

2019

Youth Coaches' Perception of their Role in a Young Athletes' Continued Participation

Ronald Roy Spencer
Walden University

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Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

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Ronald R. Spencer, Sr.

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Dr. Susana Verdinelli, Committee Chairperson, Psychology Faculty
Dr. Cheryl Tyler-Balkcom, Committee Member, Psychology Faculty
Dr. Robin Friedman, University Reviewer, Psychology Faculty

Chief Academic Officer
Eric Riedel, Ph.D.

Walden University
2019

Abstract

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by

Ronald R. Spencer, Sr.

M.S., Troy University, 1995

B.S., University of Maryland, 1982

AAS, Community College of the Air Force, 1980

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Educational Psychology

Walden University

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June 2019

Abstract

Youth sports have been shown to be beneficial to the overall development of children and adolescents. Research showed youth sports participation helps children develop academically, physically, and mentally. However, there is a high attrition rate of youth sports participants. What coaches think about youth's attrition in sports and their role in fostering or hindering young athletes' participation is not well known. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore youth coaches' perception of their role in a young person's decision to continue participating in their sport of preference. The conceptualizations of autonomy-supportive coaching strategy and Erickson's developmental theory were used as the theoretical basis for this study. Twelve youth coaches were interviewed using semistructured interviews. Data were analyzed using Moustakas' modification of Van Kaam's method of analysis. Six major themes emerged from the data: (a) sports are about having fun, (b) developing life skills, (c) coaching philosophy, (d) reasons kids quit sports, (e) good coaches keep kids engaged in sports, and (f) winning and losing. Results indicated that youth coaches believe they play a significant role in keeping kids engaged in sports. They emphasized the importance of having fun in playing sports; and they deemphasized the importance of winning as a major outcome. This study has the potential to promote a better environment for young participants by exposing the contributing factors leading to the attrition rate in youth sports. Results of this study inform coaches, parents, and administrators about the needs of the children in their sports programs.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Participation in youth sports/physical activity has numerous benefits for young participants including better health, increased academic achievement, improved self-esteem, social competence, and emotional stability (Bailey, 2006; Coatsworth & Conroy, 2009; DeBate et al., 2009; Findlay & Coplan, 2008; Loprinzi et al. 2012). Several studies examined the issue of the overwhelming number of school-aged children who are overweight (Brewer, Luebbers, & Shane, 2009; Hannon, 2008; Leatherdale & Wong, 2009; Lee, Burgeson, Fulton, & Spain, 2007). The 2010 reported a positive correlation between student's participation in sports activities and improved academics, decreased the risk of diabetes, and weight control.

It is estimated that tens of millions of children are involved in youth sports every year (Engh, 2002; Merkel, 2013; Moreno, 2011); however, 70% of all these children will quit the sport before age 13 due to an unpleasant experience. According to Merkel (2013) over 70% of children drop out of sports by the age of 15. Contributing factors to these experiences include the win-at-all-cost coach, the overzealous parents, and untrained coaches and administrators (Merkel 2013). Currently, there is a small amount of empirical data regarding the impact a youth coach has on the attrition rate of 6–12-year-olds in youth sports (Gervis & Dunn, 2004; Merkel, 2013) and little is known on how coaches perceive their role on children's continued participation on sports. What coaches think about youth's attrition in sports and their role in fostering or hindering young athletes' participation is not well known.

The purpose of this study was to explore youth coaches' perception of their role in a young person's decision to continue participating in their sport of preference. I also

explored how coaches perceived the high attrition rate among youth and what reasons they attributed to this attrition. The evidence is clear concerning the benefits of youth sports (Coatsworth & Conroy, 2009; Findlay & Coplan, 2008; Loprinzi et al, 2012). This research could promote a better environment for young participants in the youth arena by exposing the contributing factors leading to the attrition rate in youth sports. This research could also help youth sport administrators and other interest groups determine what training best helps youth coaches work with young athletes.

This chapter begins with background research and an overview of the context. A statement of the research problem follows indicating its timeliness, relevance, and significance. After that, I describe the purpose and intention of the proposed research, including the research questions, theoretical foundation for the study, and the qualitative tradition to be employed. I define the key terms and describe the study's assumptions, delimitations, and limitations. This chapter concludes with a discussion of the study's potential for creating positive social change and implications for education and social policy.

Background of the Problem

In a 10-year longitudinal study by Butcher, Lindner, and Johns (2002) followed youth from first grade to tenth grade and found that 90.3% of the participants competed in one or more sport activity between the ages of 6–16 years of age. Among these participants it was reported that 94.4% dropped out of one or more sports between ages 6–16. The researchers stated that the most prevalent three reasons for the high dropout rate that children indicated were, “I did not enjoy it anymore,” “Wanting more time for non-sport activities,” and “sports took too much time” (Butcher et al. 2002, p. 153).

Butcher et al. cited different reasons for quitting among elite competitors, including too much pressure to perform well, injury, needing time for studying, and the coach. Butcher, Lindner and Johns (2002) concluded, participation in youth sports has many benefits, including psychological, social, and physical, and these benefits may be lost to those who drop out.

Ryska et al. (2002) reported that in the younger age group, the dropout rate is mainly attributed to the lack of benefits the participant receives from the activity. Lack of playing time and the overemphasis on winning at the expense of having fun both contributed to the dropout rate. Martin (2014) says that the two most significant reasons youth participate in youth sports is peer association and fun.

The gap in the research is that little empirical research has been done to discover why there is such a high attrition rate. Especially when it comes to examining how the behavior and attitude of a youth coach impacts the attrition rate in youth sports.

This research could promote a better environment for young participants in the youth arena by exposing the contributing factors leading to the attrition rate in youth sports. This research could also help youth sport administrators and other interest groups determine what training best helps youth coaches work with young athletes.

Statement of the Problem

Research documents that there are millions of children participating in youth sports all over the United States. (Merkel, 2013; Metzl, 2006; Moreno, 2011). However, there is also a high attrition rate in youth sports (Butcher et al., 2002; Merkel, 2013). Atkins, Johnson, Forte, & Petrie, 2015; Gilbert, Gallimore, & Trudel 2009, researched the attrition rate in youth sports I gathered data that explored coaches' opinions on the youth

high attrition rate in sports and understood how they saw their role in a young person's decision to continue participating in their sport of preference I used a qualitative research design to explore the reasons for the dropout rate from the point-of-view of the youth coaches.

Research supports the importance of participation in youth sports. (DeBate, Gabriel, Zwald, Huberty, & Zhang, 2009). The gap in the research is that little empirical research has been done to discover why there is such a high attrition rate, especially when it comes to examining how the behavior and attitude of a youth coach impacts the attrition rate in youth sports.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore youth coaches' perception of their role in a young person's decision to continue participating in their sport of preference. I also explored how coaches perceived the high attrition rate among youth; and what reasons they attributed to this attrition.

Research Questions

I sought to gather answers to the following research questions:

Research Question 1 (RQ1): How do youth coaches perceive their role in a young person's decision to continue participating in their sport of preference?

Research Question 2 (RQ2): How do youth coaches perceive the attrition of youth in sports?

Research Subquestion 2.1 (SQ2.1): What explanations do youth coaches provide as the reasons for youth's attrition in sports?

Theoretical Framework

I used two theories for the theoretical framework for this study: the autonomy-supportive coaching strategies and Erickson's theory. The autonomy-supportive coaching strategies as proposed by Carpentier and Mageau (2014), Conroy and Coatsworth (2007) and Fenton et al. (2014) constitute the main theoretical framework of this study. The researchers hypothesized that coaches play an important role in how young athletes experience youth sports. One of the roles a coach plays is motivator, helping to keep the child interested and motivated in the sport of choice. The researchers specifically looked at the motivational and developmental climate provided by the coach. Fenton et al. (2014) focuses on autonomy and the role it plays in motivating young athletes. Autonomy support is one construct of the motivational climate as described in self-determination theory (Carpentier & Mageau, 2014).

Erik Erickson's stages of development identify ages as the Industry versus Inferiority stage (Erickson, 1963); it is the stage of competence during which failure to meet certain cultural and school skills at this stage could lead to a sense of inferiority. Also, the Industry versus Inferiority stage is where competence in tool usage is accomplished. The child learns to be effective or inadequate, wonders how things work or becomes timid and withdrawn, finishes what is started or procrastinates, likes to experiment or questions his or her ability. According to Erickson as interpreted by McLead (2013), the Industry versus Inferiority (aged 5 to 12) phase is when a child's peer group influences the child's self-esteem. The successful development of self-esteem at this stage leads to the child's winning approval from society. If the child is discouraged from developing the initiative in this stage, they will begin to feel inferior.

This sense of inferiority will impact the child's ability to reach their full potential because they doubt their abilities. The stage is impacted by the relationship with both peers and parents or significant others. Success in the Industry versus Inferiority (aged 5–12) phase leads to the child's feeling of competence. Salmivalli (2010) says that a sizable minority of primary and secondary school students is involved in peer-to-peer bullying either as perpetrators or victims. The age range in this study is the age range of the children in the Industry versus Inferiority (aged 5–12) phase of development. Salmivalli found that when a child is the only victim in their peer group, they are more likely to blame themselves for the situation. Based on physical, psychological, and cognitive development, a child should be at least six years of age before participating in an organized team sport (Merkel, 2013). The author also stated that a mismatch in sports readiness and skill development can lead to anxiety, stress, and ultimately attrition for the young athlete. The goals for the young athletes are to be active and have fun.

Both theories listed above relate to the study. Erickson's stages of development provide an understanding of the children's needs and developmental expectations during the 6–12 period. The autonomy-supportive coaching strategies provide an understanding of the role that coaches play in how young athletes experience youth sports. More detailed explanation will be found in Chapter 2.

Nature of the Study

When considering the array of methodologies, I determined that the qualitative design was the most appropriate approach to examine the problem generated by the research questions. Strauss and Corbin (1990) stated that qualitative methods can be used to better understand a phenomenon about which little is known. Qualitative research can

also be used to gain new perspectives; in addition, it can be used to gain more in-depth information. I utilized the phenomenological research design to explore coaches' perceptions of their role in fostering or hindering children's continued participation in sports. I also explored the coaches' opinions on children's attrition in sports.

I employed the phenomenological tradition using in-depth face-to-face interviews as the primary data collection method. I recruited participants from the community partner. I used the modified Kaam method of phenomenological analysis as Moustakas (1994) described it. Using the transcription of each participant's interview, I followed these steps: a) list every expression relevant to the participant's experience; b) test every expression for particular requirements: identify significant expressions and eliminate overlapping, repetitive or vague expressions; c) identify and cluster core themes; d) validate core themes identified; e) create an individual textural description of the experience including verbatim examples from the transcribed interview; and f) create an individual structural description of the experience. From the analysis of all the transcripts, a thematic synthesis of the meanings and essences emerged.

Definitions

Athlete: A person who is proficient in sports and other forms of physical exercise (Oxford University Press, Inc. 2002).

Coach: an athletic instructor or trainer (Oxford University Press, Inc. 2002).

Sport: An activity involving physical exertion and skill in which an individual or team competes against another or others for entertainment.(Oxford University Press, Inc. 2002).

Sport Attrition: Prolonged absence of systematic practice and competition, either in one sport (sport-specific attrition) or all sports (sport-general attrition) (Gould & Petlichkoff, 1988).

Stress: A substantial imbalance between environmental demand and response capability, under conditions where failure to meet the demand has important consequences (McGrath, 1970)

Assumptions

I chose to conduct semistructured interviews in order to learn the opinion of the participants in the attrition rate in youth sports and on their role. I assumed that some coaches may have had formal training and others may not have had any youth coach's training; and this, in turn, may affect their perceptions. According to the National Youth Sports Coaches Association (NYSCA), the main focus for their certification program is to assist volunteer coaches in understanding psychological, physical, and emotional issues experienced by young participants in youth sports (NYSCA 1992). I also assumed that the participants would be truthful about their experience and not attempt to embellish their responses to look impressive for the interview. I assumed the participants would understand the importance of the project on the future benefits for all young athletes. My final assumption was that despite my personal interest and experience on the topic, I would not show any biases or personal opinions during the interview process. The key to good qualitative research is to remain neutral and professional as a researcher. I have coached youth sports for over 30 years and am currently certified at the top level in football, baseball, and basketball.

Scope and Delimitations

This study was confined to youth coaches who participate in coaching children between the ages of 6–12 and who participate in coaching at the community partner facility. The decision to select coaches as participants of this study is to focus on their shared experiences and understanding of their role in fostering continued youth participation in sports. I used age group of 6–12 for this study because the average youth participant starts their sports participation between ages 6–12.

I intended to explore a phenomenon around youth coaches and their role in youth continued participation in sports. Transferability implies that readers could connect features from this study and compare them to other similar groups and contexts (Patton, 2002). Findings of this study should not be used to extrapolate or apply to other populations or groups that do not represent the population and context described here. I used thick description in representing the participants' voices as described by Shenton 2004. A thorough description of the content, assumptions, and the methods that guided the investigation are included. If transferability is feasible, the reader should determine whether the results are transferable to other contexts.

Limitations

This study had two main limitations. The first limitation was that interviews were completed by phone. In my original planning, I proposed having face-to-face interviews; however, due to changes in sources of data collection and due to participants' convenience, I used phone interviews. The interviews by phone eliminated the opportunity to observe non-verbal behavior (facial expression and body language) of the participants. These cues would allow me to investigate the answers given by the

participants with more in-depth questioning. However, the interviews followed a standard line of questions and I provided the participant every opportunity to elucidate and restructure any part of their interview.

The second limitation related to the recruitment of the participants; all of them belonged to the same youth sports facility. Additionally, none of them received any formal training to coach youth. Having all participants from one organization and not having diversity in terms of training experiences can limit the transferability. In using results of this study, readers should decide if their population share similar characteristics that this population had.

Significance of the Study

Currently there is a small amount of empirical data regarding youth coaches' perceptions on the attrition rate of 6–12-year old in youth sports (Gervis & Dunn, 2004; Merkel, 2013). The current research project would help fill that gap by identifying the role of a youth coach on young athletes' ages 6–12 continued participation in youth sports. The information rendered from this study would help youth sports parents, coaches, and administrators understand how youth coaches may contribute to the significant youth dropout rate in youth sports. As a result, training programs can be revised or developed to address what successful behaviors enhance children continued participation in sports. In turn, this would allow more children to experience the benefits of participation in youth sports. In addition, coaches would understand how their verbal behavior and attitude impact a child's desire or lack thereof to participate in youth sports. Gervis and Dunn's (2004) research study with elite athletes showed the negative impact a coach's verbal behavior has on that group of athletes. Determining how the average

recreational participant feels would extend the research to cover a larger group of youth participants. The results could be beneficial in informing policy and procedure to help keep children involved in recreational sports and other activities. Behavior and verbal guidelines could be established for coaches based on empirical data, showing the impact of their communicative style on the retention of youth in recreational activities. Cook and Dorsch (2014) found that coaches' behaviors are often abusive and warrant monitoring through surveillance.

