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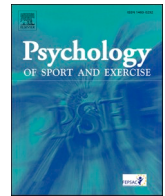
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Advancing a grounded theory of parental support in competitive girls' golf

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ABSTRACT

Parental support in youth sport has been associated with positive athlete outcomes, such as sport enjoyment and continued participation. Although research has demonstrated the significant and influential role parents fulfil in the youth sport context, there remains a dearth of theoretical frameworks detailing parental support in youth sport and an absence of empirical research examining parental support across athlete development stages and sports. The present study sought to examine athletes' perceptions of parental support, with a view to advancing a grounded theory of parental support in youth golf. Fourteen online synchronous focus groups were conducted with an international sample (Australia, Canada, England, Finland, Ireland, New Zealand, Scotland) of 61 girls, in the specialising ($n = 27$) and investment stages ($n = 34$) of athlete development. Data were analysed in three phases: open-coding, axial coding, and theoretical integration. The substantive grounded theory is constructed on the core category of 'Individual Parental Support Preferences'. This core category is underpinned by four sub-categories of parental support which were evident across development stages: *instrumental*, *informational*, *emotional*, and *autonomy* support, and is influenced by a host of athlete (e.g., athletes' performance), parent (e.g., parents' knowledge), and contextual characteristics (e.g., location). Unconditional parental support is an important aspect of emotional support, however the concept of adopting a person-first approach to sport parenting is novel. These results provide a rich and novel insight of parental support in girls' golf, advancing a grounded theoretical understanding of parental support mechanisms in a youth sport context.

1. Introduction

Research examining parenting in youth sport began in the late 1960's (Dorsch et al., 2021), stimulating an influx of research examining the role, importance, and experiences of parents in youth sport (e.g., Côté, 1999; Furusa et al., 2021). One possible explanation for this surge in research is the marked increase in parental involvement in contrast to previous generations (Stefansen et al., 2018). Parents fulfil many roles in modern day youth sport as providers, interpreters, and role models (Fredricks & Eccles, 2004). However, Côté (1999) revealed that as athletes move through the various stages of their sport development, the support provided by parents changes. In the initial stages, parents are responsible for the socialization of their children into sport (Coakley, 2006; Côté, 1999). As children progress in their sport development, parents afford children the resources and support required, to participate and compete (Fredricks & Eccles, 2004; Harwood & Knight, 2015).

Parental involvement in youth sport has been previously characterised by parental support and pressure (Leff & Hoyle, 1995). Parental support includes tangible, informational, and emotional support (Holt &

Knight, 2014), and has been associated with adaptive athlete outcomes, such as sport enjoyment, continued participation, and development of positive coping skills (Leff & Hoyle, 1995; Tamminen et al., 2016; Williams et al., 2013). Conversely, unsupportive, or pressurizing behaviours displayed by parents have been associated with unfavourable outcomes, such as reduced enjoyment, amotivation, and dropout (Sanchez-Miguel et al., 2013; Williams et al., 2013). However, researchers have suggested that viewing behaviours as either 'supportive' or 'pressurizing' oversimplifies sport parenting (Knight et al., 2017). Highlighting the complexity of the parent-athlete relationship, Holt and Knight (2014) argued that it is not the behaviours which parents display that is paramount, but rather how youth athletes perceive and interpret these behaviours. Previous research, examining parental involvement in youth sport, has revealed a number of factors which influence how athletes perceive their parents' behaviour. For example, Knight et al. (2010; 2016) examined athletes' preferences for parental support across time (i.e., before, during, and after competitions) and locations (i.e., at home, training, and competitions). Results demonstrated that preferences for support varied across contexts and time, highlighting that

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perceptions of parental involvement are not exclusively influenced by the behaviours parents display, but also by a host of additional factors (Holt & Knight, 2014). Giving thought to, and accounting for, such complexity in future research is important (Knight et al., 2017).

The research examining athletes' perceptions of parental support has certainly highlighted the intricate nature of parent-athlete relationships and furthered the understanding of parenting in youth sport. However, there remains a number of identified gaps which warrant further research attention. Firstly, previous investigations have proposed that researchers need to be cognizant of the changing support needs of athletes throughout their sporting career. Harwood and Knight (2016) stated that "parenting in sport is not a static task but rather one that is fluid and responsive to the different needs of children" (p. 86). As such, they proposed that future research examining social support and parent-athlete relationships should consider both the development level and stage of athletes, with particular attention required around the adolescent years (Harwood & Knight, 2016). To date, there is limited research exploring parental support across development stages. Further, reviews examining parent-child interactions in youth sport have revealed that there is great homogeneity in the populations being studied and that there is an absence of empirical research examining parental involvement across a variety of sports (Dorsch et al., 2019, 2021). To date, research investigating parenting in youth sport has been conducted with parent-athlete dyads primarily recruited from sports such as tennis and soccer (Dorsch et al., 2019; Knight, 2019). That is, there is limited research examining parental support outside of these populations. This is a significant concern, particularly when making recommendations regarding parental involvement across a diverse range of sports (Knight, 2019). Dorsch et al. (2019; 2021) proposed that research examining parental involvement in youth sport is not truly representative and that future critical analyses should strive to diversify and incorporate representative samples, to obtain information from participants across a diverse range of sports in order to continue to broaden the understanding of parenting in youth sport.

Furthermore, investigations examining parental involvement across gender also remains limited (Dorsch et al., 2021). Rather than a biological quality, gender is socially constructed and assigns appropriate behaviours or gender norms to the female (e.g., sensitivity; femininity) and male sex (e.g., leadership, aggressiveness; Chalabaev et al., 2013). Socially constructed gender norms are particularly pertinent in the sporting context. For example, men's sport participation is supported by gender norms, while women's sport involvement is not (Heinze et al., 2017). That is, there is a cultural incongruence between girls and sport. As a result, women and girls experience a diverse range of barriers to sport participation (e.g., attitudinal inequalities; Cooky et al., 2016). For example, Slater and Tiggemann (2010) revealed that crossing traditional gender boundaries and appearance concerns contributed to sport withdrawal amongst girls. Consequently, women and girls are underrepresented in sport, and therefore, research has proposed that exploring potential avenues to initiate and retain girls sport participation is warranted (Elliott et al., 2020). One such avenue includes the provision of positive parental support. That is, previous investigations have illustrated that parental support plays a significant role in girls' sport socialization (Spreitzer & Snyder, 1976), continued sport participation (Elliott et al., 2020), and positive athletic experiences (McCarthy et al., 2008), suggesting that support provided by parents may act as a buffer to such barriers encountered by girls participating in youth sport. Moreover, social support research has also illustrated that men and women's perceptions of support differ. For example, research conducted by Judge et al. (2012) demonstrated that women placed greater importance on the provision of emotional support from coaches, in contrast to men. The importance women place on emotional support may be linked the aforementioned attitudinal inequalities and stereotyping women and girls experience in youth sport. Despite the illustrated significance of social support in girls' sport, there remains limited research exploring girls' perceptions of parental support in youth sport.

Finally, there has been a significant amount of qualitative research conducted, examining athletes' and others' perceptions of parental support in youth sport (e.g., Gould et al., 2006; Knight et al., 2010), however, this research has not translated into theoretical developments. As such, there remains a dearth of theoretical frameworks to guide research and practice in this area. Rees and Hardy (2000) developed a grounded theory of social support in sport, which detailed the various dimensions of support and associated behaviours provided by the social support network. However, research has suggested that members of the social support network may provide distinct forms of support. A systematic review conducted by Porto Maciel et al. (2021) revealed that parents acted as athletes' primary source of tangible support, while also providing emotional and informational support. However, coaches were associated with the provision of emotional and informational support only. As such, theoretical advancements of specific forms of social support provided by coaches, parents, and teammates are warranted.

