27-28, 30]. Regarding autonomy, participants discussed the perceived benefits to children's problem solving ability when parents balance involvement and support while also allowing children appropriate space to be exposed to sport challenges and develop self-regulation. Previous research has found that parents' support of autonomy via the provision of choice and encouragement of decision-making is also linked to parental ability to understand children's internal mental experiences [53]. Finally, regarding competence, participants discussed the importance of parents who focus on children's strengths and encourage children to take on sport challenges. Likewise, Babkes and Weiss [54] demonstrated that children whose parents had more positive beliefs about their soccer competency had higher self-perceptions of competence.

SUMMARY: SPORT PARENT BEHAVIOURS

The most commonly reported parent behaviours observed by coaches and administrators in this study related to themes of unconditional/conditional regard, autonomy/control, and competence/incompetence. Like previous research in tennis, these themes align closely with the tenets of Basic Psychological Needs theory (BPN) [31]. BPN highlights the role of social agents such as parents, and how the provision of certain conditions either nurture or thwart individuals' perceptions of autonomy, competence, and relatedness [31-55]. In the current study, while the links between autonomy and control, competence and incompetence themes and BPN are obvious, the unconditional and conditional regard theme has previously been

shown to be a primary way that relatedness is either supported or thwarted [e.g., 41]. As such, BPN may provide a fruitful grounding for future sport parenting related research and the development of parent education programs that are underpinned by theory.

PARENT EDUCATION PROGRAMS

Fraser-Thomas and Côté [39] stressed the importance for researchers to explore how different organisations address parent education in youth sports, and the effectiveness of such programs. Of those coaches and administrators in the current study who had been exposed to organisational parent education efforts, all reported these experiences to be limited to behavioural guidelines such as positive parenting tips, and social marketing techniques. Moreover, participants generally perceived these efforts to be inadequate in influencing parent behaviour in emotion-charged sport contexts. Participants further suggested that parent education programs require a more rigorous approach to achieve the desired influence on those parents who do not always foster positive youth development through sport. It may be that despite subsequent understanding of preferred sport behaviours central to the reported approaches, some parents are unable to apply these behaviours without additional support. Several researchers have supported this assertion; e.g., Omli and LaVoi [34] proposed that to be effective, interventions should address the functionality of parent youth sport reactions, and develop relevant strategies for tackling these motivations for parent behaviour. Further, Goldstein and Iso-Ahola [14] noted the current focus on promoting positive parent behaviours and suggested the need to incorporate awareness training via the monitoring of internal experiences and underlying psychological triggers. Supporting these views, an analysis of non-sport parent interventions that include emotional skill development resulted in larger effects than those that do not [56]. Future research might continue to explore the effectiveness of current sport parent education efforts and also examine the more extensive approaches used in general parenting interventions to inform the improvement of current sport-specific interventions.

LIMITATIONS

Some limitations of this study are acknowledged and provide guidance for future research. The authors focused on coach and administrator experiences of parent sport behaviour in Australia. Therefore, applying findings to other cultures should be done with caution and future research might consider the use of participants in other youth sporting contexts and cultures. Also, the study's retrospective approach could lead to inaccuracies in the data given that a person's accuracy of recall may decrease over time [57]. However, we attempted to minimize this limitation by including participants who were currently involved in youth sports as a coach or administrator. Future research might examine the coach-parent-athlete context using a prospective design (e.g., ethnographical tools) and triangulate data from all sources with observational data.

CONCLUSION

The findings from this study add to the limited previous research focusing on coaches' perspectives regarding the impact of parent sport behaviour on children's development by garnering coach perspectives across team sports, exploring broader developmental impacts, and including youth sport administrators' perspectives. Specifically, this study found that coaches and administrators perceived more negative than positive parent behaviours. These findings suggest potentially less than ideal developmental conditions for children in these contexts. This study also found that coaches and administrators perceived current parent education efforts to be inadequate considering the challenges faced by some parents to

behave appropriately.

Considering the current study's findings regarding the perceived limitations of current approaches in addressing frequent sport parent behaviour thought to be detrimental to children, it is important to develop more rigorous parent education programs. With regard to potential elements of such programs, the importance of parents' unconditional regard and support of children's autonomy and competence in youth sport contexts point to the potential benefits of underpinning intervention behavioural guidelines with SDT's Basic Psychological Needs theory. Additionally, the inclusion of strategies for developing emotion regulation skills for those parents most vulnerable to detrimental behaviours also seems pertinent. Educating coaches and administrators regarding how they can assist with the promotion of positive parenting behaviours by encouraging BPN support during their interactions with parents may support parent education.

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