

“Get tough!”: A case study of the development of the sport ethic in youth lacrosse

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Negative Sport Outcomes

- ❧ Sport participation has often been linked with negative behaviors such as bullying, moral disengagement, and risk taking behavior (Kavussanu & Ring, 2016; Kavussanu, Stanger, & Boardley, 2013; Neely et al., 2017)

- ❧ **The Sport Ethic**

- ❧ Deviant overconformity by an individual to fit societal norms of a high performance sport culture (Hughes & Coakley, 1991)
- ❧ States that being a successful athlete involves the following:
 - ❧ *Making sacrifices for the game*
 - ❧ *Striving for distinction above all else*
 - ❧ *Accepting risks and playing through pain*
 - ❧ *Refusing to accept limits in the pursuit of possibilities*



Developing the “Sport Ethic”

- ☞ This belief system has been examined in teenage and adult athletes; however, its *development* in youth remains unexplored (Brewer & Tripp, 2005; Shiperd, 2010)

Purpose: The present case study aimed to investigate a single lacrosse team to understand the localized, social factors that contribute to the development of the sport ethic

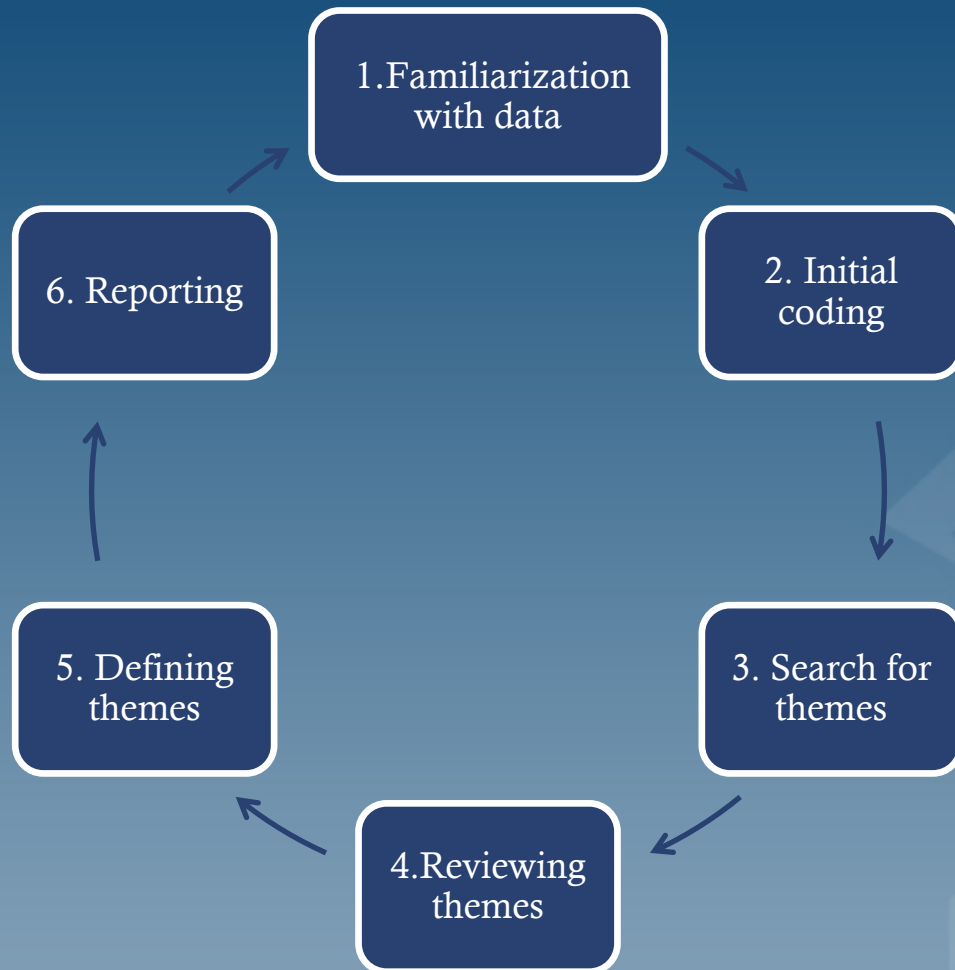
Design and Participants

- ❧ Instrumental case study (Yin, 2009)
 - ❧ Emphasis on representing the participant's environment and viewpoints
 - ❧ Triangulated data collection (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013)
- ❧ Lacrosse was chosen due to its increasing popularity and high injury frequency (Anderson, 2018; DeHaven & Litner, 1986; Lincoln et al., 2014)
- ❧ **Participants:**
 - ❧ All from a single recreational, skill development team
 - ❧ Athletes aged 11-13 ($n = 18$), Coaches ($n = 2$), and Parents ($n = 15$)

Data Collection

- ❧ Naturalistic observations (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990)
 - ❧ 27 practice sessions and 9 games
 - ❧ 109 hours of observations
- ❧ Field notes (Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2017)
 - ❧ 107 total pages of handwritten data
- ❧ End of season semi-structured interviews (Smith & Sparkes, 2016)
 - ❧ Athletes ($n = 4$; $m = 14.1$ minutes)
 - ❧ Parent ($m = 47.7$ minutes)

Data Analysis



Thematic analysis (six phase approach) was conducted by two researchers to allow for multiple perspectives to be considered (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Zartler, 2010)

Results

- ❧ Participants discussed 89 unique, specific themes related to their experiences with youth lacrosse
 - ❧ These themes were categorized into 10 subcategories which were then grouped based upon where each fit in the original sport ethic conceptualization (Hughes & Coakley, 1991)