It should be noted that grounded theories of parental involvement in youth sport exist. For example, Holt et al. (2008) developed a grounded theory of parental involvement in competitive youth sport, which made distinctions between supportive and controlling parental comments. However, Holt et al.'s (2008) theory is based explicitly on parents verbal reactions. With this in mind, research has previously demonstrated that parents provide both verbal and non-verbal support to youth athletes. For example, Gould et al. (2006) revealed that the provision of financial and logistical support is a critical component of parental support. However, the grounded theory developed by Holt et al. (2008) does not account for such non-verbal support. Similarly, Knight and Holt (2014) advanced a grounded theory of optimal parental involvement in junior tennis. The theory posits that positive parental involvement is achieved when parents seek to understand their children's sporting experiences. Furthermore, the theory proposes that parents should (1) strive to generate and communicate shared goals, (2) develop an understanding emotional climate, and (3) engage in positive parenting practices at competitions. Although such grounded theories have significantly advanced the knowledge of parenting in youth sport, they focus on the broader concept of parental involvement. That is, they do not detail dimensions of parental support in youth sport, nor do such theories consider factors which may influence how parental support is perceived. As such, there is scope for the development of a theoretical framework providing a rich and integrated understanding of constructs of sport-specific parental support. Furthermore, researchers have called for the development of theoretically grounded measures of parental support in youth sport (Knight, 2019). The advancement of a theoretical framework of parental support will prove advantageous in the development of theoretically informed psychometric instruments of social support, pertinent to parents in youth sport.

Given the scope for advancing existing theoretical frameworks in this area, the present study sought to advance a grounded theory of parental support in competitive youth sport, by examining athletes' perceptions of parental support and exploring factors which may influence how parental support is perceived. More specifically, given athletes' changing needs across development stages and the absence of research examining parental involvement across gender, the present study sought to examine girls' perceptions of parental support in the specialising and investment stages of athlete development. The specialising and investment stages of development were chosen as these stages represent a period when athletes compete, and parental involvement is significant (Côté, 1999). Sampling stage youth golfers were not included within the current study, as this development stage represents a period whereby children engage in play activities, and typically do not compete (Côté, 1999). As mentioned, previous youth sport research has been conducted primarily with tennis and soccer samples (Dorsch et al., 2019; Knight, 2019). As such, the current study explores parental support within the context of girls' golf as it is an individual sport, which requires an inordinate amount of time and financial investment, resulting in high levels of parental involvement. Furthermore, golf has received little

scholarly attention within the parenting in youth sport literature and presents a significant opportunity to move beyond well researched sports, and gain knowledge in more diverse samples (Dorsch et al., 2019, 2021).

2. Method

The Straussian variant of grounded theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2015) was the adopted methodology. Holt and Tamminen's (2010) heuristic for planning methodologically coherent grounded theory studies informed the planning of the present research. As detailed in this heuristic, it is critical that there is coherence between the chosen variant of grounded theory and adopted philosophical position (Holt & Tamminen, 2010). In line with the Straussian variant of grounded theory, the present research was conducted from a pragmatic philosophical position (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Pragmatists are not concerned with issues such as the nature of truth and reality. Instead, pragmatism places an emphasis on human experience (Morgan, 2014). Pragmatism proposes that human experience is a continuous cycle, whereby existing beliefs are interpreted to select actions for current circumstances, based on their likely consequences. The consequences of those actions are then interpreted to generate new beliefs (Morgan, 2014). For pragmatists, these beliefs represent meaningful knowledge. Consequently, pragmatism supports the view that our knowledge and beliefs are developed and gain meaning through our actions and interactions (Dewey, 1922). Therefore, pragmatists propose that one's knowledge of the world is socially constructed, as it is developed through socially shared experiences, while also acknowledging that one's knowledge of the world is unique, as it is developed through individual experiences and interactions. Moreover, pragmatic inquiry brings together purposes and procedures. That is, researchers adopting a pragmatic philosophical perspective first identify the research problem, and subsequently select methods best placed to address the research question (Morgan, 2014). Within the current investigation and in line with a pragmatic approach, the research question guided the research design. Grounded theory is often utilized and advantageous when examining social processes, or when there is no existing theory available to describe these social processes (Holt & Tamminen, 2010). Given that the present study sought to examine perceptions of parental support in youth sport, factors which influence how support is perceived (social processes), and the limited theoretical frameworks detailing parental support, adopting a grounded theory methodology was warranted.

The research team was made up of two female and two male academic researchers (one PhD Researcher, and three Lecturers in Sport and Exercise Psychology), all of whom possessed experience conducting and disseminating research pertaining to parenting in youth sport. The first author had previously competed as a high-performance amateur golfer, while the second author possessed experience providing psychological support within the youth golf environment. The fourth author also had competitive amateur golf experience, both as an athlete and providing psychological support. The first and second author liaised with National Governing Bodies (NGBs) in the recruitment of youth athletes. The first author facilitated focus groups, while the second author acted as a scribe, taking notes of pertinent participant responses. With regards data analysis, the first author transcribed focus groups verbatim, and conducted open and axial coding, in addition to theoretical integration. The remaining authors acted as critical friends throughout the data analysis process (Smith & McGannon, 2018). That is, co-authors provided the first author with critical feedback on initial data interpretations, codes, and categories, and considered alternative potential interpretations.

2.1. Sampling and participants

Following institutional ethical approval, an international and diverse sample of participants were recruited from seven countries (Australia, Canada, England, Finland, Ireland, New Zealand, Scotland) across three

continents (North America, Europe, Oceania/Australasia). NGB's acted as gatekeepers in the recruitment process, whereby High-Performance Directors were contacted via email and provided with study information. NGB's that agreed to act as gatekeepers distributed a recruitment pack to youth athletes (and parents) who met the sampling criteria, which contained: (1) an information sheet, (2) demographic questionnaire, (3) consent form, and (4) assent form. Youth athletes who chose to participate returned completed consent and assent forms to their individual NGBs.

When conducting grounded theory, the researcher begins by sampling information rich participants from an identified population and setting, who are in a position to provide detailed insights in relation to the research aims (Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Holt & Tamminen, 2010). Therefore, girls in the specialising or investment stages of athlete development were purposefully recruited for the initial phase of data collection. Specialising stage athletes (~12–15 years old) are committed to a reduced number of sporting activities (i.e., 1–2 sports) and develop sport specific skills through practice. During this stage, athletes are reliant on parents for practical and emotional support. During the investment years (~16–18 years old) athletes are devoted to becoming elite performers in one chosen sport. Parents act as a support network during this stage, as they provide their children with critical support, particularly in times of stress (Côté, 1999).