Barber et al. (1999) explained that improved mental and physical health is a benefit of youth sports participation. Bailey (2006), Coatsworth and Conroy (2009), DeBate et al., (2009), and Findlay and Coplan, (2008) concluded that participation in recreational activities increases academic achievement, self-esteem, and emotional stability (Donaldson & Ronan 2006). Hannon (2008) postulated that the youth obesity problems could be tackled if youth engage in and stay engaged in sports. Schaub and Marian (2011) indicated that obesity is a major contributing factor to the following diseases in young people: cardiovascular disease, hypertension, and Type-2 diabetes. The authors stressed the role physical fitness plays in preventing and correcting obesity in our youth. Schaub and Marian (2011) said that obesity is equal to or a greater contributor to preventable death than is smoking, and that obesity has surpassed smoking as the leading cause of preventable death. They stated that this is important because the research shows that overweight children remain overweight into adulthood. Allender et al. (2006) says the lack of physical activity is a public health problem in the world, and childhood obesity is expected to reach 40% in the United States in the next 20 years. In a review of the 2010 Center for Disease Control Report a positive correlation between

student's participation in sport activities and improved academics, decreased risk of diabetes, and weight control. This current research study could contribute to the understanding of one of the factors in the retention of 6–12 year old in youth sports. Keeping more children engaged in youth sports would be a positive social change in the way sporting activities are viewed by the general population. Keeping more young athletes in youth sports will assist with the issues listed above; such as, obesity, general health, and academic advancement.

Summary

There is evidence that children who participate in youth sports perform better in school, live a healthier lifestyle, and are more fit than children who do not participate in youth athletic activities (Carlson et al., 2008; Findlay & Coplan, 2008; Zarrett et al., 2009). With millions of children involved in youth sports every year, it is also a fact that many of these children do not stay in sports after their first year of participation (Merkel, 2013; Ryska et al., 2002). Smith et al. (2009) says coaches have an influential role on young athletes, helping them in their socialization. The way a coach communicates the team values and goals seem to be most influential on the young athletes. The environment and motivational climate created by the coach is very important in the development of the athlete. The sport environment is developmentally significant because of the socialization provided by the coach often imitates current and future real life situations (Ryan & Deci, 2000). This study aims at exploring youth coaches' perceptions on why children stop practicing sports and how they see their roles in fostering continued participation in sports. This study has the potential to help in gaining a better understanding on what behaviors can contribute to foster youth participation in sports.

In the next chapter, I reviewed several aspects of the youth coaching literature. This literature review includes the interactions between a coach and the players and children's motivation to engage in sports. The interaction between the coach and the young participants specifically focused on abuse of young athletes.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore youth coaches' perception of their role in a young person's decision to continue participating in their sport of preference. I explored coach's perceptions of the high attrition rate among youth; and what reasons they attributed to this attrition. In this literature review, I focused on the exploration of youth participating in sports. Although there are a high number of children participating in sports, there are also a high number of children quitting practicing sports. More empirical research should explore why there is such a high attrition rate, particularly when it comes to examining how the behavior and attitude of a youth coach impacts the attrition rate in youth sports.

I discussed the benefits of participating in sports, the motivation factors that keep children involved in sports, the dynamics between coaches and children, and the identified problems within the youth sport environment. I included the theoretical foundation of this study. In this section I will discuss the theoretical foundation, literature search strategy, and literature review.

Literature Search Strategy

I performed the initial literature review using the libraries at the University of Texas at San Antonio and Randolph Air Force Base in San Antonio. I also used at North Carolina State University, and Saint Augustine's College's in Fayetteville, NC. journal sections. I researched at the following military libraries at both Fort Bragg Army Base in North Carolina and Seymour Johnson Air Force Base in Goldsboro, NC. While stationed with the military in Alabama utilized, Alabama State University Library, Troy University

Library and Air University Library at Maxwell Air Force Base. Finally, I researched Walden University databases PsycARTICLES, PsycBOOKS, MEDLINE, PsycCRITIQUES, Psyc EXTRA, PsycINFO, Text, Academic Search Complete, Education Research Complete, ERIC, and EBSCO for peer reviewed and scholarly material. I used the following search terms: *coaching, children, youth sports, behavior, coaching methods, benefits of participation in youth sports, abuse in youth sports, and verbal and physical behavior of coaches in youth sports*. I reviewed ninety-eight research articles to formulate this proposal, a total of 325 articles made up my article review. Many of the articles I did not use are articles concerned with the adult athlete experience with coaching and other age groups outside of this study parameters.

Theoretical Foundation

The theoretical framework consisted of two theories, including the autonomy-supportive coaching strategy, and Erickson's theory. The autonomy-supportive coaching strategies as proposed by Carpentier and Mageau (2014), Conroy and Coatsworth (2007), and Fenton et al. (2014) constituted the main theoretical framework of this study. The researchers hypothesized that coaches play an important role in how young athletes experience youth sports. One of the roles a coach plays is motivator, helping to keep the child interested and motivated in the sport of choice. The researchers specifically looked at the motivational and developmental climate provided by the coach. The research focuses on autonomy and the role it plays in motivating young athletes. Autonomy support is one construct of the motivational climate as described in self-determination theory (Carpentier & Mageau, 2014).

Empirical research has proven that youth sport activities are positively connected to developmental outcomes in many areas of a young athlete's life. These positive outcomes include academic achievement (Eccles & Barber, 1999) school retention (Mahoney & Cairns, 1997), social skills (Weiss & Ferrer Caja, 2002), and self-esteem (Bowker, 2006). Smith, Smoll, and Cumming (2009) found that coach-initiated motivational climate played an important role in the young athlete's development. A study by Keegan, Spray, Harwood, and Lavallee (2010) showed coaches and parents motivational styles were similar in leadership style, feedback, emotional and pre-performance behaviors. These consistencies were shown to be beneficial to the motivation of the young athlete and related to caregiving, instruction, and support. Keegan et al. (2010) wrote, parents and coaches displayed these attributes in different ways; however, they were similar as it relates to motivation. The authors found, coach's motivational role was related more to instruction, selection and management; while the parent's role related to support and facilitation. According to Keegan et al. (2010) both roles of the parent and coach appear important as it relates to the athlete's motivation. The coach's contribution to the positive motivation includes being collaborative, positive and tolerant. The parent's contributions are unconditional support, positive motivation, and being collaborative. This plethora of motivational influences has been shown to be beneficial to both social goals and autonomy goals (Keegan et al. 2010).

Prichard and Deutch (2015) wrote that in the United States sports are at an all-time high in participation; however, the drop-out rate is alarming. In their research, they talked about target description as it relates to motivational climate. Target description is designing learning activities that promotes a motivational climate in youth sports. A

child's perceptions of a task influence their approach to the mastery of the task; it also impacts the amount they spend working on that task. Prichard and Deutch (2015) added that tasks that are "challenging and diverse" commands more effort by young athletes. The researchers confirm that coaches have a major influence in the motivational climate in youth sports.

Smith, Smoll and Cumming (2007) took 20 youth basketball coaches, one group served as a controlled group and the other group, the experimental group. The experimental group was given a 75-minute motivational workshop, providing specific training in behavior guidelines and instructions in how to create mastery-oriented climate. The control group did not receive any specific training. When the season was over, the youth in the experimental group reported lower anxiety. Anxiety was reported as being on the increase by youth in the control group. Performance anxiety correlates to autonomic arousal and worry, which lead to sport avoidance, athletic burnout, and attrition (Smith et al., 2007). Eccles and Barber (1999) followed 1,000 sport participants from sixth grade to age 25. They found that youth involved in long term sports showed an increase enjoyment in school than did those who did not participate in athletics.

Erik Erickson's stages identify ages 6–12 as the Industry versus Inferiority stage (Erickson, 1963), which is the stage of competence during which failure to meet certain cultural and school skills could lead to a sense of inferiority. In addition, the Industry versus Inferiority stage is where competence in tool usage is accomplished. The child learns to be effective or inadequate, wonders how things work or becomes timid and withdrawn; finishes what is started or procrastinates, likes to experiment or questions his or her own ability. Mcleod (2008) stated that when children are encouraged and

reinforced for their initiative, they begin to feel industrious and feel confident in their abilities. If they do not receive encouragement and reinforcement for their initiatives the child feels inferior.

Children aged 5–12 yrs. Learn to read and write and to work independently. This age group begins to learn specific skills in school. Mcleod says it is at this stage that the child's peer group will gain greater significance and will become a major source of the child's self-esteem.

Merkel (2014) cited other reasons for sports attrition, some directly linked to the coach's behavior. These negative attributes included favoritism, poor teaching skills, and increased pressure to win. The researcher said there is a direct correlation between positive and negative experiences and the attrition rate. Merkel also indicated that parents as well as coaches can create high anxiety and stress levels for the young athlete. Parents can set a child up for failure by building the child up as a top athlete, when they only have mediocre skills. They may also force children to stay in a sport when the child's interest is lacking, which is another stressful situation. A child who is unable to perform as expected by parents and coaches may lose confidence and seek alternatives for fun (Merkel 2014). These parents also decrease the child's motivation by criticizing the child after they cannot live up to the parent or coach's expectations. This failure to live up to the expectations can lead to the development of a sense of inferiority.

Both Erickson's stages of development and the autonomy-supportive coaching strategies provide the theoretical background of this study. Erickson's theory provides a framework to understand the children's needs, maturity level, and developmental expectations during the 6–12 age period; the autonomy-supportive coaching strategies

provide an understanding of the role that coaches play in how young athletes experience youth sports.

Literature Review

In the literature review, I looked at the benefits of participating in youth sports. Extensive research literature was available on the advantages of participating in youth sports activity (Anderson, Hughes, & Fuemmeler, 2009; Carlson et al., 2008; DeBate et al. 2009; Findley & Coplan, 2008; Merkel, 2013; Zarrett et al., 2009). Benefits included better mental and physical health. The motivational factors were well represented in the literature, explaining that youth participate in recreational activities for a variety of reasons (Barber et al., 1999; McCullagh et al., 1993; Merkel, 2013; Stewart & Meyers, 2004; Wells, Ellis, Arthur-Banning, & Roark, 2006 Wong & Bridges, 1994). The reasons youth participate ranged from wanting to be with friends and have fun, to the desire to become an Olympian or professional athlete (Chambers, 1991; Engh, 1999; Merkel, 2013; Ryska et al., 2002). In a survey taken by parents, Armentrout and Kamphoff (2011) found that parents who were satisfied with their child's organization, listed fun and enjoyment and friendships as the top two reasons for their satisfaction. Listed on the dissatisfied side were time and travel and expense for the top two reasons parents were dissatisfied with the organization. This survey listed reasons that could contribute to the attrition rate in youth sports, showing there are many contributing factors to the attrition rate. Armentrout and Kamphoff (2011) research looked specifically at the contributing factor the coach plays in the attrition rate. The researchers also investigate the dynamics between the coach and players. However, there was not substantial information on the role the coach played in the high attrition rate in youth

sports. Some of the information focused on the training coaches should possess when working with young children, more specifically these researchers were looking at the impact a caring environment had on participant attrition (Newton et al., 2007; Wiersma & Sherman, 2005). In an article by Weiss and Williams (2004) it is stated that most of the research on youth attrition in sports is done within motivation theory, and addresses dropout in relationship to conflict of interest, negative experiences, lack of fun and lack of playing time. Other sources dealt with the type of training a coach should provide to the children (Gervis & Dunn, 2004; Horsley et al., 2015; McCallister et al., 2000).

Research indicates that the number of young children participating in youth sports is gradually increasing. Metzl (2006) stated that 30 million children were involved in youth sports as of 2006. Fraser-Thomas, Cote, and Deakin (2008) estimated that 67% of the 7–8-year old, participants drop out of youth sports. In a 2013 research article by Merkel, she estimates 45 million children participate in youth sports. The question is why, and what influenced their decision to stay in or leave their sport of choice? Fraser-Thomas et al. (2008) provided an explanation; they said athletes pass through three stages of sports participation. The first they called the *sampling* stage that happens between the ages of 6–12, when young athletes are just out to have fun and be with friends. In the second stage, called the *specializing* stage, which includes ages 13–15, the activity is more structured. The child begins to narrow down his or her interest to one or two sports. The third stage is the *investment* stage ages 16 +; it highly structured and the participants are motivated by the goal of improving skills and performance. Ryska et al. (2002), using a sample of 349 participants, found that young athletes, ages 9–18, who entered activities for external reasons, including little success, lack of playing time, overemphasis on

winning, and did not meet new friends. This group tended to drop out at a higher rate than did athletes entering sports for internal reasons. Internal reasons are explained as an inherent desire to develop skills in an activity. Engh (1999) and Shields et al. (2005) addressed communications in youth sports and talked about the impact of negative verbal behavior and how it makes the young athlete feel, but they did not explain how it influences the dropout rate.

Benefits of participating in youth sports

Participation in youth sports/physical activity has numerous benefits for young participants including better health, increased academic achievement, improved self-esteem, social competence, and emotional stability (Bailey, 2006; Coatsworth & Conroy, 2009; DeBate et al., 2009; Findlay & Coplan, 2008; Loprinzi et al., 2012). Several studies examined the issue of the overwhelming number of school-aged children who are overweight (Brewer, Luebbers, & Shane, 2009; Hannon, 2008; Leatherdale & Wong, 2009; Lee, Burgeson, Fulton, & Spain, 2007). The 2010, Center for Disease Control reported a positive correlation between student's participation in sport activities and improved academics, decreased risk of diabetes, and weight control. This, in conjunction with the decrease in school athletics and physical fitness programs, may be reasons to keep community/recreational sports participation high. The alternative for many of these children to get and stay fit is to get involved in local parks and recreational programs. In a longitudinal study, Carlson et al. (2008) found that many positive benefits are derived from participation in youth sports. Using 5,316 kindergarten students, researchers found that a weekly increase in physical activity had a positive result on the children's mathematic and reading scores. Their research found kindergarten girls' academic scores

increased as they participated in 70–300 minutes a week of physical activity. The same research did not show an academic increase for boys, their score level remained the same; the activity level was not positive or negative for boys in the study. In another study, Strong et al. (2005) conducted a systematic literature review using a panel of experts who found that children ranging from 6–18 years old should have a minimum of 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity a day. The authors said that bicycling, brisk walking, or general active outdoor playing will meet the criteria of moderate to vigorous activity. The researchers added that the activity should be enjoyable, a variety should be available, and it should be developmentally appropriate. Some studies have shown that youth are not getting a significant amount of physical activity to benefit from the physical activity (Goudas & Hassandra, 2006; Lutz et al., 2008; Stel & Sila, 2010).