Sport Ethic Component	Themes
Being an athlete involves making sacrifices for The Game	Pressures to specialize
	Sacrifices for lacrosse
Being an athlete involves striving for distinction	Adult-driven outcome focus
	Communication differences due to skill level
Being an athlete involves accepting risks and playing through pain	Hegemonic masculinity
	“Brush it off”
	Replicating professionals
Being an athlete involves refusing to accept limits in the pursuit of possibilities	Seeking education and help
	Lacrosse is warfare
	Physical limits are barriers that are beatable

Results

☞ Pressures to specialize

- ☞ **Description:** Coaches, athletes, and parents encouraged to enhance chances of reaching elite levels

Athlete 3: *“I watched the [Name of local University] and saw that those guys are working all the time... They mean business, so do I now.”*

☞ Communication differences due to skill level

- ☞ **Description:** Athletes were treated differently based on their skill level

Coach Behaviors:

- ☞ Play time
- ☞ Practice/instruction differences



Results

❧ “Brush it off”

- ❧ **Description:** Injury wasn't deemed as an adequate excuse for not participating

Parent: *“His dad and I are just like, ‘suck it up, you’re fine’... If it’s not a bodily fluid that is leaking or if a bone is out, we can actually talk about it.”*

❧ Seeking education and help

- ❧ **Description:** Individuals in this environment go to extreme lengths for the best training
- ❧ Does not factor in other factors (social) when seeking programs

Parent: *“We were with another organization for two years, but the coach here has more experience and we can play year around.”*



Discussion

- ❧ Sacrificing other sport participation and social activities is detrimental for adolescent development (Larson et al., 2019; Padaki 2017; Smith, 2019)
- ❧ Communication differences based on skill level may increase antisocial behaviors in peers and decrease overall intentions to return to sport (Evans, Vierimaa, Budziszewski, & Graupensperger, 2019; Kavussanu & Spray, 2006)
- ❧ Increasing financial investment or participating in leagues purely for competition rather than social enjoyment may negatively effect sport experience (Dunn, Dorsch, King, & Rothlisberger, 2016; Baxter-Jones & Maffulli, 2016)

Take Home Message

- ❧ Sport leaders should consider developing educational programming geared not only on how to *behave* while children are playing, but also how to *frame / describe* sport

Thank you!

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