As concepts began to develop, participants were recruited using theoretical sampling, a critical component of grounded theory methodology (Holt & Tamminen, 2010). When adopting this approach, it is not people that are sampled but rather concepts, therefore subsequent data collection theoretically recruits people and places that enable the researcher to further examine these developing concepts (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Initial data analysis revealed there were a number of developing factors which influenced athletes' perceptions of parental support (e.g., context, parents' knowledge). The research team subsequently sought to sample participants who could generate data to allow for further exploration of these concepts. This allowed the authors to establish properties and dimensions of identified categories and explore variations and similarities in experiences. This process continued until all categories were identified and theoretical saturation had been achieved, another core element of grounded theory methodology (Holt & Tamminen, 2010). Corbin and Strauss (2015) propose saturation is demonstrated when all categories are fully developed, show variation, and are integrated.

The final sample consisted of 61 girls currently participating in youth golf (Australia: $n = 6$; Canada: $n = 12$; England: $n = 9$; Finland: $n = 5$; Ireland: $n = 11$; New Zealand: $n = 8$; Scotland: $n = 10$). The recruitment of participants from these specific countries presented a significant opportunity to investigate parental support in a broad range of countries, accumulating knowledge in more diverse samples, and building on limitations of previous research. Athletes in the specialising stage of their development ($n = 27$) ranged from 11 to 16 years ($M = 13.33$ years; $SD = 1.4$). These athletes participated in 1–5 sports ($M = 2.4$; $SD = 1.02$) and had an average golf handicap of 8.3 ($SD = 7.5$). None of the athletes in this development stage held a World Amateur Golf Ranking (WAGR). Specialising athletes spent an average of 7.8 h practicing ($SD = 7.4$) and 8.3 h playing on course ($SD = 4.3$) per week. Athletes in the investment stage of their development ($n = 34$) ranged from 14 to 19 years ($M = 16.7$ years; $SD = 1.4$). These athletes participated in 1–4 sports ($M = 1.4$; $SD = 0.82$), however all athletes in this development stage noted that golf was their main sport. Of the 34 athletes in the investment stage group, 24 held a WAGR, ranging from 312 to 2541 ($M = 1123$). Athletes held a WAGR for an average of 2.15 years and had an average golf handicap of +1.8 ($SD = 2.2$). Athletes in the investment stage of their development spent an average of 17 h practicing ($SD = 7.20$) and 9.8 h playing ($SD = 5.3$) per week.

2.2. Data collection

Given the recruitment of youth athletes from both the specialising and investment stages of development, participants completed a demographic questionnaire prior to participation (e.g., age, WAGR, sport participation), enabling the research team to categorize athletes into the most appropriate development stage. Data were collected via online synchronous focus groups utilising Microsoft Teams, which enabled the research team to carry out data collection during the COVID-19 pandemic. Importantly, focus groups were conducted across an extensive 7-month period, to allow for the interplay between data collection and analysis, a critical aspect of grounded theory outlined in Holt and Tamminen's (2010) heuristic. That is, subsequent data collection was directed by concepts identified in the initial stages of data analysis. In total, 14 focus groups were conducted (eight investment stage and six specialising stage focus groups), which ranged from 63 to 92 min ($M = 78$ min, $SD = 8.88$). Given that video-conferencing technology works best with a small number of participants (Lobe et al., 2020), focus groups were limited to 3–6 athletes per group. Specialising and investment stage athletes participated in separate focus groups, to allow for an examination of perceived parental support across development stages. Similarly, focus groups were made up of participants from the same country. Given the recruitment of athletes from seven countries across three continents, pragmatically organising focus groups with participants from the same country eliminated time zone differences between participants. An interview guide was developed, which explored parental support in the practice, competitive, and home environment. Example questions included: (1) In relation to your practice, what kind of things do your parents do or say that you find supportive? (2) When you have been at golf tournaments, have you ever seen any examples of really supportive parents? And (3) What is the most important thing that your parents do to support you on your golfing journey?

Although online focus groups possess significant strengths, it is important to document a number of difficulties that the research team incurred during the data collection process. Firstly, acknowledging that focus groups present an opportunity to utilise group interaction to generate insights (Stewart & Williams, 2005), the adoption of focus groups also presented scheduling challenges. That is, it was difficult to schedule a date and time that was suitable to all participants. This resulted in a minority of youth athletes who had provided consent and assent being unable to participate. Moreover, in terms of facilitating focus groups there were occasions whereby background noise and disturbances were present, which interrupted group discussions. Finally, an operating speaker, microphone, and camera was a prerequisite for participation. However, there were occasions whereby participants did not activate their camera, subsequently making it difficult to predict when participants had finished speaking or when participants wanted to add to the discussion.

2.3. Data analysis

Each focus group was audio recorded and transcribed verbatim by the first author, which yielded 382 pages of single-spaced text. Data analysis included three phases of coding, which began immediately following the first data collected in line with best practice guidelines. This enabled the research team to identify concepts that required further exploration in subsequent data collection (Holt & Tamminen, 2010). During open coding, transcripts were coded line-by-line, allowing the researchers to identify and categorize significant pieces of data. That is, data pertinent to perceptions of parental support and factors influencing how support is perceived were identified and assigned codes (e.g., financial support; transportation support). The constant comparison process where data, codes, and categories were frequently compared to allow similarities to be drawn and differences to be identified, was essential throughout (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). The second phase of the analysis involved axial coding. During this phase, identified concepts

were organised into categories and sub-categories. That is, complementary concepts were grouped together to create categories, for example, financial, logistical, and functional support were grouped together to create the category of instrumental support. Following, links and relationships between categories of parental support and factors influencing perceptions of support were established. The third and final phase of the analysis process involved theoretical integration, a distinguishing feature of grounded theory methodology (Holt & Tamminen, 2010). During this concluding phase, the core category which the grounded theory is constructed on was identified (i.e., *Individual Parental Support Preferences*). Relationships between the core category and sub-categories of parental support, factors influencing perceptions of support, and bi-directional communication were also established during this stage (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). The use of memos supported theoretical integration, enabling the first author to make comparisons, keep record of developing concepts, identify important questions, and critically, recognize potential links and relationships between categories.

2.4. Methodological integrity

The following techniques were utilized throughout the research process to enhance methodological rigor: methodological coherence, theoretical sampling, iterative process to data collection and analysis, and constant comparison (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Further, a research notebook was used to record thoughts and reflections on research activities and diagrams were utilized to create and present visual representations of links between categories. In addition to the implementation of techniques during the research process, co-authors also acted as critical friends throughout the analysis phase (Smith & McGannon, 2018), by encouraging self-reflective bracketing on the development of concepts and categories and providing regular feedback during the development of the grounded theory.

3. Results

Following data collection and analysis, a substantive grounded theory of parental support in girls' golf was developed (see Figure 1). The substantive grounded theory is constructed on the core category of: *'Individual Parental Support Preferences'*. This core category is underpinned by four sub-categories of parental support which were evident across both development stages: *instrumental*, *informational*, *emotional*, and *autonomy* support, and is influenced by a host of athlete, parent, and contextual characteristics. Furthermore, the theory demonstrates regular bi-directional communication between parents and youth athletes is essential for open communication of individual preferences for support. Data was gathered from participants recruited from seven countries (Australia, Canada, England, Finland, Ireland, New Zealand, and Scotland), however, it should be noted that there were no observable cultural differences within the data.

3.1. Core category: Individual Parental Support Preferences

In both development stages, athletes possessed individual preferences for parental support and held personal views on the roles of parents, particularly across the sub-categories of instrumental and informational support. For example, athletes perceived their parents' presence during competition as supportive, Specialising Athlete 21 (SA) revealed "I like when my parents are spectators ... whether I play good or bad they'll give me feedback on what I could improve or what was good and it's a nice way to reflect on my game". However, others perceived their parents' presence as an added source of pressure, SA1 noted "I don't really like when they [parents] are on the course, cause they kind of put me off ... I think it is just the pressure ... I don't want to mess it up ... because they expect me to do so much".