Self-esteem

Higher self-esteem is another benefit of participation in youth sports (Bowker, 2006; Coatsworth & Conroy, 2009; Smith & Smoll, 1990). Smith and Smoll, (1990) studied 542 Little League baseball players, (mean age = 11–12 years) to see how self-esteem and youth sport coaching behaviors related. The researchers found that children with low self-esteem responded best to coaches who displayed reinforcing and encouraging behaviors. Smith and Smoll, (1990) explained this to be a need in individuals with low self-esteem, having the need to receive positive and supportive feedback from others, in this case, the coach. The researchers also supported the opposite condition, children with low self-esteem responded negatively to coaches who were not supportive. This is not the same for children with high self-esteem; their responsiveness was not contingent upon the coach's supportive behavior or lack thereof. The authors

could not determine why there was a difference between children with high and low self-esteem. They suggested that it could be that children with high self-esteem get positive and supportive feedback from others in their environment, thus the feedback from one individual did not impact them as it did children with low self-esteem. Brown, Collins, and Schmidt (1988) studied direct and indirect self-enhancement, saying that people with high self-esteem depend on direct self-enhancement, meaning that it is internal while people with low self-esteem depend on indirect self-enhancement, coming from outside sources. Current research by Adachi and Willoughby (2014) confirms the above research conclusion that the longer a young athlete is involved in youth sports is directly correlated to their level of self-esteem. The research showed that the higher the self-esteem, the more frequent and longer they stay connected to the activity. This is important because higher self-esteem has been proven to correlate to with positive youth development (Blomfield & Barber 2009; Taylor et al. 2012).

According to Bowker (2006) another area of self-esteem adolescent are concerned about is physical self-esteem: both physical appearance and physical competence. The main purpose of the Bowker (2006) research was to look at the relationship between sports participation and self-esteem. There were 382 students (215 girls and 167 boys) from grades 5-8 participating in this project. Overall, a correlation was found between sport participation and self-esteem. A positive correlation was found among physical appearance, physical competence, physical self-esteem, and general self-esteem. However, for the boys there was a lower correlation when it came to sport participation and appearance than for the girls; all other correlations were not significant when it came to gender differences. The author did not offer research proof for the difference between

boys and girls and their physical appearance difference. Bowker (2006) concluded that both boys and girls who participated in sports felt better about themselves physically (appearance and competence).

Bailey (2006) found a positive connection between physical activity and psychological well-being, noting that stress, depression, and anxiety are all improved due to participation in sports and physical activity. Bailey cautioned that youth activities should be planned and well organized. This caution is especially significant when looking at the relationship of prosocial behavior and the participant's physical activity or sport of choice. The behavior can worsen if the coach or adult managing the activity does not manage the activity properly. A properly managed activity can combat antisocial behavior in youth. He noted that physical activity helps with academic achievement because it increases blood flow to the brain, enhances mood, and improves mental alertness and self-esteem.

Coaching Climate.

Coatsworth and Conroy (2009) in a research project with 119 youth between the ages of 10 and 18, found that coaching climate (perceived coach behavior) is a predictor of the benefits derived from sports participation. Developing self-perception in the children played a major part in increasing the benefits of sports in young athletes. Kurtines et al. (2008) stated that coaches having an autonomy-supportive style of coaching during the season, resulted in need satisfaction of their athletes, and need satisfaction had a positive relationship to self-perception, and a positive self-perception predicted positive youth developmental outcomes.

A connection was found between positive youth development and sports when sports were combined with other out of school activities (Zarrett et al., 2009). The mean age group of the fifthgrade participants was 11.1 years; there were also participants from sixth and seventh grades whose age exceeded this project's age range. In essence, the researchers looked at children engaged in a number of combinations of sport and non-sport activities. The seven combinations included sport-only, high-engaged, sport-YD (youth development), sport-performing art, sport-religion, and non-sport. Certain profiles were predictors of depression; highly engaged youth and non-sport youth had the highest levels of depression. Those children who were highly involved in sports (year round sports), and those not involved in any sport had a higher rate of depression as compared to the other groups. Children with a good religious' base, meaning they participated in religious youth groups or religious education, and who played a sport had the lowest depression level, which was significantly lower than the non-sport group. These results are for 10–12–year old and may not be the same for late adolescence.

Health related benefits.

Another benefit of sport and physical activities is that it has been found to help control the overweight problem in youth (Tremblay & Willms, 2003). The researchers conducted a longitudinal study, starting data collection in 1994 and every two years thereafter until 2002. They surveyed ages 7-11 for the participants, sending surveys to 15,600 households, with a return rate of 86%. A cross tabulation was performed between overweight, obesity and activity/inactivity with family structure and socioeconomic status. Children involved in sports and other physical activities were less likely to be overweight or obese. Conversely, children who watched television in excess and/or

played excessive amounts of video games, showed an increased risk for overweight and obesity. The 2010 White House Task Force on Childhood Obesity Report to the President, "Solving the Problem of Childhood Obesity within a Generation," reported that 31.7% (1 out of 3 children) of 2–19-year old are overweight or obese. Lee et al. (2007) said, in 2004, that 18.8% of 6–11 year-old were obese. The researchers in the White House Task Force study looked at how school health policies and programs impacted physical education and physical activity. Using computer assisted telephone interviews or self-administered mail questionnaires; they surveyed all 50 states and the District of Columbia contacting elementary, middle and high schools. Of the 1394 schools eligible to take the interviews and surveys, 988 (72%) schools around the United States completed the instruments. Results showed that most school districts had policies stating they will teach physical education, but many of the schools did not have daily physical education programs. They concluded that school districts needed an inclusive approach to physical education at all levels of education. This comprehensive approach could give all children an opportunity to become physically active and stay active throughout their lives, thus addressing the overweight problem in both children and adult Americans. In an article by Taliaferro et al., (2010) the research team found, young athletes ate more vegetables and fruits and participated in more robust activities than their non-athlete counterparts. In addition, the athletes in the study were less likely to be overweight both as a youth and as an adult.

The research has been conclusive concerning the benefits of sports for all children (Bailey, 2006; Lee et al., 2007; Zarrett et al., 2009). In a literature review, Bunker (1998) summarized a body of research that addressed the benefits of athletic participation for

girls. As a part of the President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports, the author commented that physical activity contributes to a girl's psychological and physiological well-being. It positively influences the girl's value and ethical behavior, as well as self-esteem, social competence, and emotional well-being, and is a factor in the development of distinctive identity. The physiological contributions, according to Bunker (1998), include helping develop a healthy immune system, physical fitness, and weight control. She added that physical activity positively affects the female reproductive system and bone density. Bunker concluded, based on her collected work and presentation to the President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports, that all children should regularly participate in physical activities in both school and recreation, and that competent adults should lead these activities.

Research documents the fact that there are numerous benefits to youth sports participation. Benefits include better health, increased academic performance, weight control and other social and psychological gains. However equally important and worthy of exploration is determining what factors increase or decrease one's inclination to participate in youth activities. The next section explores the motives researchers have found for young people's participation in youth sports.

Participation Motives

In taking a closer look at the participant's motivation, quantitative research by Ryska et al. (2002) examined the dropout rate of young gymnastic participants in Australia. Using a sample of 349 participants, they found that young athletes, ages 9–18, who entered activities for external reasons, tended to drop out at a higher rate than did young athletes entering sports for internal reasons. External reasons included parents

making the child participate in the activity and participating because of friends. Internal reasons included a need to be around others, social recognition, and a sense of being challenged. The researchers in this study reported that intrinsic motivation accounted for the athlete's tenacity and focus in a particular activity. Ryska et al. (2002) also reported that in the younger age group, the dropout rate is mainly attributed to the lack of benefits the participant receives from the activity. Lack of playing time, and the overemphasis on winning at the expense of having fun, both contributed to the dropout rate. Martin (2014) says that the 2 most significant reasons youth participate in youth sports is peer association and fun. Martin's research involved the socialization factor of sports participation; she said both teammates and coaches influence the individual's decision to stay or leave the activity. In the younger age, about age 8 group participants rely on feedback from coaches and parents, however around age 10–14 they are influenced by feedback from their peer. However, in other research it was found that the dropout rate begins early in the participation years. According to Simpkins et al. (2006) the relationship developed in these early years are important because throughout the years of participation it helps the athlete transition into adolescence. Ullrich et al. (2009) found a correlation between positive emotions, a sense of achievement and motive to stay connected with the activity. The research also found that youth leave sports because of a variety of reasons (Ewing & Seefeldt, 1996). Rottensteiner et al. (2013) says both the coach and teammates impacts a player's decision to stay or go in their activity.

Kondric et al. (2013) used the Participation Motivation Questionnaire (PMQ) to evaluate sport student's participation motives. They found 6 motivational factors including sport action with friends, popularity, fitness & health, social status, sport events

and relaxation through sports. The researchers did not find any significant differences in the motives in terms of age differences as initially hypothesized. This research is important in youth motivation because it was performed using 3 countries in the research study.

Wong and Bridges (1995) examined the relationship of certain variables thought to influence youth participation motivation in sports. The study included 9–13-year old from the American Youth Soccer Organization (AYSO). Coaches, whose experience ranged from first coaching experience to eight years of experience, were observed by researchers to evaluate coaching behavior. In addition, a questionnaire was administered at practice in weeks 7 and 13; the questionnaire was given to the children as a group. Specifically, the researcher's variables included competitive trait anxiety, perceived competence, and perception of control. Coaches were observed for two games in order to assess their behavior and verbalization with the children. The researchers used the following tools to assess the variables: Self-perception Profile for Children, Sport Competitive Anxiety Test (SCAT), Multiple Measure of Children's Perceptions of Control and Intrinsic/Extrinsic Motivational Orientation Scale for Sports. The Behavioral Assessment Scale was used to assess coach's behavior, including general technical instruction, general encouragement to team members, negative reaction encouragement, mistake-contingent instruction and encouragement (the coach's response to mistakes), and reinforcement and non-reinforcement based on the absence of positive feedback following a team goal. In addition to feedback children received from coaches, the effect of the three variables assessed of the children are said to have some bearing on the child's intrinsic motivation, in other words their positive perception of self-

determination and competence directly influenced a child's intrinsic motivation. Ryska et al. (2002) defined intrinsic sport motivation as participating to improve a skill, have fun, and challenge one's ability (Fenton et al., 2014). They concluded that young athletes get involved and stay involved in sports for these reasons. In Self-Determination Theory, intrinsic motivation refers to involvement in an activity because it is inherently interesting or extrinsic motivation is determined by external sources, such as rewards, or approval by others (Ryska et al., 2002). As Ryska et al. (2002) also indicated, children who participate in sports for intrinsic reasons tend to remain in the activity longer than those participating for extrinsic reasons. Fenton et al., 2014 also suggested a child's perceived level of competence is a contributing factor in building an intrinsic motivational orientation. The researchers found that if the coach created an autonomy supportive environment, children are more likely to exhibit a higher level of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity (MVPA) on a daily basis. With the focus on the coach's behaviors, the researchers recorded per game an average of 109.64 behaviors, the minimum number of coach's behaviors recorded were 17, with a maximum number of 267 in one game. Most of the behaviors were instructional and were followed by encouraging behaviors. Wong and Bridges (1995) reported that only 3% of the coaches' behaviors recorded were classified as negative reactions to game situations. The validity in this study could be questioned because of the use of the scales, Analyses of the Connell Multidimensional Measure of Children's Perception of Control, and Harter (1982) Multidimensional Motivational Orientation Scale for the Classroom, these scales were intended for use in the classroom. In addition, coaches were aware they were being

watched; researchers were stationed close enough to the bench to hear the comments coaches made to players.

Intrinsic motivation.

Ryska (2003) proposed that youth participating in sports for intrinsic reasons demonstrated better sportsmanship behavior than young athletes participating because of extrinsic motives. The researcher recruited 319 participants, 185 boys and 134 girls to participate in the project; participant's age ranged from 10–15 years old. He used several measures to assess the variables, which included competitiveness, motivational orientation, perceived purpose of sport, the mastery/cooperative subscale, the enhanced self-esteem subscale, sportsmanship, and the rules and official's subscale. In looking at sportsmanship the author reported young athletes are participating in these activities because of extrinsic reasons. In an earlier study on intrinsic and extrinsic reasons for sports participation Ryska et al. (2002) found that young athletes were more likely to drop out of sports if they participated for extrinsic reasons. Ryska (2003) research can also be summed up by saying; athletes participating for intrinsic reasons also have a better mental health attitude than those participating for extrinsic reasons, especially when they looked at sportsmanship. Intrinsically motivated athletes had a greater propensity to be good sports than did extrinsically motivated youth. He also found that intrinsically motivated youth had more respect towards officials and rules. This could be another contributing factor to the dropout rate and extrinsically motivated athletes claiming that a coach is unfair or mean. Although this is a good research project, Ryska does not connect the coach's attitude and behavior to the dropout rate among youth. Young children may enter athletics and other activities for extrinsic reasons, but it is not

understood from the study the impact the coach's behavior play in changing or motivating the athlete to continue or discontinue participation in an activity.

Wiersma and Sherman (2008) stated that intrinsically motivated youth achieve more and are happier than extrinsically motivated youth. The research addressing intrinsic and extrinsic motivation does not address the issue of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation changing over the course of the athlete's experience in an activity; it would have been beneficial to have some data on how a child's motivation for participation can change over time and what elements influenced that change as it relates to motivation.

As I reviewed the literature it was clear that there are many reasons for youth participation in sports, this is seen in the following research, (Barnett et al., 2008; Fraser-Thomas et al., 2008; Hurtel & Lacassagne, 2011; Smith et al., 2006; Zaharidis et al., 2006), all showing that participation motive is wide and diverse. Whether intrinsically or extrinsically, parents, friends and their own internal needs motivate children to participate in sports. Once a youth is motivated to participate, what role does the coach play in fostering/cultivating an environment that is conducive to continuous participation?

