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Kyle Haderlie
Utah State University

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**The Impact of Parents’ Past Experiences on Parenting Styles and Practices in Organized Youth Sport**

**Kyle Haderlie, Utah State University**

**Introduction**

PARENTS are highly involved and play a critical role in the facilitation of their children’s youth sport experience (Knight, Neely, & Holt, 2011). One area of youth sport parenting research that has received little attention is the parent’s **BACKGROUND and EXPERIENCE**. These may shape parents’ involvement styles and practices in sport. Because the child’s **PERCEPTION** influences their psychosocial outcomes (Anderson, Funk, Elliott, & Smith, 2006), it is important that parents understand their children’s preferences for communication and behavior. Research by Snyder and Purdy (1982) showed that parents without backgrounds in sport became more interested in the sport experiences of their children, whereas parents with backgrounds in sport attended more of their children’s sporting events. Therefore, **PARENTS’ PAST EXPERIENCES** seem to have an impact on **PARENT INVOLVEMENT** in organized youth sport. Importantly, the involvement may be positive or negative as some parents with experience may provide appropriate support, whereas others may be too overbearing and critical.

The **PURPOSE** of the present research was to illuminate patterns of parent experiences that are consistent with positive sport parenting styles and practices.

**Method**

**Participants**

A subset of 46 U.S. **PARENTS** (17 fathers, 29 mothers) were recruited from a large-scale study being conducted in Australia, Canada, the UK, and the US. Parents ranged in **AGE** from 33 to 53 years (M = 43.96, SD = 4.84). 83% as White or Caucasian, 11% as Black or African American, 6% multi-racial or “other”. Parents reported a **RANGE OF EXPERIENCE** in sport, ranging from 2 to 20 years (M = 2.55, SD = 1.22): - 91% participated in youth sport - 70% participated in secondary school sport - 26% participated in club, travel, or elite sport - 35% participated in college or community sport - 4% participated in **Olympic** or international sport - 4% participated in professional sport

**Procedure**

Participants were recruited through league directors in non-school based youth sport programs. Data were collected through the **OPEN-ENDED SURVEYS** via online interface at the convenience of the participant.

**Data Analysis**

**OPEN CODING** (i.e., the process of identifying themes in the data) was implemented independently by the author and a graduate research assistant trained in qualitative data analysis. **Critical friend** (Hill, 2002)

**AXIAL CODING** (i.e., the process of identifying categories and subcategories of the themes identified in open coding) was used to develop structure through hierarchical organization of the data.

**Results**

**Figure 1 – Data map of parenting in organized youth sport**

- **Benefits**
  - Immediate: e.g., sense of belonging, detachment
  - Long-term: e.g., healthier, better concurrent
- **Goals for child’s participation**
  - Academic: e.g., for part of a year, become a scholar
  - Developmental: e.g., I am more confident about managing, doing well
  - Behavioral: e.g., I feel better about my behavior, I don’t throw temper tantrums
- **Parents’ goals for own youth sport participation**
  - Participation: I want to win championships, play at the college level, play recreationally for life.
  - Costs: e.g., I want more than just to get my kid to a tournament, I want my kid to have fun
- **Parents’ own experience in youth sport**
  - Positive: I’ve experienced it, I want my kid to experience it
  - Negative: I’ve experienced it, I don’t want my kid to experience it
- **Parents’ own experience in youth sport**
  - Positive: I’ve experienced it, I want my kid to experience it
  - Negative: I’ve experienced it, I don’t want my kid to experience it
- **Goals for children to avoid**
  - Physical: e.g., harm
  - Cognitive: e.g., I don’t want to lose, I want to win
  - Social: e.g., I want my child to be humble in victory and gracious in defeat.
- **Personal factors**
  - Current goals for self: e.g., I want to make my children feel happy, I want to make my children successful, I want to make my children healthy
  - Parenting Practices: e.g., Encouraging, Managing, Consulting, Mediating, Supervising
  - Parenting Styles: e.g., Authoritative, Authoritarian, Permissive
  - Parental Involvement: e.g., 15% participated in youth sport, 26% participated in college or community sport
  - Roles in children’s participation: e.g., I want my child to participate in youth sport, I want my child to participate in college or university sport
  - Impact of previous sport parenting experience: e.g., I want my child to compete, learn the game, have fun, respect the coaches, want to come back and play again next year

**Discussion**

Parents’ previous sport experiences, the perceived benefits and drawbacks of these experiences, and the goals parents hold for their sport experiences influence their **CURRENT INVOLVEMENT** in their children’s sport participation.

The primary reason parents specified for involvement as a coach, manager, or administrator was so they could continue influences that might have created negative environments for their children.

An **INTERESTING FINDING** of this study was that the goals of the four participants who did not participate in organized youth sport aligned largely with the goals of the other 42 participants who did.

Because the experiences of sport parents are influenced by personal and family demographic factors (Fredricks & Eccles, 2004), **FUTURE RESEARCH** aimed at understanding parenting styles and practices in sport in more diverse populations could target parents from a range of ethnic, SES, and geo-political backgrounds.

**References**


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