Furthermore, there were also a number of distinct parental support preferences across development stages. That is, athletes in the

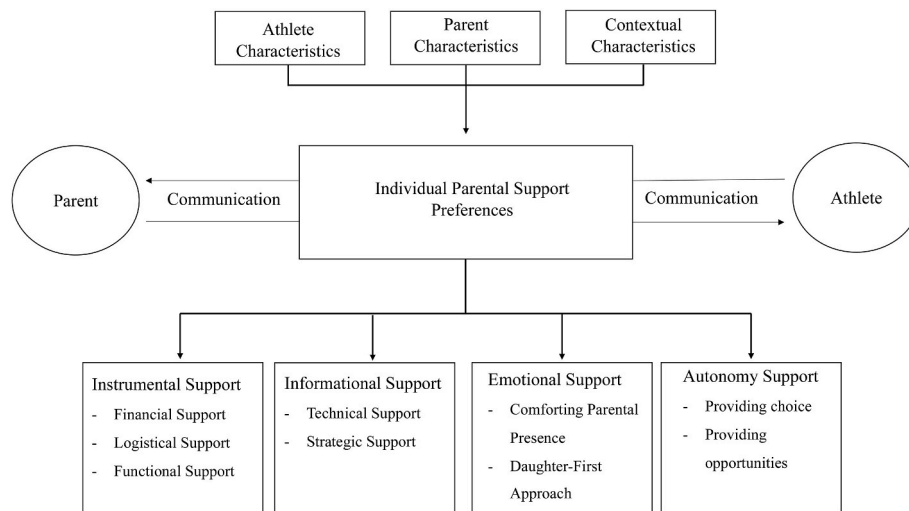


Figure 1. Grounded theory of parental support in youth sport

investment stages of development were less reliant on parents for financial support (e.g., accommodation fees; travel fees), logistical support (e.g., transportation; planning assistance), and informational support (e.g., feedback). IA 11 stated:

When i was younger they helped me out a lot, but they've gradually started to step back a bit and this year I have planned everything myself It's been an important support for me because this is the stuff that you need to take care of one your own later on.

Similarly, IA 12 revealed:

I started being more independent and I want to be more independent because I'm getting older and want to go to college and that's when I'll need to be ready to take care of my own stuff ... these days I register myself for competitions and plan things on my own, that's not on my parents anymore.

Athletes in both the specialising and investment stages of their development were acutely aware that there was not a universal type of parental support that conformed to all athletes' needs, "I don't really think you could pick out a supportive parent, because everyone is different when it comes to support" (SA2). Athletes revealed what one player may perceive as supportive, another athlete may interpret as unsupportive. IA5 noted:

You see parents and they like, when you're on the range they hand them their clubs, they sort all their stuff make sure they've got all their tees, their gloves, their balls, everything like that. But sometimes you see people that don't like that and they kind of shoo away their parents ... I think it's all about personal preference.

Athletes' awareness of their individual preferences for support developed as they progressed through their development, "when you were younger you didn't know what you wanted, but once you get older, you know what you want" (IA3). Prior to developing this awareness, parents provided support thought to be appropriate, "when I was younger, my dad always did what he thought was best" (IA25). However, as athletes became more experienced, they noted that they developed an awareness of their support preferences through trial and error, "it's just trial and error, and realising that some things just don't work for me" (IA11).

3.2. Sub-categories of parental support

Parental support comprised of four sub-categories, which included instrumental, informational, emotional, and autonomy support. These

sub-categories underpinned the core-category of '*Individual Parental Support Preferences*'. Although these sub-categories are distinct, they are related in that together they represent the construct of parental support.

3.2.1. Instrumental support

Instrumental support consisted of three elements: financial support, logistical support, and functional support.

Financial support. Monetary assistance was a core component of parental support, across both development stages. This assistance provided by parents financed competition, coaching, and equipment expenses, in addition to membership fees, SA27 stated "he [dad] pays for tournaments, hotel fees, clubs, all my equipment, just everything, food for the golf course, some of those protein bars and Fiji water are pretty expensive". However, it is important to highlight that some athletes in the investment stage of their development were embarking upon financial independence. Financial assistance provided by National Governing Bodies (NGBs) and golf organizations, in addition to athletes gaining employment played an influential role in athletes' progression towards financial autonomy. IA19 quoted:

I found the change in the whole money situation was as soon as Golf Australia were like 'we want to send you overseas' or 'we want to send you out of state' ... I don't have to rely on my parents to fund every single thing that I do ... it's not a cheap sport. It's so expensive to travel, accommodation, play, be a member of somewhere. So it's awesome when you're able to do some of those things at a less of a price or free even.

Furthermore, participants in the investment stage of their golf development were cognizant of the financial investments and sacrifices made by parents to support the athlete (e.g., family holidays; financial support of other family members). IA12 stated:

The financial support from my parents is pretty good, but it doesn't come out of nowhere, my parents need to do stuff so they can support me financially and I'm blessed that they can do that for me, that this is possible because of them ... but sometimes I think about how do they feel about the way that the money just comes and goes, and that most of the money goes just for me and not the rest of the family ... when I started to play overseas and when I got older I started to realize that this thing I do isn't free.

Logistical Support. Logistical support included the provision of transport to practice and competitions. Unsurprisingly, athletes in the specialising stage of their development were very much dependent on their parents for this support, SA1 revealed "they drive you to

competitions ... without them you wouldn't be able to do anything". However, whilst some participants in the investment stage remained reliant on their parents for transportation, many athletes were now also self-sufficient, IA33 stated "for me getting my license was a big thing, then you can drive yourself to training and to tournaments".

Logistical support also consisted of competition planning assistance. Parents helped in making travel arrangements for competitions (e.g., booking accommodation, transport) and offered support in the development of schedules, SA17 revealed "they organize everything, if you're going to stay with someone or if you're going to book a hotel, where you're going to eat". Again, specialising stage athletes were very much dependent on parents for this support, while some athletes in the investment stages of their golf development were now in a position to take control of their competition schedule and travel arrangements. For example, IA28 stated "I'm a lot older ... so I organize myself ... when you're younger, they'll plan the trip ... help me in making decisions about what tournaments to play, sort the accommodation ... travel with me, when you're younger you wouldn't be able to do that".

Functional Support. Functional support included the provision of a facilitative parental presence at practice and competitions. There were diverse views regarding the role of parents in the provision of this support. Athletes across both development stages appreciated parents providing support with the preparation of equipment, SA2 stated "I normally let my mum pack by bag because I can never trust myself to remember everything", while others favoured autonomy to complete this aspect of preparation independently, "I quite like doing it myself [preparing equipment] ... if I get somebody else to do it I don't feel completely confident ... I like doing that kind of stuff myself, I feel more prepared" (SA4). Similarly, some athletes preferred the autonomy to practice independently, SA3 noted "[they] leave me to it and just let me get on ... I feel if my dad is always watching me then there is more pressure to do well", while other athletes appreciated parental presence, IA25 noted "some days when I'm playing alone my dad will come out and watch me on the course, it's just good to have the company really".