Coach and Player Factors in Participation

Keegan, Spray, Harwood and Lavallee (2010) worked with 79 youth, ages 9–18. They found that coaches influenced the young athletes' motivation as much as parents influenced their child athletes. Positive feedback high in supportiveness saw a more positive response from the child when a child's performance or effort was notable. They found that supportive coaches provided positive reinforcement and encouragement, rather than punishment and criticism. Negative feedback undermined motivation and the athlete

was frustrated producing poor relationship with the coach. Negative feedback was also seen as an attack on the athlete's skill and ability, resulting in decrease motivation.

In more recent research on autonomy-supportive coaching Amorose and Anderson-Butcher (2015) concluded that autonomy-supportive style of coaching is an effective style of motivation for coaches. The researchers also say that a controlling style of motivation is an ineffective style of coaching. According to Bartholomew et al., 2009 the controlling style of motivation uses reward and punishment, criticism, comparison and recognizing coach accepted behaviors while distancing themselves from unacceptable behavior.

Abuse

Abuse of players by coaches is another factor in youth sports. Brackenridge et al. (2005) extracted data from 132 filed cases of abuse within the football (soccer) system. Descriptive case data showed cases were broken down as follows: physical abuse, sexual abuse, neglect, emotional abuse, bullying, and concerns not specified. Brackenridge et al. found that of the 132 cases they reviewed and analyzed, 46 listed the coach/teacher/instructor as the alleged abusers. The alleged abusers were referees in 24 cases of abuse, followed by managers and administrators with 19 allegations. Grouped into one category coaches/teachers/instructors were the biggest offenders in this study with 46 cases out of a total of 132 filed. The 46 complaints came from the coaches' own players. The allegations against the coaches/teachers/instructors broken down as follows: physical 9.1% (12), sexual 4.5% (6), emotional 6.8% (9), bullying 6.1% (8), 5.3% (7) cases were not specified and the other 3.2% (4) cases make up the remainder of

allegations against a coach/teacher/instructor. The other 65% of cases involved someone other than a coach/teacher/instructor.

Ryska et al. (2002) found that 9–18-year old were likely to drop out because of a lack of team cohesion, not making new friends, and not feeling they are contributing to the team's goals. Smoll et al. (1993) stated that significant others, including the coach played a role in youth athletes' attrition rate in youth sports. The coach clearly has a significant role in how a young player acclimates to the team environment. In putting it all together, it comes down to communications; how coaches, parents and other players cultivate a positive environment. Kondic et al. 2013 found that athletes who participated in sports for recreation were more likely to continue participation if they were having fun (Chambers 1991; Merkel 2013). Stewart and Taylor (2000) studied 221 female athletes ranging in age from 12-20 and discovered that their number one reason for dropping out of sports was they were not having fun. The survey given to the participants showed that 58% of the participants listed having fun as their main reason for involvement in their sport activity. Eighty-three percent listed having fun as one of their top five reasons for participating in sports. In the same survey the participants were asked if they had quit a sport in the past from which they learned that 169 had quit and the top three reasons why, were injury (26%), time conflict (18%) and coaching issues (16%). On the other hand, the more competitive athletes were more likely to attribute fitness and the challenge of the sport to their rationale for continued participation in an activity. Although Ryska et al. (2000) did directly attribute continued participation to the coach's behavior, they also pointed to contributing factors in which a coach has an impact, such as having fun and being with friends. The researchers also found that more gifted athletes within their

sample group of ages 9-18 had a different rationale for continued participation than the less gifted athletes. The less gifted athletes ranked fun as their top reason for participation, whereas the more gifted athletes ranked skill development at the top of their list. These findings may have a direct effect on the perceived relationship between a coach and the players. The authors concluded that the more gifted athletes in all age groups might take or even welcome criticism because of the perceived benefits of the corrections by the coach. On the other hand, corrections given to the less gifted may be perceived as criticism and be less tolerated by this group of children.

Anxiety

Smith, Smoll and Cumming (2007) examined anxiety in youth sports and found that young participants drop out of youth sports for an array of reasons. If youth are dropping out because of their changing interest, there is little the coach can do to impact the dropout rate. However, according to the authors, if the dropout rate is due to a child's high anxiety level, the coach has some influence in this area; coaches, parents and organizations should take steps to make needed changes for all participants to enjoy the activity. Smith et al. also commented, children with high sport performance anxiety are especially sensitive to failing. The high anxiety is brought on by the child worrying about making a mistake, not playing well, and losing; the research shows that the children do not want a negative evaluation from coaches, friends, and parents. The researchers commented, the coach greatly influences the experience of a youth participant, the way the coach promote goals, values, and attitudes all play a part in the youth sport's experience. The comment was also made that the way the coach interacts with the child makes a difference in how the child manages the anxiety. High sport anxiety can be

exacerbated if the child receives critical or punitive feedback from the coach. In the article there is a link between anxiety and goal achievement, the way the coach expresses to the children the goals of the team (winning and losing, skill development and having fun). The article talks about Mastery Environment, this basically means that a coach can maximize a child's performance, regardless of skill level by not comparing the athlete to other participants. Each individual will be coached based on their level of skill, giving maximum effect, and encouraging and supporting their teammates, in other words the feedback will be based on these items and other tasks that do not compare one player against another. According to the researches it is the comparing one child to another that produces sport's anxiety and subsequent dropout. This is inclusive of the way the coach communicates the team's goal(s) to the players. If the goal is to have fun and learn a skill, with winning and losing being secondary to having fun, children are more likely to stay with the team.

Grossbard, Smith, Smoll, and Cumming (2009), looked at competitive anxiety in 9–14-year old sports participants, the researchers separated the group of participants into 9–11 and 12–14-year old. The conclusion was that 9–11-year old experienced anxiety while participating in youth sports. They found that the Sports Anxiety Scale accurately measured the existence of anxiety across all age groups. Because the goal of the research was to check age appropriateness of the instrument, the researchers did not deal with the source of the anxiety. The point here is to show that all age groups (children and adults) experience anxiety while participating in recreational and school sports. According to Jones (2005), in youth sports, to have fun is the major reason children participate. The research seems to favor the pleasure (fun) principle as being the most desired

arrangement for all children to successfully work through shame and doubt (Barber et al., 1999; Chambers, 1991; Ryska et al., 2002; Stewart & Taylor, 2000).

Holt and Mandigo (2004) conducted research with 33 junior members of a Wales (UK) cricket club; the average age of the participants was 11.9, and the average playing experience was 2.97 years. The study was conducted to evaluate how the players coped with worry. Using open-ended questions, the researchers asked what the players worried about when playing cricket. The majority of responses were that the children worried about making a mistake, because making a mistake was associated with low performance for boys. This failure concern, according to the research, had a social implication, in other words, a boy making a mistake lost social status among his peers, and this was especially true if the mistake was considered an easy play. Researchers mentioned the lesser status among peer group members but did not address how this worry is impacted because of parent, coaches, and other adult members in the boy's relationships. As was mentioned above, if children are having fun they tend not to be concerned with performance (Barber et al., 1999).

Character Building.

McCallister et al. (2000) demonstrated that youth are developing characteristics of cheating, poor self-esteem, and lack of respect. The role a coach plays should be one of teaching young player's life lessons as well as the game they play. Shields et al. (2005) looked at young athlete (ages 9-15) participants and found that through self-reports they admitted cheating to help the team win; 13% tried to hurt an opponent, 31% argued with officials, and 27% showed poor sportsmanship after a loss. When parents were asked the same questions, in all cases there was a small percentage that said they cheated to help

the team, argued with opponents, and acted like bad sports during a game. Coaches fared a little better than parents, however, a few reported exhibiting negative behaviors.

Omlil and LaVoi (2008) recently found when investigating anger in 8-18 year old athletes that a situation called background anger was impacting children's mental and behavioral attitude. Background anger was defined as parents and coaches yelling at officials, coaches and parents eye rolling, comments made on the sidelines, and stomping up and down the sidelines, characterize background anger. It was also shown that the behaviors could get more physical such as shoving a coach after a game, a parent or coach violently grabbing a child after the game because of a poor performance, and parents fighting after a game. The researchers said that children are traumatized by anger shown between adults. That research project also found that the background anger increases as children get older and more competitive. They speculate that this is the reason the dropout rate is higher around the age of 14. According to Engh (2002), 70% of all youth drop out of sports before their 13th birthday.

Coach Training

Quinn (2004) reviewed the requirements youth leaders should be aware of as well as the training necessary for these individuals. In most training, youth leaders are getting the needed technical guidance, however this training is lacking in providing guidance in developmental stages in youth growth and development, dealing with behavioral problems, and techniques for working with the dynamics in a youth group. Quinn (2004) also noted that there is a consensus in the field that there is a need for a definitive statement for youth development and an agreement on what behaviors, training, and attitudes a competent youth leader should possess. Quinn (2004) also makes it clear that

all youth workers should be trained, including, full-time, part-time, seasonal, volunteers, and any other category of workers dealing with youth. In a qualitative study by Wiersma and Sherman (2005), focus groups were used to investigate what coaches thought about coaches' education. The majority in the focus group agreed that coaches should be trained prior to working with children. However, they had concerns about how a requirement would impact the volunteer pool. The main concern was time constraints; to deal with this concern the focus group recommendations included mentoring by senior coaches, using website training and roundtable discussion. The group agreed that the training themes should include, technical, psychological, and managerial skill building for coaches. The group did not suggest who should provide the training, which may impact the effectiveness of the education. Trust should be the first concern when working with young people, and one should always keep in mind their social, emotional and cognitive development (Newman & Newman, 1978). Newman and Newman indicated that pushing a child towards a specific pattern of skills might be more detrimental than beneficial. Ingham et al. (2002) believe that is exactly what most youth sports are doing with the current prolympic system in youth sports. Both studies substantiate the fact that parents and coaches are pushing children to a performance and skill level that the child may or may not be ready to perform due to physical and/or mental maturity. Weiss and Fretwell (2005) studied 11 and 12-year-old soccer players, all participants playing for their father, who coached the team as a volunteer coach. Although there were positive aspects to having their father as coach, there were also many negative aspects as well. Most players coached by their father said they felt pressured and more was expected of them than the other team members. In an article

prepared by the Committee on Sports Medicine and Fitness (2001) a group of medical doctors, PhDs, and sport fitness experts concluded that when the physical and mental demands are placed on a young recreational sport participant before the child is mature enough to cope with that level of play, it can negate the positive benefits of participation in the activity.

Some of the reviewed literature looked at the trained and untrained coach and how their players perceived them. Smoll et al. (1993) used a control and experimental group to determine the impact a trained group of coaches would have on athletes versus a group of untrained coaches. The researchers found that the cognitive-behavior training increased instructional and supportive effectiveness of the coach, resulting in players rating trained coaches as encouraging, reinforcing, and non-punitive. Prior to the start of baseball season, Smoll et al. (1993) provided training to the experimental group; the training consisted of 2 ½ hours of Coach Effectiveness Training (CET), a program developed by the research group. The program was designed to enable coaches to work more effectively with young athletes. Behavioral guidelines were used as a base in developing the program, which used a cognitive-behavioral framework. In essence, the program deemphasized winning and losing, and emphasized giving maximum effort in playing the game. In an article by Munsey (2010), a staff writer for the American Psychological Association, *Monitor on Psychology* follows up on Smoll et al. (1993) research on coach's training. Munsey interviewed Smith from the research team of Smoll et al. (1993), Smith told Munsey that in 1993 the prevailing attitude of a coach was tough, hard, a task master; Smith attributed this perception to how coaches were perceived on television. Smith went on to say the best environment for a young athlete to

thrive is one of having fun, athletes are highly motivated, trying to improve, and willing to give maximum effort. Smoll et al. (1993) have found in their research the intimidation style of coaching does not foster motivation. As of this interview Smoll et al. have been working on developing a coach training program and will distribute the training to youth sport programs free of charge, the training program will include an instructional video. Smoll et al. claims their research is the only empirically validated research although there are many training programs on the market. Smoll et al., in addition to others collaborating with them have conducted research on youth in sports since the 1970s. However, their research lacks specific qualitative research on the part a coach's verbal and physical behavior plays on the attrition rate in youth sports.

Shields et al. (2005) found in their study of 803, 9–15-year old, their parents, and coaches that 42% of the coaches self-reported yelling at a child for making a mistake. This behavior did not go unnoticed by the youth; 48% of the youth reported being yelled at following a mistake. In addition, 4% of the children reported being physically abused (hit, slapped, and/or kicked) by a coach. The researchers commented that if the number reported is representative of the total population of youth in sports it means that over 2 million children are being hit, slapped and/or kicked by their coaches each year.

Ingham et al. (2002) questioned the need to embarrass young athletes when adults impose their authority. This imposed authority often leads to the child feeling self-conscious due to being ashamed because of their degree of competence, which introduces self-doubt into the young participant. In a retrospective qualitative study by Gervis and Dunn (2004) the researchers found that young elite athletes were often victims of emotional abuse. Participants reflected on their experiences which occurred on an

average of about 10 years prior to the time of the study. The athletes told the researchers they were belittled and shouted at by their coaching staff. The participants also said the coach's behavior impacted them long after the activity was over. Gervis and Dunn (2004) found the abuse of elite athletes ages 8 to 16, that all athletes experienced some type of abuse, to include belittling, shouting, threatening, and humiliating behavior. It was pointed out that when coaching elite athletes, the abuse is often overlooked as long as the athlete was winning, which justified the coach's behavior. Using interviews as their data collection method the information they collected found that verbal behavior does impact negatively on a participant's ability to enjoy their sport, regardless of their level of play. Using semistructured interviews, several of the research participants in the Gervis and Dunn (2004) study responded that they took the shouting personally and felt scared. Another youth stated he would remember the humiliation for the rest of his life. Still another commented, when at practice, he was upset and depressed most of the time, due to the way they were treated by the coaching staff. Research shows that there are many reasons that draw a young person to youth sports; nevertheless, it is another matter keeping the young person in the activity. Schinnerer (2009) report that 90% of 4th through 8th grade students reported being bullied by a coach; the abuse included both verbal and emotional abuse.

Group Cohesion

Ryska et al. (2002) found that the lack of group cohesion was a factor in young gymnastic participants in Australia dropping out of the sport. The Ryska et al. (2002) study included 349 youth gymnasts, ages ranging from 9-18 years. The researchers tracked the gymnasts and found that out of the 349 participants who started the study,

only 149 were registered for the sport a year later; over 200 of the participants did not continue their participation. Even more interesting in their findings, was the fact that at the time of the report the participants, who had not signed up the following year, also had not registered for any activity following their drop out of gymnastics. The motive factors included competition, action, fitness, team atmosphere, new situation, social recognition, and personal challenge. The authors claimed that their results were consistent with those of other researchers in that young athletes join activities primarily to fulfill one of the motives listed above, and when the motive is not met, the athlete discontinues involvement in the sport. Although the article included team atmosphere as one of the motives for participation, the researchers did not explain what was included under this area. It is difficult to assess what role the coach played in contributing to the young athletes having their expectations met. In other words, if a child joined an activity to have fun and the coach criticized that player for making mistakes, then it was the coach's coaching style that contributed to the athlete's discontinuation of the sport. This study did not directly explore the athletes' reasons for not continuing their involvement in the sport.

The research conducted by Stewart and Taylor (2000) supports the "participation for fun" theory. Also supporting the "participation for fun" theory, Jones (2005) sampled 100 boys and girls attending summer soccer camp in Ohio, with an age range of 7–12 years old. There were 51 males and 49 females attending the camp. Using interviews, the researchers found children ranked playing soccer and soccer games as their number one enjoyable activity at the camp. The subcategory included those activities that relate

to having fun, such as world cup, and other games related to playing soccer. In the second subcategory, swimming was the number one activity following soccer games.

Ingham, Chase, and Butt (2002), in an essay, looked at a phenomenon called *prolympism*. It said that youth sports are being used to promote those children who show significant athletic potential at a young age. That the system of youth sports is being used to separate the top young athletes and prepare them for a professional career, and/or the Olympics, has led to the term *prolympism*. These intentions run contrary to what youth sports is about to develop all young athletes to their fullest potential regardless of current skill. Ingham et al. (2002) stated that the “Every Kid is a Winner” slogan is a utopian dream. Ingham et al. suggested that it is not possible for every child to be an Olympian or professional athlete, which is not the intent of youth sports. The intent of youth athletics is to provide children with an environment where skills are developed and self-esteem and confidence increased. These attributes can take the child into adulthood with some very important lessons learned about life in general. Although there is no research on this subject, the essay put together by Ingham et al. is logical when thinking about what motivates people, especially adults to push children beyond their capabilities. Ingham et al. (2002) said that most of the negative behavior by coaches and parents are intended to get their children as advanced in the feeder system as possible. The feeder system is what youth sports are called; it feeds into junior high school, high school, college, and eventually into the prolympism. The motive for this adult behavior seems to be money; the more elite players a recreational program produces, the more funding they get, which may include donations and grants, for their programs. Ingham et al. (2002) use the word *elitist* to describe the different groups involved in youth sports. They

believe these elitist youth programs are guided by a performance discourse, meaning that the communication is about performance and refers to the gifted athletes, not the less talented, or those who are just trying or learning a sport. The implication is that the less talented are left out; the concentration is on the more gifted athletes, the potential prolympian. Ingham et al. proposed that youth sports could benefit all children participating in its activities if all the children were treated the same, and the concentration was on how the children learn, with whom they learn, and what is the best learning environment. The concern was, if a child is made to feel inadequate in one social environment (sports) that impacts his or her engagement in another social environment.

Gender differences in Coaching

McCallister et al. (2000) found in their research that female coaches were more likely than male coaches to attempt to teach their team participants the value of supporting and encouraging their teammates in spite of their current limitations in playing the game. The researchers interviewed 22 youth baseball and softball coaches, 10 women and 12 men, concerning the values, life skills, and philosophies they thought important, and how they taught these values, life skills, and philosophies to their young team participants. Ages covered by the coaches interviewed are 7-12-year old; this age group is in the learning stage of their athletic career. The article stated that both groups for the most part had similar responses to questions concerning values, life skills, and philosophies. Sportsmanship was seen slightly differently based on gender. Males said that sportsmanship was not showing up the other players following a win and shaking hands after the game. Female coaches responded to this question by saying

sportsmanship is encouraging and supporting team members. Although both groups of coaches thought values and life skills should be taught to the children, neither group had a specific plan as to how they planned to teach these values and life skills. One coach responded that he would teach values by having the errant child run laps or do push-ups if he catches a team member being negative or using unacceptable language. Both groups, when questioned, also felt that competition and winning should be deemphasized in the younger age groups.

McCallister et al. (2002) compared their interviews with observations of the coaches and found that most coaches' behavior did not coincide with their stated philosophies. Winning and participation was one of the inconsistencies found; when observed, the coaches put more emphasis on winning than they advocated earlier in the interview. When asked about participation, most coaches agreed that all children should participate. However, the reasons given were not because of the benefits sport participation provided; the average reason provided by the coaches was financial, in that the parents had paid for the children to participate. In general, the researchers found that many of the inconsistencies between what coaches said and what they practiced were due to the inexperience of the coaches. Most coaches reported that they volunteered because they had a child playing the sport, and some accepted the position because no one else would take the job. Parents also played a part in why coaches strayed away from their stated philosophies. It was reported that parents wanted the coach to coach to win, leading the coach to make decisions in order to win a game; counter to the philosophy of having fun. During close games some children would not get an opportunity to play

because they lacked the skill to help the team win the game. Overall, in this research study there were no significant differences between male and female youth coaches.

Millard (1996) studied coaching differences based on gender. The study included 29 females and 29 male high school soccer coaches, using an observational tool called Coaching Behavior Assessment System (CBAS). Millard stated that sports research has changed its focus from the coach's personality characteristics to their leadership style, focusing on their overt behavior. According to Millard (1996), this shift is due to the belief that a coach's words and actions tend to influence their players' performance and mental well-being. Millard (1996) set up a systematic observation system consisting of 12 trained observers. She started out coding 10 categories on the CBAS: reinforcement, mistake-contingent encouragement, mistake-contingent technical instruction, punishment, punitive mistake-contingent technical instruction, keeping control, general technical instruction, general encouragement, organization, and general communication. She reported the mean for test administrator reliability was .91. The one shortfall could be the fact that each coach was observed only for one game in the middle of the season. Coaching behavior may change from game to game based on any of a number of reasons and only observing one full game may not display the total range of a coach's behavior. In addition, a coach's behavior may be based on many factors, from the time of day, to day-to-day personal situations, so more and longer observational periods might give a better picture of a coach's behavior. The coach's behavior may be different when the team is winning versus when the team is losing. The findings in Millard's research article simply showed there is a difference between coaches based on the gender of the coach. Statistics in this project show that male participants are generally older than their

female counterparts. Males also had, on average, more coaching experience than female coaches. When the researcher looked at total coaching experience, coaching all sports not just soccer, females had more total sports participation time as participating athletes than males. In other words, females in this study not only coached the sport, but at some time in their life they participated as a player, while males tended to coach sports they had not played. The participation motive seems to play a more significant role in a young athlete dropping out of an activity than did the gender of the coach (Millard, 1996).

Participation in youth sports has many benefits, the reasons the participation level drops off seems to result from a variety of causes. In some cases, participants want to change their extracurricular activity, and in other situations the participants experience abuse at the hands of those appointed to mentor and train them.

Summary of the Literature Review

The research review shows youth sports has grown year after year; estimates range from over 30 million (Metzl, 2006) to 44 million children (Moreno, 2011) ages 6-18 currently participating in some form of youth sport. It shows that children enter these activities for a variety of reasons including, fun, skill development, fitness, personal challenge, and friendship. To have fun and be with friends seems to be the major reasons youth sports are so popular with young people (Kondric et al., 2013). Weiss and Ferrer-Caja (2002) found the lack of fun was a major motive for children dropping out of sport activities.

It has been shown that participation in youth sports has many benefits. Self-esteem is one of the most researched elements connected to participation and has shown to be a major benefit (Coatsworth & Conroy, 2009; Dotterer, McHale, & Crouter, 2007).

Physical fitness and weight loss are other advantages of participation in youth sports. In addition, benefits include academic improvement, increased school retention, improvement in social skills and other psychological gains (DeBate et al., 2009; Findlay & Coplan, 2008; Lee et al., 2007; Rosewater, 2009). Although the benefits of participation in youth sports are well documented, it is also documented that between 60 and 70 percent of all children drop out of these activities after entering (Brady, 2004; Ryska et al., 2002; Wall & Cote, 2007). Some of the research points to the coach as having some control over the elements that contribute to the dropout rate of young participants, if not directly, then indirectly (Gervis & Dunn, 2004). It was also reported that these young children are experiencing stress and anxiety (Barber et al., 1999; Butcher et al., 2002; Gervis & Dunn, 2004; Grossbard et al., 2009; Weiss & Fretwell, 2005). Most of the stress and anxiety are due to a variety of reasons including, not having fun, verbal and physical abuse by adults in the system (coaches and parents), too little playing time, and too much pressure to win (Chamber, 1991; Ryska et al., 2002).

Other reasons given included things the coach did not have control over, which included the participant's change of interest (Engh, 1999; Wall & Cote, 2007). The discussion also included whether a participant entered a sport because of intrinsic or extrinsic reasons. Intrinsic reasons include, improving health, improving skill and involvement for other personal reasons; it is not necessarily because another person is involved in the same activity. Extrinsic reasons for involvement basically include doing something because someone else is doing it. It is of interest to note that participants entering for intrinsic reasons tended to stay longer than those participating for extrinsic reasons (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Recours et al., 2004; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Wiersma &

Sherman, 2008). In conclusion, research seems to point to a multi-faceted explanation of why children quit sports; their experience could be the determining factor in their decision to quit or continue participation. As noted above, children enter and exit youth sports for a variety of reasons. Current literature does not adequately address the role the youth coach plays in the high attrition of children in youth sports, and the role a youth coach plays in the attrition rate. This study attempted to identify the role a youth coach plays in attrition by using the qualitative method to discover the answer as seen by the stakeholders. The next chapter describes the research design and methods that were used to address the purpose of this study.

Chapter 3: Introduction

Introduction

This chapter outlines the method and design of this study. The purpose of this study was to explore youth coaches' perception of their role in young athletes' age 6-12 decision to continue participating in sports. I also explored how coaches perceived the high attrition rate among youth and what reasons they attributed to this attrition. The data for this study derived from in-depth semistructured interviews conducted in the phenomenological tradition (Moustakas, 1994). This chapter describes the selection of the qualitative tradition and the methodology and the role of the researcher. I justify the participant sampling method, explains the data collection methods, describes the ways the data was coded and analyzed. I tell how trustworthiness of the information was assured and discusses limitations and ethical considerations relevant to this study.

Research Design and Rationale

Jasper (1994) talked about the subjective nature of reality, and this is what this project is looking at the experience of coaches and their perceptions of children's engagement in sports. Phenomenology is the study of a person's experience, and the purpose is to understand a person's lived experience with a phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). Kivel and Kleiber (2000) made the point that a person's experience and the meaning of that experience is what reality is to them. By employing the phenomenological approach, this study seeks to gather answers to the following research questions:

RQ1: How do youth coaches perceive their role in a young person's decision to continue participating in their sport of preference?

RQ2: How do youth coaches perceive the attrition of youth in sports?

SQ2.1. What explanations do youth coaches provide as the reasons for youth's attrition in sports?

Phenomenological Research Approach

This study employed the phenomenological approach to study the shared experiences of youth coaches. Phenomenology is used to look at the structure and essence of experience (Patton, 2002). Phenomenology does not claim objective knowledge; instead, individual's worldviews are subjective and relative to how they interpret their life experience. This study assumed universal essence to the shared experiences of youth coaches. I elicited and recorded these descriptions, after coding and conducting analysis, and conclusions drawn about the nature of their experience (Moustakas, 1994). The phenomenological approach is the most appropriate tradition to employ in this study as it captures new perceptions of the lived experiences of the participants. This approach allowed for an exploration of participants' skills through rewriting and reframing interview questions in response to what the researcher finds through the data collection process (Creswell, 2007). I elicited data and understood the phenomenon at a deep level. By using inductive reasoning, the analysis moved from specific facts to general conclusions. The data collected examined for crucial statements, which embodied the essence of lived experience, assembled meaningful units of these descriptions, identified themes, and produced a report which contains the participants' experience (Moustakas, 1994).

Role of the Researcher

My role as a researcher was to design the qualitative phenomenological study, gain IRB approval, locate and screen participants, conduct the research, analyze the findings, and report the results. My primary data collection tool was in-depth interviews, conducted face-to-face. Each interview was recorded and transposed to paper. Upon meeting the coach, I introduced myself and established rapport. I explained to the participants the nature of the interview and how the results could lead to new information that would help coaches and youth organizations maintain and retain youth participation. There were no incentives offered to the participants for their involvement in the research. Additionally, the researcher took steps to ensure rigor and trustworthiness.

I am currently working for the Veterans Administration, Social Work Services as a Licensed Professional Counselor/Master Addiction Counselor. I have over 30 years of experience as a youth coach and nationally certified in youth baseball, basketball, and football. I have a lengthy background in coaching youth sports as a nationally certified youth coach. Le Lievre, Schweitzer, and Barnard (2011) state that qualitative researchers acknowledge and suspend preconceived ideas about the study through the process of bracketing. This reflexive approach allows the participant's thoughts about the situation to be at the forefront of the research and not the researcher's preconceived notions. I have not worked with the community center, where I collected data. I do not know or have any association with present or past youth coaches in this community center. I have not coached a youth sports team in this geographical location. The location was selected because they serve the population I want to study, and they are within my local area.

A reflective process was a primary consideration throughout the collection and interpretation phase of the study. Fontana and Frey (2005) explain reflexivity as the process of exploring challenges and choices in the philosophy of the research. This process helps the researcher with core beliefs and motives that may impact the study. Also, Cupchik (2001) says that reflexivity used in recognition of how the researcher affects the research process. It assists the researcher in the termination of any preconceived ideas about the research project; also, the researcher can explore any preconceived notions concerning the phenomenon. Le Lievre et al. (2011) wrote that when the researcher can bracket out their preconceived ideas, it adds to the reliability of the study. Thus, I bracketed my reactions and preconceived notions of youth coaching.

Participants

Participants were recruited using purposive sampling; participants were selected based on their involvement in youth sports. Devers and Frankel (2000) stated qualitative research uses purposive sampling. Purposeful sampling allows the researcher to identify information-rich participants (Creswell, 2007; Patton, 2002). Morgan (1988) said participants must be selected because they share commonalities. Morse (1991) stated good informant is willing to scrutinize their experience and their response to that experience judiciously. The individuals chosen for this information can provide specific details concerning the phenomena. In this situation, the phenomenon is the participation of youth in youth sports and the high attrition rate. The members selected for this research project all shared specific characteristics, they are or were coaches of children between the ages of 6 and 12, and they all worked at a community center. I do not and have never had any affiliation with this community center youth program. Appendix A

contains a copy of the letter of cooperation with my community partner. Thus, I chose this sample for their knowledge concerning the phenomenon studied. I interviewed 12 youth coaches; I reached saturation following data from participants yielded no new information (Charmaz, 2006). Bowen (2008) says saturation bringing new participants into the study until the data starts to become redundant and begins to replicate previous information. Validity and meaningfulness produced through qualitative examination have more to do with information-richness and the researcher's analytical ability than with sample size (Patton, 1990). Saturation is defined by Schensul, Schensul, and LeCompte (1999) as the point in which additional information would not add to the research outcome. Trotter and Schensul (1998) call this point, sufficient redundancy; this is when participants' responses start to repeat themselves.