Furthermore, athletes across both development stages appreciated the provision of course strategy and warm-up support, while others favoured to independently complete these tasks. IA29 revealed "I like to do that [course strategy] with my dad, so that we can work together on course". Conversely, IA34 stated "I feel like course strategy is personal ... so I prefer to do that on my own". Additionally, athletes enjoyed their parents taking on the role of caddy (if permitted by regulations) and spectator, "if my dad can caddy then I like him to caddy, it's just someone to talk to in between shots" (IA20). However, others viewed their parent's presence as unsupportive, IA4 stated "I don't like my mum or dad caddying for me ... it would just end in an argument".

3.2.2. Informational support

Informational support included the provision of advice pertaining to the technical and strategic elements of performance and development. However, akin to functional support, there were diverse views with regards the role of parents in the provision of this support.

Technical Support. Within the practice, and pre- and post-competition environment, athletes across both development stages were comfortable with and appreciated receiving technical support from parents, SA20 revealed "I like for him to come along and take videos of my swing and give me tips". Additionally, athletes' revealed that in the absence of coaches, parents were in a position to reiterate advice provided by coaches, IA2 stated:

My dad listens to my coach as well, so if I haven't seen my coach for a while, because my dad attends my lessons or he gets feedback from my coach, when I am struggling with things it's not like I necessarily always need my coach there because he [dad] has the tips and the things that my coach has said to me ... it's almost as if he's my coach when my actual coach isn't there.

Conversely, athletes also perceived the provision this information as

unsupportive and not the role of the parent, "I like to get the emotional support ... but he doesn't tell me anything about the technique, because he knows that he's not supposed to get involved because that's not his part of this, that's all down to my coach" (IA12).

Interestingly, although athletes' views regarding the role of parents in the provision of informational support varied across the practice, and pre- and post-competition environments, all athletes perceived the provision of technical advice, as unsupportive during competition, "If it's a tournament, I'd like them to do it [give advice] afterwards... I can't really like mess with my swing right now because it might mess me up and I haven't tried this" (SA23).

Strategic Support. Parents played an active role in the provision of post-competition feedback. Parents helped specialising stage athletes identify positive aspects of their performances and areas for improvement, SA3 revealed "I quite like it when my dad goes through each hole, shot by shot ... I find that quite helpful just to see how I went wrong and what I can do to improve". However, athletes in the investment stage were less reliant on their parents for this support. Instead, athletes turned to parents to discuss their views on aspects of performance.

My dad used to review every hole with me after my round, and now he kind of watches me as I review, and I talk to him instead of him talking to me ... I think it changed as I got more competitive ... I got to take the lead and he would just listen because he knew that I was capable of doing it now (IA26).

3.2.3. Emotional support

Emotional support included behaviours which provided comfort and security and demonstrated unconditional love.

Comforting Presence. A comforting parental presence was a core component of emotional support, as athletes across both development stages noted parents were someone they could speak to about practice, course strategy, mental preparation, feelings about upcoming competitions, and aspects of performance. IA19 revealed "they're making sure that I'm ready for the event mentally ... we might have a chat about 'what are your goals for the event' ... that's always a really good thing to go into the event with.

Athletes also revealed that parents provided a comforting presence, particularly in the competitive environment. IA29 stated:

I think their presence just makes you a little bit more comfortable especially if you're going into a new environment, them just being there helps you feel a little bit more safe ... he's just someone I can go to if I need something.

Person-First Approach. Findings also revealed that in the provision of emotional support, adopting a person-first approach, whereby the adolescent is treated as a person first and athlete second was important, IA33 stated "I'm their daughter before anything else". Employing this approach included displaying behaviours that; (1) demonstrated unconditional love and support; (2) were golf-development focused. Discussions revealed it was important to athletes across both stages that the love their parents displayed was not contingent on their results.

The most important part for me is that they make sure that I understand that I am loved even when the golf doesn't go that great ... they care about golf, but they care about me more and yeah that makes me feel great ... it makes me more comfortable. I know that no matter how I play, when I get home, I'm still loved (IA10).

Unconditional love and support were displayed through the provision of continued verbal and non-verbal positive reinforcement. Irrespective of performance, youth athletes wanted their parents to provide reinforcement through positive body language, hand gestures, and facial expressions, particularly during competition, SA27 quoted:

I like my dad to just give me a whole bunch of thumbs up, because that is just the best feeling in the entire world when you know you

just got a bogey, but my dad's like 'yay', that makes me feel so good and relived that he's not mad.

Additionally, participants noted a preference to receive a post-round hug from their parents, again irrespective of performance, "I honestly just want a hug, even if I shoot really good or really bad, I just want that reassurance ... it makes me feel good about myself and after I've gotten that reassurance I can just move on" (SA27).

Similarly, the provision of verbal positive reinforcement before and after competition was viewed as supportive. Athletes appreciated parents providing reassurance and perspective by highlighting positive aspects of a poor performance, identifying areas for future improvement, and not dwelling on the negative. IA20 noted:

When I am being negative, they bring out everything that is positive ... especially with golf you can get very hard on yourself and everything can feel like it's going wrong ... but when you have someone telling you 'these things are going right, it's okay, you're still improving' ... it can get you out of that negative mind frame.

Parents who adopted a person-first approach were unconditionally present through good and bad performances, "Just being there, no matter what. Through the good, bad, they are always going to just be there" (IA16). Similarly, parents did not pass judgement on their daughter after a poor round. IA19 revealed:

No judgement, that's a big thing ... sometimes you feel like less of a person and that you're going to get judged by everyone if you have a bad round. Whereas you know that you have that comfort of your home to go home to, there is no judgement.

Additionally, parents who adopted a person-first approach placed an emphasis on their daughter's development and enjoyment, rather than performance outcomes. IA31 stated:

Coming home from tournaments when they haven't gone well, they're always there for you ... they don't care about the result, they care more about my development, coming home and not having to worry about what they're going to say ... I feel a lot more comfortable, safe I guess and I think it helps me and my development.

3.2.4. Autonomy-support

Autonomy-support included the provision of opportunities and choice for sport participation and development.

Provision of Opportunities and Choice: IA19 stated:

Let them choose what they want to do. If they want to play in a little tournament or something always let them do that or let them train for as long as they want ... it's a lot more enjoyable when you get to choose what you want to do.

Additionally, participants revealed autonomy-supportive parents do not force their child-athlete to participate, practice or perform. IA15 revealed:

Don't force them [athletes], don't be putting any pressure on them ... if they really want to play the sport, they will want to go themselves ... If they want to go to the golf course let them go to the golf course and bring them, but if they don't like the sport then don't be like 'oh you have to like it'.

Interestingly, IA31 also stated that parents not being present can also be supportive:

I think another huge thing is that as a parent understanding that sometimes the best thing to do is to support by not being there ... not getting too involved but you know obviously that's like a fine line which takes a bit of time to work out.

Support Decision Making. Finally, autonomy supportive parents trusted the investment athletes' decision making: "They trust me with

everything ... I get to plan my practice, I get to plan the competitions ... they trust me to make the decisions myself ... that's a support I've been really grateful for" (IA11).

3.3. Factors influencing individual preferences for parental support

Results revealed that athletes possessed individual preferences for parental support, however, results also revealed multiple factors that together influenced athletes' individual preferences. These factors included athlete, parent, and contextual characteristics. Within the advanced grounded theory, these characteristics together influenced athletes' '*Individual Parental Support Preferences*' (i.e., athletes' perceptions of parental support).