The study had 12 participants who met the sample criteria. In researching several qualitative articles on sample size, there seems to be a varied opinion on the subject. Morse (1994) suggests 30-50 interviews when performing ethnography research. Creswell (2007) suggested 20–30 interviews when implementing grounded theory methodology. For a phenomenological study, Creswell (2012) suggested 3–4 to 10–15 interviews, and Morse (1994) recommended at least six participants. Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006) said that 12 interviews are sufficient to reach saturation in a homogenous population.

I received written permission from the youth sports director after the approval of the proposal. I posted flyers throughout the community center, advertising the research project and including my contact information (Appendix D). The youth director received contact information from potential volunteers and passed the volunteers to me. The

director did not know the selected participants. I ensured they met the qualifications to participate in the study. More detailed information on data collection procedures follows in the next sections.

Data Collection

Interviews are the primary source of data collection. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) indicated that the interview is one of the most powerful avenues for understanding the lives of fellow humans. Interviews provide participants the opportunity to express themselves in relations to the issue under investigation (Charmaz, 2006). The use of open-ended questions allows the interviewer to have the interviewee elaborate on any given item, and can return to the interviewee for clarification, using follow-up questions. Open-ended questions also facilitate exploratory interviewing to expand the researcher's knowledge of the research subject (Schensul et al. 1999). The interview questions will focus on the experience of the participants, especially as it relates to their role in fostering or hindering continued youth participation in sports (Appendix B).

Patton (2002) explains that field notes are a must in qualitative research; they describe what has been observed during data collection. Patton adds that field notes should be written or recorded when they take place; the researcher should not rely on memory for recording the note at a later time. Although notes are made to help explain the data, Patton said the interviewer takes notes while recording the interview. These notes can help formulate follow-up questions; the notes will help locate information within the interview, such as essential quotations. Also, the notes can be used in case the tape recorder malfunctions.

Data Collection Procedures

This study had one community partner, which helped in promoting this study at their sports settings. The program director of this program provided contact information from their youth coaches. Once approved by the youth center director was obtained, the youth center director or their staff contacted participants by telephone or email through an introduction provided to the center director by the researcher with the intent given for the contact. I offered the youth center director a flyer (Appendix E). The flyer invited current youth coaches to participate in the research study. The flyer gave a synopsis of the study and a contact phone number and email address for the researcher. As an alternative, the youth center director was asked to email the invitation to eligible coaches in the program, inviting them to participate in the study. The participants signed the consent form following their selection to participate in the study. At that time, I scheduled the interview, considering the interviewee's availability. At the time of the interview, I briefed the specifics of the consent form.

Phone interviews lasted between 20 and 30 minutes. Before beginning the interview, I informed all participants that the interview was going to be recorded. When the study is completed and approved, each participant and the director of my community partner will receive a copy of the results and discussion sections of the study.

McNair, Taft, and Hegarty (2008), state that interviews appeared to be simplistic; in reality, they are very complicated. The writers mentioned that the interview process is very complicated and takes a wide range of communicative skills to use the technique effectively. McDougall (2000) says that it is essential for the researcher to have good communicative skills, to speak clearly, have an adequate command of the subject matter

and to be able to ask valid follow-up questions. There are several types of interview question; structured interview questions have a set of predetermined responses. Unstructured questions allow for researchers to gather a higher amount of information because there is no limitation on the number of questions to ask. A semistructured question consists of questions that guide the interviewee towards certain themes while giving the interviewer the latitude to expand on a question or answer given by the interviewee (Charmaz, 2006). This research project used the semistructured interview. Participants answered questions directly related to their experience in youth sports. These questions were followed up by clarification questions as necessary. The interview started by asking participants some demographic questions (Appendix D). Open-ended questions are addressing the participant's experience in youth sports as it relates to the attrition rate.

Interview procedures were similar for all participants; I asked questions from the set of interview questions. I also took appropriate notes to document nonverbal behavior. The prepared questions are a guide; I did not restrict the interview by asking questions verbatim, as written (Gerhart, 2009). I asked follow-up questions when appropriate. The purpose of the questions was to ascertain the participant's personal experience in youth sports. All interviews were individual, in-depth, and semistructured/open-ended. Schensul, LeCompte, Nastasi, and Borgatti (1999) said open-ended questions are used with individual participants to collect information.

Schensul, LeCompte, Nastasi, and Borgatti (1999) said open-ended questions are used with individual participants to collect information. A specific set of questions were

designed to guide the interview. Questions were based on the research literature and formed to answer the research question for this research project.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is an iterative process, and it starts at the beginning of data collection and continues until completion (Liamputtong, 2009). Data collection and data analysis combine as a single process due to the reciprocal effect both methods have on each other (Saldana, 2009). The dual task of collecting data and analyzing it, allows the researcher to review the information obtained and to decide whether there is a need to seek new or more detail data. As a general working procedure, I followed Saldana's suggestion and asked myself: What strikes me as being exciting or unusual from the data?

This study used the modified Kaam method of phenomenological analysis as Moustakas (1994) described it. These are the steps for data analysis that I followed:

1. List every expression relevant to the participant's experience. This process described Horizontalization. It requires to review the transcripts and to identify significant statements that represented and explained how participants experienced the phenomenon.
2. Test every expression for particular requirements: identify substantial feelings and eliminate overlapping, repetitive or vague expressions. Reduction and elimination are critical procedures in this step.
3. Identify and cluster core themes. These themes represent the essence of the participant's experience. Verbatim quotes will be used to explicate the themes.
4. Validate the core themes identified. To achieve validation, the themes will be compared to the transcript of each participant to reveal the meaningfulness of the themes.

5. Create an Individual Textural Description of the experience including verbatim examples from the transcribed interview.
6. Create an Individual Structural Description of the experience. From the analysis of all the transcripts, a synthesis of the meanings and essences will emerge.
7. I used manual hand-coding, taking pen and highlighter to paper to code, categorize, and thematize the data. As this was a phenomenological research study, I used the modified Van Kaam process to analyze the data, as Moustakas (1994) described. Modified Van Kaam data analysis involves several analytical steps for both individual participants and the entire data set together. The first step of a modified Van Kaam analysis is horizontalization for each participant, which involved the preliminary line-by-line coding of all quotes. In this step, I set aside any biases and coded salient passages while suspending judgment of what might be relevant. Table 1 shows an example of this process for Coach K.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Creswell (2003) identifies eight ways to check the accuracy of the finding; three of those validation strategies I used in this study. Triangulation used in comparing the different sources and helping to build themes from the collected data. According to Barusch, Gringeri and George (2011) triangulation establish credibility by using analysts, multiple data or methods. The purpose according to the authors, is to develop a deeper understanding of the collected data because it involves data on the same topic from a variety of participants. The results of combining a variety of perspectives produce a stronger account of the situation. I used triangulation to verify the quality of the study. Triangulation provides an opportunity to use multiple and varying data sources, methods,

and investigators to provide supporting evidence that validates the research findings (Creswell, 2007). Allowing the participants to provide their perspective on the accuracy of the results strengthened the trustworthiness of this study (Creswell, 2007). The second validation strategy that I used was a rich, thick description. I reached thick description by recording all interviews; also, using field notes taken as necessary. Creswell (2007) indicated thick description is needed to establish transferability and for dependability and confirmability. The third validation strategy was peer debriefing; this process is called member checking in other literature (Barusch et al. 2011). Barusch et al. say member checking is similar to triangulation, it deepens the understanding of the research.

The trustworthiness of the data is reliant on the responses provided by the coaches participating in the interviews. I took time before administering the interview questions building a relationship; as a long-term coach, introducing and talking about personal experiences would be beneficial in developing this relationship. Creswell (2007) indicated that participants are more likely, to be honest, and forthcoming if they have built a relationship with the interviewer.

Credibility

To enrich credibility and internal validity, Shenton (2004) wrote that the line of questioning and the methods of data analysis derived from successful previously utilized methods in comparable studies. In this study, participants engaged with me to address the question of why they believed youth sports have a high attrition rate. I used triangulation to ensure credibility. According to Shenton, this form of triangulation uses a variety of informants and compared their experiences and viewpoints. A rich picture of the participant's behaviors and attitudes can be constructed based on a wide range of

opinions. Van Maanen (1983) says bits of information can be checked out across participants.

Transferability

Creswell (2013) said qualitative studies do not attempt to generalize results using small samples. The researcher does not claim to generalize their findings to a larger population as quantitative studies does. Patton (2002) suggests using purposeful sampling, saying participant's broader significance in terms of their relevance to the study. The sample is small in number, but it is useful in a larger realm. Patton adds that transferability does not equal generalization as in quantitative studies. Transferability means readers can connect features from the research and compare them to their personal experience (Patton2002). I used thick description in defining the phenomenon under investigation (Shenton 2004). Holloway (1997) said the thick description is an in-depth explanation of specific field experience. The reader determines whether the results are transferable to other circumstances.

Dependability

Quantitative research uses reliability, and qualitative research uses dependability. To ensure dependability, the recommendation to the researcher to describe the processes used to develop the study in detail so that other researchers can reproduce the research (Shenton, 2004). I used in-depth coverage to enable other researchers to replicate the study's results (Shenton 2004). To ensure dependability, I discussed the research design, its implementation, the gathering of data, and the effectiveness of these processes (Shenton, 2004). Dr. Susana Verdinelli conducted a dissertation staff review and checked for research bias during data collection and analysis.

Confirmability

In quantitative research, objectivity is equivalent to confirmability in qualitative research. Patton (2002) says that confirmability is researcher bias; the bias can have an impact on the study and influence the finding of the study. Shenton, 2004 says the finding in a qualitative study should be the result of the participant's responses and not that of the researcher. Earlier in the proposal, I explained my connection to youth sports, and this study which spans over 40 years. I have served as coach, umpire and a member of several youth advisory councils. Objectivity started at the beginning of the study and maintained until the study concluded. The objectivity was assured by recording all interviews. By recording each interview, the researcher ensured the findings are the opinion and experience of the participants (Shenton 2004). After the proposal was approved, I used an audit trail to track procedures and decisions made in the course of the research. The audit trail allowed me to trace the course the original research followed.

Ethical Protection of Participants

Arksey and Knight (1999) pointed out that any research study, regardless of how mundane it seems, could put a participant in distress. The research warns that researchers may press a participant to continue an interview session even though a participant is in distress (Charmaz, 2006). The initial interview consisted of providing the participants with a letter of consent. I explained the document, and I had the participants sign it acknowledging they understood the guidelines as stated in the consent document. The consent form (Appendix C) explained that all interviews were going to be recorded and transcribed into text. Additionally, interviews were expected to vary depending on the

participant. I included the risks and benefits in the form, along with with IRB and my contact information.

I explained to all participants that their names were confidential and not released to any outside agency. For clarification, I explained that I used a numeric or alpha/numeric coding that represented their name in the research. At the end of the study, all participants received a letter thanking them for their time and information, and their participation in general. Other information discussed with participants included how data were secured. I kept all data in a locked container with the researcher having the only key to the secured information. I safeguarded the computer information with password protection; I was the only person with access to the network. At the request of the participants they will be given a copy of the research results, I will also provide the participating youth program with a copy.

Before data collection, an IRB application was submitted to the university IRB for approval. The board ensured proper procedures were followed. They ensured consent and confidentiality issues were reviewed and explained to all participants. Other concerns of the IRB were data collected is kept confidential, and interviews conducted in privacy. I will keep interview data in a safe and protected location for five years. I will destroy participants' data after that time.

Summary

This chapter introduced, explained, and justified the research design and rationale for the design of the study. I provided a detail explanation of the methodology of the study including the selection of the participants, ethical protection of participants, data collection and procedures, and data analysis. A justification for the use of the qualitative

phenomenological approach is included in this chapter. Ethical concerns and issues of trustworthiness were also addressed in this chapter.

Chapter 4 will provide additional details on data collection and analysis. A thorough description of the study's results and the themes will be identified. The participants' demographics, evidence of trustworthiness, and the research questions follow in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4

Introduction

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore youth coaches' perception of their role in a young person's decision to continue participating in their sport of preference. Additionally, the study explored how coaches perceive the high attrition rate among youth and what reasons they attribute to this attrition. Chapter 4 includes the findings from this research study. First, I provide a description of the setting for this study and participants' demographic information, followed by profiles of the participants. This is followed by a discussion of data collection and trustworthiness of the data, and the data analysis. Finally, I present this study's findings.

I interviewed 10 male coaches and two female coaches for this research study. Most participants coach more than one sport throughout the year. All coaches have been coaching for a minimum of 1 year. The following research questions guided this study:

RQ1: How do youth coaches perceive their role in a young person's decision to continue participating in their sport of preference?

RQ2: How do youth coaches perceive the attrition of youth in sports?

SQ2.1: What explanations do youth coaches provide as the reasons for youth's attrition in sports?

Study Setting and Demographics

I interviewed 10 male coaches and two female coaches for this research study. Most participants coach more than one sport throughout the year. All coaches have been coaching for a minimum of 1 year. No coach in this survey had formal training in coaching youth sports.

Table 1. *Demographic and other main characteristics of the participants.*

No.	Title	Race	Gender	Area of Coaching	# of Years Coaching	Personal Participation
1	Coach A	Black	M	Basketball Soccer Baseball and Football	3 Year	HS Football
2	Coach B	White	M	Basketball and Tennis	10 Years	HS Baseball
3	Coach C	Indian	M	Basketball	5 Years	No Participation
4	Coach D	White	F	Basketball	1 Years	College Basketball
5	Coach E	White	M	Basketball	2 Years	HS Basketball
6	Coach F	Black	M	Football	1 Years	HS Football
7	Coach G	White	M	Basketball	4 Years	High School Basketball
8	Coach H	White	M	Basketball and Soccer	2 Years	High School Basketball and Football
9	Coach I	Black	F	Basketball, Softball Soccer and Cheerleading	10 Years	College Basketball Cheerleading
10	Coach J	Black	M	Basketball and Soccer	1 Years	High School Basketball
11	Coach K	White	M	Basketball and Football	4 Years	No Participation
12	Coach L	White	M	Basketball	5 Years	High School

Participant Profiles

Coach A. Coach A has coached basketball, football, soccer, and baseball for approximately 5 years. Because he has been a coach for his eldest son's teams, he started coaching 4–5-year old children but has also taught youth from ages 6–11 in different sports. He began coaching in summers when he was in college because he has always liked working with kids. Now that he has his own kids, he was motivated to coach for them because they didn't have a coach. He says that he felt obligated to participate in youth sports because he recognized that some kids came from single-parent families or families divided by divorce, and he knew that he could be a good role model for those kids who might need a strong father figure in their lives. In addition, he also was not happy with what he saw in other coaches and thought that he could help out those kids by providing them with a different kind of coaching experience. An experience more child centered, without yelling and screaming at the young players. More age appropriate coaching, understanding child behavior.

Coach B. Coach B has been coaching youth sports for about a decade. He has coached basketball for most of that time, but also coached tennis. In that time, he has coached kids as young as 4 and 5 years old to high school age. He is motivated to coach youth sports because he thinks that kids between the ages of 6–12 are impressionable. He thinks that kids in this age group are easier to encourage and motivate to become involved in youth sports, and that kids who get involved in youth sports when they are older are more difficult to encourage and get engaged.

Coach C. This is Coach C's first year coaching youth sports, and he teaches basketball to 8–9-year old kids. Unlike some of the participants, he does not have

children of his own that motivated him to coach, but instead he is motivated to coach because he feels like he can be a role model for kids, and he thinks that coaching is fun.

Coach D. Coach D is a basketball coach and he has been involved in coaching youth sports for 3 years. He coaches boys ages 8–11 and is motivated to coach and be involved in sports because his son plays basketball. His son’s basketball team went through a few unreliable coaches, including one who failed to show up regularly for games. As a result, Leal began stepping in to help in the absence of the coach and took on the full-time responsibility when asked.

Coach E. Coach E has been a youth basketball coach for five years. He coaches kids between the ages of 8–11. He says that he is motivated to coach because he likes being around the kids and preparing them to move into junior high athletics.

Coach F. Coach F is a little league football coach. He has coached for 1 year. Malcolm coaches 9–11-year-olds. His two sons are on the team. His wife was supposed to be the coach, but when she was unable to do it, he took over the team for her.

Coach G. Coach G has coached basketball and has assisted coaching baseball. He’s been involved in coaching youth sports for four years. He coaches youth ages 5–9. This is his son’s age group, which is one of the reasons he began coaching. He says that he has a limited amount of free time, and coaching is a way for him to help out and be part of his son’s sports.

Coach H. Coach H coach soccer and basketball. He’s coached for about two years, and works with kids ages 4–5, 7–8, and 11–12. His motivation to work in youth sports comes from watching kids’ faces light up when they play, and when he sees kids understand the sport and that they can play it.

Coach I. Coach I have coached softball, basketball, soccer, and cheerleading. She has been involved in youth sports for over a decade. She says she has coached many age groups, beginning with 5–6–year old. The age of the kids she has coached over the years depended on the ages of her children, as she always coached the sports that they played. She is motivated to coach youth sports because she wants to motivate kids to play, and also to help kids build confidence in themselves.

Coach J. Coach J is in his first year of coaching youth sports, and he coaches basketball for 4 and 5-year-olds. He says he likes working with them when they're young. This is because at the young age, he expressed that he can teach them the basics of the sport because they're just starting.

Coach K. Coach K has been a coach for 4 years, and in this time, he has coached basketball and football. He has coached youth ages 8–13.

Coach L. Coach L coach boys' basketball and has done so for about five years. He has coached kids as young as six up to 12 years old. He likes to be involved in youth sports because he gets to work with kids who are interested in playing. He says that there is also a need for coaches, which is he cites as another motivating factor for him.

Data Collection

I conducted all interviews over the phone on a pre-arranged date and time. I used the phone interview method because of the conflicting work schedules of the participants and me. I work out of town and was only available to conduct face-to-face interviews on Saturdays, while Saturdays were the days the community partner had games and so the participants were busy. The interviews lasted approximately 20–30 minutes. All 12 interviews were audio-recorded using a digital recorder, and each participant was

informed that they would be audio-recorded and provided their statement of consent to be recorded.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

I used three validation strategies to ensure accuracy of the findings (see Creswell, 2003). First, I used triangulation to compare data sources and create themes from the data. I used multiple participants to establish credibility (Barusch, Gringeri, & George, 2011). Second, I used thick, rich description, which Creswell (2007) stated was important to establish credibility. Finally, I used peer debriefing, or member checking see (Barusch, Gringeri, & George, 2011). This was done to enhance understanding of the findings.

Credibility. In this study, I used triangulation to establish credibility of the study. Credibility is similar to internal validity in quantitative research, and according to Shenton (2004), data analysis should be established based on methods used in similar studies. Triangulation involves using a variety of sources and different types of informants. In this study, I interviewed 12 participants that helped in corroborating and supporting the emerging themes.

Transferability To ensure transferability in this study, I used thick description. As Holloway (1997) described, thick description provides an in-depth explanation of field experiences and data collection techniques. Providing such detail allows readers to determine if results are transferable to other circumstances and populations. I used thick description in providing information about the population and the phenomenon under study. I also provided vignettes to illustrate findings of this study.

Dependability. in qualitative research means that the research processes are described in depth at such a level that other researchers could follow these steps to

replicate the study. To ensure dependability, I followed Shenton's (2004) recommendations: I thoroughly discussed the research design and implementation, how data were gathered, and the efficacy of these processes. I also used peer review and debriefing to avoid research bias in data collection and analysis.

Confirmability. In qualitative research, findings should be based on participants' responses and free from researcher bias (Shenton, 2004). To establish confirmability, I addressed my role as the researcher clearly, describing my own connection to youth sports in advisory capacities. I audio-recorded all interviews to ensure the findings were based on the opinions of the participants, as suggested by Shenton (2004). I also created an audit trail to establish the decisions I made throughout the research, allowing other researchers to follow this in future studies.

Data Analysis

I used manual hand-coding, taking pen and highlighter to paper to code, categorize, and thematize the data. As this was a phenomenological research study, I used the modified Van Kaam process to analyze the data, as Moustakas (1994) described. Modified Van Kaam data analysis involves several analytical steps for both individual participants and for the entire data set together. The first step of a modified Van Kaam analysis is horizontalization for each participant, which involved the preliminary line-by-line coding of all quotes. In this step, I set aside any biases and coded salient passages while suspending judgment of what might be important. Table 2 shows an example of this process for Coach K.

Table 2

Example of Coding Process

Interview Text	Line-by-Line Coding	Focused Coding
Uh, it, uh, it's not everything, just having fun.	Have fun	Fun
That's to me that's the most important, the most important thing on the whole, the whole sports, you know, uh, if you're not having fun then, uh, you, you pretty much don't need to be doing it because you play the sports to have fun and you know to get better, but the number one thing is to have fun and if you're not having fun, then you don't need to be doing it.	Having fun for me is the most important part of playing youth sports	Fun

After I finished the preliminary line-by-line coding, I began the second step of reduction and elimination. In this step, I looked at each of the preliminary codes and asked myself if that code was important to understanding the lived experience of that participant related to the phenomenon, and if the code could be reduced to its latent meaning. If the answer was no to either question, I eliminated that code. When all the codes I generated had been through this two-step process, I created the codebook of all remaining codes. After I reduced and eliminated the preliminary codes, I began to thematize the remaining codes through focused coding, based on their latent meaning (see Table 2). I used the codes in the codebook to develop the families of codes that led to the thematic groupings. Then, I created preliminary thematic groupings based on similarities in the remaining preliminary codes for each participant's interview. After this, I carefully examined these themes against the data in the interview to ensure that the themes were representative of the entire data set and, thus, the experiences of the participants. After thematizing the results of each participant's interview, I examined

these themes for similarities and differences across all interview data. Based on the cross-comparisons I performed throughout the data analysis process, I developed six global themes.

Results

The results of the modified Van Kaam data analysis (Moustakas, 1994) yielded six themes, all of which addressed the research questions. These themes were: (a) sports are about having fun, (b) developing life skills, (c) coaching philosophy, (d) reasons kids quit sports, (e) good coaches keep kids engaged in sports, and (f) winning and losing. No discrepant or negative cases emerged that were not within the range of variation for a given theme or subtheme and so all were given equal consideration and incorporated in the emerging themes. In presenting the results of each theme, I provided a general definition and characteristics of the theme. Then, I selected meaningful examples from participants to illustrate the depth of the theme.

Theme 1. Sports are About Having Fun

The coaches saw youth sports as a fun recreational activity for kids and drew from their own experiences playing youth sports, remembering the fun they had when they played. Participants thought that the kids having fun playing was more important than winning games, though one participant noted that that kids may equate having fun with winning; that is, that if they are winning, they are having fun. In addition, they felt that having fun was the key to keeping kids engaged in, and wanting to continue, playing sports. Kids who had fun playing sports wanted to keep playing, according to participants. Participants said that kids face high expectations from their parents and sometimes from other coaches. Placing high expectations on children can lead to burnout,

so participants felt it important to keep things fun at practice. At least at practice, participants felt that kids could be themselves and have fun without the worry and pressure of winning.

Coach A said:

Oh, that's the most important because you, if the kids don't have fun, they're not gonna want to play and they're not going to play the next year or the next year, and when, and, and sport is not going to be, sports not going to be successful. So it's, it's very important to have fun and plus, I just think if you're having fun, you're gonna to [sic] you're gonna try harder, you gonna run harder, you're gonna really, you're gonna really do all the things that we all need to do to be successful, if you're having fun.

He also thinks that kids are more likely to keep playing if they are having fun. "If you're having fun as a child, you want to do it, you want to do it again," he said of sports. He also thinks that having fun is what keeps kids coming to practice. As he put it, "practice to them is like playing," which he thinks is a fun opportunity for kids. Coach A does not want to see other adults spoil this fun for kids. He thinks "sometimes parents are too hard on their kids and they really push them to the point where it stresses the child out," and when this happens the child doesn't want to play anymore because "[the parents] made it no fun." As long as kids are having fun, Coach A thinks that they will keep practicing and playing sports.

Coach B approaches youth sports in a lighthearted way and tries to instill in his players that sports are about fun, first and foremost. He wants his players, and their parents, to know that "your college scholarship doesn't depend on this" and that

“regardless of how many you win or how many you lose, you know, you’re, you’re guaranteed to play in, in this league.” He stated:

I try to do to joke around some at practice and have some fun. I, I try if, I can, if time permitting we have, um, just some light shoot around, uh, and they, they kind of tend to take themselves, uh, on one-on-one because all my, all my guys tend to go to school together and, uh, and, and they know each other even before basketball starts.

He tries to joke around and have fun with his players because “I don’t want them getting to a point to where they dread coming to practice, where they dread going to a game.” He thinks that some nervousness is normal before a game, because “that means they, they care, that they’re concerned,” but the main thing with sports is that “you gotta have some fun.”

Coach B has seen other coaches let go for behaviors he did not approve of over the years. He said, “I’ve seen a few coaches that, uh, it was like drill camp,” which took the fun out of the sport. After being given “ample time to change his ways,” Coach B said that this coach was told he would no longer continue coaching.

In his interview, Coach D shared a story of how going to his brother’s college football games influenced the way he thinks about having fun while coaching sports. He said that even though his family went to all of his brother’s football games, he could only remember the final score to one game because it was a very exciting game. Beyond that, he and his brother remember having fun, which is what he brings when he coaches kids.

When he first began coaching, Coach D’s number one goal was “just trying to make practice fun.” Over time, he has started adding “a little bit more incentive” to

practices. He said that he still uses some of the same drills that he has always used, “but some of the same drills we don’t do because, you know, if it gets too repetitive, they don’t kind of stick with it. They get bored.” He thinks “if [sports] becomes a mundane task, something that, you know, that is just so repetitive, and they just don’t, you know, have fun at it, they’re not going to come back,” so it’s important to him to keep things fun for his players.

“Fun is what it’s all about, you know,” proclaimed Coach F. He believes that most of his kids are “coming out here to have fun” and that is what they should get from playing youth sports. He said:

It’s young kids, uh, as a coach, just watching the kids play is fun, okay. It’s fun.

Uh, because kids, they’re fun. Okay. They have all kinds of little games and tricks and their behavior and you have to laugh and joke and uh, allow them to have fun.

They’re kids.

When Coach F talks about having fun, he ties this directly back to winning. He said, “hey, any sport is all about fun and, but most of all again the kids want to win, so winning makes fun.” He sees that winning provides motivation for the players to keep showing up to practice, which makes them better players in addition to providing them with fun time. Becoming better players means a greater likelihood of winning more games, so in his eyes, winning and having fun are intertwined in youth sports.

In a similar way, Coach G believed kids should have fun in sports. Coach G stated, “it’s extremely important; they’re kids. If they can’t have fun at it, why should they do it?” Coach G believes that it’s his role to “make it fun” for the kids, “keep it fun

for ‘em.” He also shared that he is concerned sometimes that kids might be playing sports for a reason other than to have fun. He stated, “It’s one of those [situations] where parents or someone’s trying to live the glory days through a child, they’re not going to maintain interest. It’s a chore to ‘em, it’s works to ‘em, and they’re kids.” He thinks that kids are not ready to handle situations like that, so coaches must ensure that sports are fun for kids.

According to Coach H, having fun comes before winning. He believes “we’re out there to have fun in whatever game we’re playing,” and that fun is “100% important for the kids.” He thinks that winning is important but is unnecessary for fun. “If I never won a game,” he said, “that’d be fine, as long as my team and kids were enjoying themselves and feeling like they were an accomplishment.” His fear is that, if kids don’t have fun playing sports, “if you’re out there just working at the sport, it, it doesn’t become fun anymore. It’s, it’s a job and if it’s a job, nobody likes their job,” he laughed. He elaborated:

If they’re not having fun, they’re going to think of it as a job, just like the chores at home, and they’re going to slack off, they’re not gonna want to, uh, put out their 100%. Um, you know, so if, if, if they’re not having fun, they’re not, they’re not going to put out everything that they’ve got.

To keep kids playing, and giving it their best, Coach H believes that fun should be the priority. He doesn’t want to see youth sports as something that kids begin to resent because they come to view practicing and playing as a chore. If kids are having fun, then they’re going to do their best, and winning follows.