3.3.1. Parent characteristics

Parents' knowledge and experience of the sport influenced athletes' preferences for parental support, particularly informational support. Athletes appreciated receiving informational support from parents. Results indicated that these participants perceived their parents to have the ability and knowledge to provide this information, and consequently were more comfortable and open to their parents providing this support. IA2 stated:

He used to play competitively ... he sort of knows preparation, tips, how not to get nervous, things like that ... my dad listens to my coach as well ... when I am struggling with things it's not like I necessarily need my coach there because he has got the tips.

Conversely, participants who perceived their parents to have limited knowledge of the sport and experience, did not appreciate parents providing this assistance. IA11 quoted:

There's parents that are not coaches, they have no golfing background, but they just go around at the [driving] range in the morning when they [athletes] are warming up and go on with technical stuff. We all know that they just want the best for their kids, but maybe it's not their place to give technical stuff without any education.

3.3.2. Athlete characteristics

There were also a number of athlete characteristics which influenced participants' perceptions of support; these included athletes' performance, feelings, and development stage. Athletes revealed that their performance at competitions often influenced their preferences for support. SA2 stated:

It normally depends on if I have a good round or a bad round. If I have had a bad round normally I prefer to you know be to myself for a bit and sort of go through my game on my own and just think about what went wrong or what I am going to do next time ... but if I have a good round she will be like 'oh well done that is amazing' ... it's nice when they know when to leave you and when to not.

Similarly, athletes' performance at practice influenced their support preferences, IA1 noted "It very much depends, normally I practice on my own, but if I am having a bad time ... or if I need help with something, I will just send him a message and be like 'come help me'".

Further, athletes also revealed that their constantly changing feelings and mood often influenced their perceptions of and preferences for support, for example, SA2 stated:

It sort of depends on how I am feeling that day ... sometimes it is good to have someone there [at practice] to take videos and help you analyse your swing ... but then sometimes there are days where you just want to do it yourself.

Lastly, athletes' age and development stage appeared to play an influential role in athletes' support needs. Athletes in the specialising stage were more reliant on parents for functional and informational support. However, as athletes approached late adolescence and early

adulthood, they began to take on more responsibility. IA28 commented, “I’ve definitely gotten a lot more independent as I’ve gotten older with the whole driving license, driving myself to tournaments, just generally got older and more independent, with my finances as well ... getting a job and earning my own money”.

3.3.3. Contextual characteristics

Finally, there were a number of contextual characteristics, such as the context (i.e., at practice; at competition) and timing which influenced the type of support child-athletes desired from their parents. Athletes felt comfortable receiving informational support from parents at practice and pre- and post-competition, SA27 quoted “sometimes my swing gets wonky and it’s good that he has enough golf knowledge to help me and fix my swing”. However, these athletes did not appreciate receiving informational support from parents during competition, SA18 stated “not while I’m competing, I’d like if they were going to say anything, I’d like them to say it after the round”. Furthermore, some athletes appreciated parental presence in training situations, however they perceived their parents’ presence as an added source of pressure in the competitive environment, highlighting the importance of context in athletes’ preferences for support. For example, SA5 stated:

I prefer them not to be on the golf course because it just puts a lot of pressure ... you feel like ‘oh, I want to hit this shot good’ ... I don’t mind them being on the practice ground ... but sometimes it is a bit overwhelming being on the course with them.

The format of competition also played a very influential role in athletes’ preferences for support, SA20 noted: “it depends on the format, but I don’t usually have a caddy, unless its matchplay ... you need a team behind you for match play”. Additionally, the environment impacted the type of support athletes wanted from their parents, SA7 stated:

It depends on what kind of competition it is, if it’s a big competition and there’s loads of people that I don’t know, I will normally get him to walk around, but if it’s just a normal competition where I know people ... then its fine.

Further, athletes’ competitors appeared to play a role in athletes’ preferences for parental presence. IA19 stated “Say for instance I’m not comfortable with who I’m playing with or you know I don’t know them at all, you know I’ll maybe go ‘hey mum can you or whoever’s driving me, can you please caddy for me?’”. Lastly, contextual characteristics such as the weather and course difficulty also influenced athletes’ preferences for parental presence:

Most of the time I’m not bothered if they walk around or not, but sometimes if I know a course has got a lot of rough and maybe it’s not going to be the best of weather, it’s quite good to have maybe my dad way ahead ... it is good sometimes, on a tougher course to have them there (IA7).

Taken together, these parent, athlete, and contextual characteristics influence athletes’ preferences for support.

3.4. Bidirectional parent-athlete communication

Findings revealed that regular bidirectional communication between parents and youth athletes acted as a facilitative process. Within the advanced grounded theory, this open bi-directional communication between parent and youth athlete enabled communication regarding individual preferences for parental support (core category), IA5 stated “communication is key”. Athletes across both development stages revealed they regularly informed their parents of their support preferences, IA30 quoted:

Being multicultural, having a Korean conservative background and then also having an open-minded Kiwi New Zealand culture within me ... my parent’s aren’t strict at all but they’re not exactly the most

open minded people either. So I think constantly talking to them about ‘could you please kind of give me space’ of being able to talk to them about certain problems when I need it ... I think just constantly communicating to them about what I want and what I didn’t want really helped.

However, athletes also expressed appreciation for parents inquiring about how they would like to be supported. When asked what advice is important for parents SA2 stated:

I would tell them to just ask their daughter or their son about their preferences because everyone is different and also adapt to their preferences and not what you think might be right, but what they prefer and what makes them feel comfortable.

SA19 highlighted that it’s important to regularly engage in these conversations “talk to their kid about what their kid wants regularly, not just when they first start playing golf, cause obviously what you like changes over time ... just talk about it, every kid is different”. Athletes across both development stages noted that possessing a close and trusting parent-child relationship enabled engagement in open communication. IA20 stated:

We just have a good relationship outside of golf as well ... I feel comfortable talking to them about anything golf related or not golf related... I feel like I have just as good of a relationship with them on or off the golf course ... I can just tell them how I feel.

Similarly, receiving unconditional parental support empowered athletes to engage in open communication, “they’ll always love you so I feel like it makes it easier to say something, knowing that they’ll still support you, like it doesn’t matter what you say” (SA26).

Further, athletes revealed it is incumbent on parents to create an environment whereby child-athletes feel comfortable communicating their support needs and preferences. IA34 stated “I think we have to both be able to communicate ... and for that to work the parents have to really work on allowing an environment for communication”.

Although athletes across both development stages indicated that they engaged in open communication with parents, participants in the investment stage discussed how they now felt much more comfortable engaging in such conversations. They revealed that in the earlier years of their development, they struggled to communicate openly. IA28 noted:

At the start I definitely found it hard to tell him that I didn’t really want him on my bag ... I definitely found that hard because I knew how much he wanted to be there, he wanted to be involved as possible, so I think at the start it was hard to be like ‘that’s not what’s best or it’s not really what I want’.

Investment stage athletes revealed age, experience, and developing an awareness of their support needs allowed them to feel more confident communicating with their parents:

When you were younger you really didn’t know what you wanted ... but once you get older, you know what you want and you are brave enough to tell them ... you say ‘can you go away?’ or ‘I need your help’, they listen to you now (IA3).

4. Discussion

The present study adds to existent literature by advancing a substantive grounded theory of parental support in youth sport. Results revealed that athletes possessed individual preferences for parental support across four key categories of *instrumental*, *informational*, *emotional*, and *autonomy* support, which were influenced by a multitude of athlete, parent, and contextual characteristics. These findings are consistent with previous qualitative research exploring parental support within the context of youth sport. For example, research conducted by [Wiersma and Fifer \(2008\)](#) examined sport parents’ perceptions of

parental involvement, which demonstrated that parents provided transportation and scheduling support. Similarly, [Wolfenden and Holt \(2005\)](#) indicated that within the context of youth sport parents provide emotional, tangible (i.e., financial support; transportation), and informational support. Moreover, research has recently begun to delineate factors which influence athletes' perceptions of parental involvement. For example, [Knight et al. \(2016\)](#) demonstrated that youth athletes' perceptions of parental involvement vary across contexts (i.e., at home, training, and competitions). That is, athletes appreciated parents supporting their holistic development at home, providing constructive feedback at practice, and providing practical support across all contexts. Similarly, [Knight et al. \(2011\)](#) examined athletes' perceptions of parental support before, during, and after competitions. Results indicated that athletes' perceptions of support differed across phases of competition. Furthermore, findings demonstrated that athletes' perceptions of their parents knowledge and experience of sport influenced their perception of instructional support. That is, athletes did not appreciate their parents providing technical or tactical information, unless parents possessed the necessary tennis experience and knowledge to do so. Such findings indicate that contextual and temporal factors, in addition to parent characteristics (i.e., knowledge) influence athletes' perceptions of support. These findings are consistent with results from the present study, however, the aforementioned research examined aspects of parental support in silo. The current investigation extends on the previous knowledge in the domain of parental support, by adopting a grounded theory methodology allowing for the development of a conceptual framework of parental support in youth sport, advancing theoretical understandings. That is, the grounded theory methodology and associated process of theoretical integration within the present study allowed for the conceptualisation of constructs of parental support in youth sport and critically, details links and relationships between categories of parental support (i.e., autonomy, emotional, informational, and instrumental support), athletes' individual perceptions of support, and influential factors such as, athlete (e.g., development stage), parent (e.g., knowledge), and contextual characteristics (e.g., competition format), further enhancing the understanding of the complexity of providing parental support in the youth sport environment. Furthermore, the advanced conceptual framework illustrates the facilitating role of open bi-directional communication in the provision of parental support. Rather than investigating these aspects in isolation, the advancement of the grounded theory brings together important aspects of parental support by a process of theoretical integration, providing a rich and integrated understanding of parental support, factors influencing parental support, and open bi-directional communication. Furthermore, although existing social support literature has detailed the support provided by the social support network in youth sport (e.g., [Rees & Hardy, 2000](#)), the presented grounded theory provides detailed insights into support mechanisms pertinent to parents specifically.

Within the sub-category of emotional support, athletes appreciated parents removing the focus from performance outcomes, and instead placing an emphasis on continuous development and sport enjoyment. Such findings bear a strong resemblance to adopting a mastery motivational climate, whereby social agents value athlete's effort and personal improvement. Perceived task motivational climates are associated with more positive athlete outcomes, such as perceived competence, and feelings of autonomy and relatedness ([Harwood et al., 2015](#)), suggesting the adoption of development-focused parental behaviours may also have positive implications for athletes.

Results revealed adopting a person-first approach, whereby the child is treated as a person/child first, athlete second, and supported and loved unconditionally is important. Previous research has indicated that unconditional support is an important aspect of emotional support ([Gould et al., 2006](#)), however the concept of adopting a person-first approach to sport parenting is novel. Within youth sport, a minority of parents continue to exhibit unsupportive or pressurizing behaviours, often resulting in increased athlete anxiety and amotivation ([Gould](#)

[et al., 2006](#); [O'Rourke et al., 2011](#); [Sanchez-Miguel et al., 2013](#)). Research revealed motives behind such behaviours include the lure of professional sport and return on time and financial investments ([Bean et al., 2016](#)). However, the promotion of a person-first approach to parenting by practitioners, NGB's, and sport organizations, whereby the person is placed at the centre of the support provision, may help reduce the prevalence of such behaviours and motives. Furthermore, fostering a person-first approach to supporting child-athletes, aligns with acknowledging individual differences and providing tailored support which meets the individual needs of each child.

Previous research revealed athletes' preferences for positive verbal comments during competitions ([Knight et al., 2010](#)), however, this preference was not evident amongst youth athletes in the present study. Instead, athletes placed great importance on the provision of positive body language, facial expressions, and hand gestures, irrespective of performance. Many youth sports (e.g., football; basketball) permit parental cheering during competition, however the context of the youth golf environment and surrounding etiquette means that cheering and shouting is prohibited, which often results in parents displaying their emotions through body language and facial expressions. Within the competitive youth golf environment, parents are often in close proximity and the slow-paced nature of golf affords child-athletes with time to observe and take note of parents' reactions, body language, and facial expressions, in contrast to fast-paced sports. As such, it appears that the provision of positive body language and facial expressions by parents may be more pertinent within the youth golf environment. Further, the results also highlight how different sport environments may also be an influential factor in athletes' preferences for support.

Additionally, athletes appreciated parents displaying autonomy-supportive behaviours, such as providing athletes with choice and supporting decision making. Existing literature has suggested adopting an autonomy-supportive parenting style, whereby parents promote athletic choice is an important aspect of sport parenting expertise ([Harwood & Knight, 2015](#)). However, findings from the current investigation indicate that parents remained highly involved in their child-athletes sport through the provision of instrumental, informational, and emotional support. Such findings align with previous research which has revealed that parents can exhibit high levels of involvement, while also being autonomy-supportive by fostering athletic independence and choice ([Pynn et al., 2019](#)). Taken together, the current findings provide further support for the adoption of autonomy-supportive parenting, specifically within a youth golf context and among populations outside of the United States ([Harwood & Knight, 2015](#)); however examining the impact of this approach on athlete outcomes provides a logical avenue for future research ([Pynn et al., 2019](#)).

The identified grounded theory demonstrates regular bi-directional communication between parents and youth athletes, acted as a facilitative process, allowing for open communication of individual support preferences. However, it is important to highlight that despite previous research identifying that parents have more power than their children due to their recognized expertise ([Recchia et al., 2010](#)), within the present study, there was not a perceived priority given to parental questions and views. Instead, athletes revealed supportive parents allowed for bi-directional communication and created an environment whereby athletes felt comfortable sharing their views regarding their sport participation and support needs. [Tamminen et al. \(2017\)](#) revealed child-athletes may feel more comfortable having difficult conversations if parents seek to balance the inherent power balance in the parent-child relationship. Perhaps, promoting bi-directional communication provides a logical avenue to do so. Parallels can be drawn from previous research, for example, [Knight and Holt \(2014\)](#) revealed within the context of youth tennis, parents engaging in open communication with their child-athletes allowed parents to successfully attend to their children's needs. Much of the research examining parent-athlete communication has focused on the content of conversations (e.g., [Tamminen et al., 2017](#)), however, given the findings of the current study which

revealed the importance of bidirectional communication between parents and athletes, research investigating how parents create a supportive communication environment, whereby athletes feel comfortable engaging in bidirectional communication, appears pertinent.

Results also revealed a multitude of factors which influenced athletes' preferences for parental support (e.g., parents' knowledge, athletes' performance, timing, and context). As previously indicated, these findings align with existing literature (e.g., Knight et al., 2011, 2016). However, the current study also revealed novel contextual characteristics unique to the youth golf environment, which influenced athletes' preferences for support. Athletes revealed the format of competition influenced their preferences for parental involvement. For example, athletes emphasized the importance of parents providing caddy support in matchplay situations, due to the demands of this format. Further, athletes' playing partners, weather, course difficulty, and the competitive environment also influenced athletes' preferences for parental presence during competition. Such results are more unique to the youth golf environment, but highlight the impact parents can have during youth competitions and add novel findings to the parenting in youth sport literature, demonstrating further the intricate nature of parenting in youth sport.

Previously, parental behaviours have been universally classified as supportive or pressurizing (Knight, 2019). However, taken together with previous research (e.g., Knight et al., 2011), these findings which revealed athletes possess individual support preferences, that are influenced by a host of factors, suggest that the classification of parents' behaviour as supportive or unsupportive perhaps is not as definitive as previously thought. Future research and practice should move beyond prescribing universal specific guidelines for parenting in youth sport and instead focus on creating supportive climates whereby athletes' individual preferences for support are considered and accounted for (Pynn et al., 2019). However, it is acknowledged that there are also a number of factors which may prevent parents from providing their children with their preferred support (Furusa et al., 2021).

Previous research has explored parental involvement across development stages (e.g., Lauer, Gould, Roman, & Pierce, 2010), however, such research has relied on athletes' retrospective experiences, which researchers have suggested may present recall concerns. A unique characteristic of the present study is the examination of parental support amongst athletes currently in the specialising and investment stages of development, minimising any recall or memory bias concerns of previous research. Although the provision of *informational*, *instrumental*, *emotional*, and *autonomy* support were evident across both development stages, there were some notable distinctions which warrant discussion. Athletes in the specialising stage were dependent on the provision of financial and logistical support from parents. However, investment stage athletes approaching adulthood were becoming less reliant on parents for this support. This move away from parental dependency appeared to be a process that occurred over time, as athletes slowly began to take on more responsibility and embarked upon a journey of independence. Interestingly, investment stage athletes reported no changes in the emotional support provided by parents. Such findings align with previous literature, (e.g., Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004), whereby parental involvement has been shown to be at its greatest in the early and middle years as parents make a financial investment and time commitment to their child-athlete. As athletes progress into the investment stages of sport development, parental involvement changes as parents take on the role of follower and supporter, where the provision of high-levels of emotional support are important, particularly during times of difficulty (Côté, 1999). Arnett (2000) stated the period of transitioning to adulthood is often marked by 'semi-autonomy', as individuals approaching adulthood take on more responsibility, but still turn to parents for support. Further, Harwood and Knight (2015) propose that parents themselves go through transitions, and the ability to adapt their involvement in line with their athlete's development needs is critical.

4.1. Applied implications

Consistent with tenants of pragmatic inquiry, the findings of the current research present a number of important implications for practice. This grounded theory presents the first evidence-based research examining parental support in youth golf, and brings forward important insights into girls' perceptions of parental support in youth sport. As previously stated, research has illustrated that girls experience a diverse range of gender-based barriers to sport participation, such as attitudinal inequalities, stereotyping, and appearance concerns, which often contribute to girls' attrition in youth sport (Cooky et al., 2016; Slater & Tiggemann, 2010). As a result, researchers have proposed that exploring potential avenues to initiate and retain girls' sport participation is warranted (Elliott et al., 2020). One such avenue includes the provision of positive parental support. That is, previous investigations have illustrated that parental support plays a significant role in girls' initial and ongoing sport participation (Elliott et al., 2020; Spreitzer & Snyder, 1976), and positive athletic experiences (McCarthy et al., 2008). Moreover, research has demonstrated that emotional support and encouragement from parents is more influential for girls, in contrast to boys (Spreitzer & Snyder, 1976). Positive parental support facilitates sport participation for children and adolescents. However, there may be an important role for parental support specifically within girls sport. That is, the provision of positive parental support may assist in breaking down gender norms associated with girls' sport participation, while also acting as a buffer to the biases girls experience in youth sport. The findings of the current research further reinforce the importance of emotional support for girls participating in youth sport, in addition to instrumental, informational, and autonomy support, and provide critical insights into how parents may endeavour to provide this support (i.e., daughter-first approach, unconditional love).

Further, recent years have seen the introduction of parent-education programs in sport. (e.g., Azimi & Tamminen, 2022), which have provided education on topics such as sport participation and communication strategies (Burke et al., 2021). Although it may not be feasible for sport organizations to implement individualized education programs (Knight, 2019), drawing parents attention to the individuality of support preferences and factors which influence perceptions of support appears appropriate. Moreover, the present findings revealed the importance of bi-directional communication between parents and youth athletes. Previous research has illustrated the importance of regular and transparent communication between parents and coaches, to foster collaboration (O'Donnell et al., 2022; Preston et al., 2020). In such interactions, youth sport coaches may seek to impress upon parents the importance of open bi-directional communication with youth athletes. Additionally, generating opportunities for regular open-communication between parent and athlete, while also creating space for the development of parents' communication skills within youth sport organizations may be of significant value. Finally, given findings illustrated that athletes' support needs developed through a process of 'trial and error', there appears to be an important role for sport psychology practitioners in helping children become aware of their support needs, and exploring opportunities to communicate these needs with their parents.

4.2. Limitations and future research directions

Although this grounded theory advances the understanding of parental support in youth sport, it is not without its own limitations. Firstly, this substantive grounded theory represents youth athletes' perceptions of parental support in golf. Although these perceptions provide the reader with a rich understanding of athletes' views of parenting practices within the youth golf environment, these findings may be specific to the youth golf context, and therefore future research is warranted to examine the transfer of findings to diverse youth sport settings. Furthermore, the current research failed to explore parents' perceptions of support. Previous research has demonstrated that athletes

and parents may possess incongruent views of parental support in youth sport (Kanters et al., 2008). Future research may seek to explore parents' perceptions of parental support, which presents an opportunity to further advance the grounded theory of parental support presented within this study. Further, the current study failed to examine sampling stage youth athletes preferences for parental support. Although the present research sought to examine parental support within competitive youth sport, given the facilitating role parents play during the sampling phase of development (Côté, 1999), future research should examine parental support among this demographic. Lastly, data were not collected on family forms (composition). Investigating parent-child relationships among diverse family forms presents a novel avenue for future research (Harwood & Knight, 2016).

5. Conclusion

The new substantive grounded theory is the first which has sought to explain parental support in youth golf. Parents provided *instrumental*, *informational*, *emotional*, and *autonomy* support within the examined context of youth golf, however athletes' possessed individual preferences for support across these categories. Parenting in youth sport is complex and it is imperative that youth sport stakeholders recognize that athletes' preference of parental involvement is greatly influenced by athlete, parent, and contextual characteristics. From a theoretical perspective, the current research advances a conceptual framework to guide future research in this area, provides novel insights into parental support in a youth golf context, and further reinforces the need to move beyond prescribing universal guidelines for parenting in sport and instead create environments whereby athletes' preferences are communicated and supported, adopting a person-first approach to sport parenting may provide a logical avenue to do so.

Declaration of competing interest

Given their role as an Editorial Board Member, Burke S. had no involvement in the peer-review of this article and had no access to information regarding its peer-review. All other authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Data availability

The authors do not have permission to share data.

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