Coach I believe that having fun is “very important to me.” In her mind, winning is less important than having fun when it comes to youth sports. Sports are “for fun and game, it’s, it’s, it’s just [to] keep them busy and keep myself busy,” she said. Even if her team doesn’t win, she said that her players can still have fun, and this is true even if they don’t win any games during the season. Youth sports is all about “having new friends and having fun,” according to Coach I.

Coach J believes that “the main thing is to have fun” when playing sports, and that if kids aren’t having fun playing, then there is “really no point in being out there.” She tries to instill this attitude in her players as well, teaching them to “always try to have fun.” She also thinks that kids will stay in sports if they’re having fun, even if they lose a game. “They have to enjoy it. They can’t feel like it’s, um, like, just hard work and not get any enjoyment out of it.” She shared that she wants kids to “enjoy themselves” while they’re playing sports.

On fun, Coach K stated:

That’s the most important, the most important thing on the whole, the whole sports, you know, uh, if you’re not having fun then, uh, you, you pretty much don’t need to be doing it because you play the sports to have fun and, you know, to get better, but the number one thing is to have fun and if you’re not having fun, then you don’t need to be doing it.

He also believes that having fun is important for keeping kids involved in youth sports. He said that he tries to talk to his players in a fun way, and with a fun attitude, because doing so “makes it fun for them.” When they’re interested in sports, and having fun, his players want to come to practice. If they aren’t interested in coming to practice he

tells them, “hey, uh, look, coming to practice, you know it, it, it could be fun,” and then ensures that everyone is having a good time and that it feels like play. If players are struggling, he finds this technique of focusing on fun helps as well. He said, “It can be a, a learning process, you know what I am saying, you’re not just coming here to have, you know, just to learn the game or learn what to do, but you’re, you’re having fun.”

According to Coach K, focusing his players toward having fun means that they’ll show up and learn while they’re having fun at practice, which is fundamental to youth sports.

Coach L tries to keep his practices enjoyable, and one way that he does this is by “getting in there with them and having fun myself,” so that the players see that everyone, even the coach, is having a good time. He also shared how important it is to him that his players don’t see sports as work or a chore. He said:

I think it’s important to have fun, uh, if you’re not having fun, then, they’re not, uh, I don’t think they’re, they’re going to keep coming back and it’s going to be seen as just another required of their time, a lot like, uh, school and some other things, where it may just become a requirement and not something that they’re actually enjoying doing.

Theme 2. Developing Life Skills

This theme refers to how participants described the extended benefits of playing sports. Kids learn much more than the skills needed for success and winning from sports. Participants felt that they played an important role in the lives of the kids they coached. They felt responsible not only for coaching and teaching kids how to play the game, but also for teaching children important developmental skills. Kids learn about themselves as individuals and how to work with others as a team through sports. Kids also learn

confidence through playing youth sports, which they carry with them in life. Learning how to work well with others is another skill that helps kids in youth sports and in other areas of their lives. The focus of this theme is on these developmental benefits that participants believed youth sports provides kids.

Rather than youth sports being about sports per se, Coach A believes that “youth sports are really about development.” As such, he focuses on developing his players not only to be good players, but to teach them life skills that will help them succeed in everyday life. To do this, he puts his players “in a position to succeed.” He shared that, when his players are just starting out and are not very good at some of the basic sports skills, he recognizes that can be discouraging for the child. He works to develop them but also to play to their strengths, so that he can help them build their confidence in their own ability to play. He said:

So, I want to put you in, in the position to succeed. And by doing that for each individual person, if everybody understands they're there where they are in this adventure of whatever sport they're learning, then you work on it on your own.

Coach A focuses on building players' skills but also developing them as people, so they can see that hard work pays off and they learn their strengths and weaknesses. One way that he thinks kids see their hard work pays off is if they win a game. “You want to validate the work you've put in with these kids, you want to see them succeed,” he said. “They're uncomfortable,” he said, “Sometimes they're scared and it, and it really shows them hey, I, I can do this. I can persevere through this and I can, I can do this.”

Social development is another aspect of youth sport that Coach A thinks is important. He shared the story of one of his current players who is “super shy,” but has

come out of his shell through his participation in sports. Part of this social development is learning the important of teamwork. Coach A believes that players need to learn how to trust each other to play together effectively on a team. He said:

I mean, to be able to, be a, be a member of a team and have, have teammates depend on you and you depend on other kids and trust each other. Uh, if we don't trust each other, it's like, I mean, you don't pass to somebody, you, cause you think they're gonna, they're gonna, oh they're gonna mess it up.

Coach B believes that there are three life skills that kids learn through playing sports. The first skill is that they learn to respect others. "Number one is respect your coach," he said, "um, and then I tell them to respect their teammates." Teamwork is the second skill. "I think, um, it teaches them how to work on a team," Coach B said. He continued, "they need to sorta pull their weight on a team, um, and that not every is, is equal. Some people are better at certain things than others. Um, so, you know, learning how to work on a team."

Third, Coach B thinks that youth sports are important for building kids' confidence. He said:

It builds up your self-esteem. Um, you know, uh, uh, just seeing what you can do even if it's just, uh, blocking for someone on your team or getting an out or shooting a three-pointer, um, you know, the way that kids seem to kind of light up.

Coach C likes to "play little bonding games to allow [players] to be able to trust your teammates and growth with their teammates." Learning how to work as a team is one of the three life skills that Coach C believes participating in youth sports teaches

kids. He said, “you can’t win a game by yourself. You have to be able to trust your teammates and you also have to be able to depend on your teammates.”

Coach C also believes that kids learn social and communication skills through sports. Coach C said:

You’re able to create communication skills while playing sports. You’re able to create lifelong bonds. I know for me, I have so, close to one of my friends that I play Dixie baseball with him age six, all the way up to travel ball. So, you create bonds, lifelong bonds, um, you create connections and networks that, that will last you throughout not only sports, but also while in education.

He gave an example of how this works at practice, stating “what we do is drill when we’re setting picks, say, say their names. Say I am setting that pick,” through which kids learn how to communicate clearly with their teammates.

Finally, Coach C related that kids build their confidence through playing sports. “As long as they have confidence in it,” he said, “I think they are more likely to succeed.” He went on:

If they’re having fun using their talent and then they’ll have the desire to want to learn more while having fun, because if you make it so strict for them and focus on winning, they won’t have a desire to learn anymore. But right now, they have a challenge, so I think it’s good to just allow them to have fun while using their talent and then later on they’ll be able to construct and build up and develop their talent.

Coach G believes that kids should learn life skills through playing sports. He believes that playing sports is an important way for kids to develop cooperation and team

work skills, and that working hard to accomplish a goal pays off. Youth sports is “helping them work together with others,” according to Coach G. “No matter if it’s in family, in sports, in a job. So that’s a huge life lesson for ‘em,” he elaborated. Further, he said:

Especially in a team sport where you’re dependent on other people to do their job.

So, learning that skill of getting along, working together, understanding, you know, everybody’s ability, who has what role. ‘Because we all play role.

Coach G said that, though sports, kids learn to “always give your best.” He believes that, for everything in life, “don’t halfway do something. If you are only going to halfway do something, then you might as well not do it.” If kids work hard, Coach G believes that they will reap the rewards. He believes that society today has created a culture of instant gratification. “You have to work at something you really want, so the more value, the more important it is, usually the harder it is you have to work for it,” he shared. “Learning to work for something you want” is a profound lesson that kids learn through playing sports.

Coach H believes that playing youth sports helps kids develop teamwork skills as well as effective communication and socialization. He recalled seeing other coaches telling their players to “kick the opponents where it hurts,” an approach that does not foster teamwork nor good sportsmanship. He said, “they’re not there to hurt other kids, they’re out there to play the game like it’s supposed to be played. And, and, and you’re not out there to hurt other people.”

Instead, he works to foster communication skills amongst his players. He relayed:

The most important lesson I would say for coaching teams is that, uh, uh, communication is the key to everything. If you communicate to each other, you

can uh, understand each other and be ready for the next play. You can also understand what's going on again with your opponent. You know, um, just listening and watching and observing things, um, can teach a bigger lesson than anything I could ever tell you.

Good communication also fosters connections between the players and important socialization experiences. He sees that coming together and making new friends is an important aspect of youth sports, especially because some of the kids may not have “played a sport in their life, they’ve never been to a daycare, they’ve never been around other kids,” so he thinks that involvement in sports creates “lifelong friends.”

Coach I believe that part of the experience of playing youth sports is learning important skills that children can use throughout every part of life. One lesson that she tries to teach the kids she coaches is to be “better than where you are today,” meaning that they should always be striving for improvement in everything that they do, not just in athletics. She also said that kids learn about growing up through playing sports, because “at that age they learn about themselves,” which is an important life lesson.

Teamwork is the most important thing,” proclaimed Coach J. Teamwork is a valuable life skill, and one that kids who play sports come away with at an early age. “Working together, always giving kids a chance to, uh, pass, or pass the ball, make sure they get a chance to shoot, like that,” she said of the teamwork involved in playing sports. Sports are also helpful for teaching kids about working together. Sports “teach you to share,” she said, continuing, “not being, like, a ball hog (...) you’re working with your team.

Theme 3: Coaching Philosophy

This theme highlighted the roles and responsibilities that coaches believed they had regarding youth sports. Many coaches adopted the philosophy that they must maintain a positive attitude for their players. Others believed that they needed to meet kids at their level and treat the players as individuals. Most of the coaches spoke of the ways that they handled mistakes and drew from behaviors that they had seen other coaches exhibit in constructing their own beliefs of how coaches should handle mistakes.

Coach A believes that his job as coach is to be a leader and role model for the kids, and help kids maintain a positive attitude. At the beginning of the season, he tries to get to know the kids in a friendly way, because “you want them to feel comfortable.” As the season goes on, however, he said “you do have to be somewhat of a disciplinarian” because if he is too nice, he said, “I found that at the end of the season nobody has really improved.” He also finds it effective to let kids know when he is disappointed with them, which is something that he learned from his own parents. He said, “you don’t have to be mad at them if they do something wrong, you just need to be disappointed. And then, then they understand. (...) And I know for me growing up that was a big thing I always wanted.”

As a leader, he also tries to instill in his players the importance of following directions. He shared an anecdote about a kid on his basketball team who only dribbles and has a hard time passing and shooting. He has encouraged this kid to pass, but said, “I’m having a hard time with him because he’s not really responding well to any of the things I’ve done in the past, so I’m almost at a point where I’m going to have to just say well, if you don’t do what you should do, you’re not gonna get to play as much and, and

in a nice way, but to say this is how these things work. If you don't listen to the coach and you play a team sport later on in life, buddy, you're not gonna get to play. They're not going to let you play."

Coach A also feels that he is also positioned to be a role model for the boys he coaches. He said that some of the boys might have an absent parent, or another family member raising them. "There's so many things and I think a youth, youth coach can, can have the ability to come in and be a good, uh, role model," he said, adding that he enjoys the part where can be "almost like a big brother or parental figure, uh, if one is missing."

Maintaining a positive attitude and source of motivation for the kids is another part of Coach A's coaching philosophy. He doesn't want the kids that he coaches to ever feel embarrassed or like they let anybody down, so he "would prefer to give 'em a high-five and celebrate with them when they do something really good." Part of this is addressing mistakes when players make them, but he said that he will also "spin it to a positive and say no big deal, you know, we'll get it next time." Another part is sharing the emotions of the players, whether they win or lose, but keep a positive attitude overall. He described one game that his team lost, saying, "we lost the game. But you know what, we still celebrated because we showed the ability to kind of, uh, overcome adversity and come back and do some cool things."

Coach F believes that as a coach he is responsible for motivating his players and building their sports skills. He uses several methods to motivate his students to keep practicing sports and playing them but believes that much of the motivation must be internal, stating, "the kid himself has to be wanting to play. He has to have the motivation

that he wants to learn.” One way that he makes sure kids stay motivated is to keep kids from feeling that their time is being wasted at practice. He said:

So, my job again is just to make sure that I’m there on time and we have a productive practice, um, where we’re not wasting people’s time and we’re not having a lot of lolly-gagging and playing. But the kids, they focus on the teaching of the techniques of playing football, tackling, catching, running...

Being on time is very important to him, as he stated, because by doing this he is setting an example and being a role model for his players. “You know, set an example,” he said, “if I tell my kids to be (...) there at a certain, time, well I need to be there before they get there.

He also motivates kids by addressing mistakes in a positive way and avoiding the mistakes that he believes other coaches make when trying to motivate and direct their players. He said, “I will never touch a player, number one, they’re kids,” but that he also thinks it is “best not to holler or scream or embarrass them if they make a mistake during practice.” Instead he described how he keeps a level head and reminds the player of the mistake that they made and how they were taught correctly in practice. He said that tries “to just talk to the young kid in a respectful manner with a low tone of voice” because this doesn’t call unwarranted attention to them and embarrass them. The most important thing that he tries to instill in his players is discipline, and he believes that if his players are disciplined then they will do their best and follow instructions as they were taught, and go play games to their best ability, thereby keeping them from making mistakes in the first place.

As a coach, Coach F also believes that he has an important role in helping his players build their skills, which is one of the benefits that he sees of youth sports in general. He said:

I'll get out there every day and talk to them, show them the techniques of playing football, uh, work with them on their strength and their physical fitness, um, and then just, uh, show them, teach them how we're going to play and the plays that we're going to do.

He continued:

They benefit by the learning experience. Um, once they, you know, if you teach them how to play or everybody knows how to just throw a ball and catch a ball, but a lot of kids may not know how to properly tackle, how to properly run plays.... So, in coaching, those are the techniques they learn.

Coach G has a coaching philosophy composed of three parts: handling mistakes, treating kids as individuals, and being a positive influence. He believes that it is job as coach correct mistakes with a proper attitude and really understand why a player made a mistake. He relayed:

The reason for that mistake was I didn't know. I don't have that skill yet, did I not understand, or was it, e, I'm not paying attention, I'm just being here. You know, I am not trying to put forth any effort, so you got to base it on the individual event.

To address these mistakes, especially if the player doesn't know the skill, he said, "you coach 'em, you work with 'em, you talk to 'em, you show them the right way so they understand what's expected." However, if the player made a mistake

because they weren't putting forth the required effort, "well then there'll be a negative consequence, they may run sprints."

Coach G believes in the importance of treating every kid like an individual and showing them respect. To do this, he draws from his background in social and human services. He said:

So, all kids are different. You got [sic] to find out what motivates them, what are their goals, why are they playing it, is it because mom and dad told me to, or is it, I don't know, I've never played before, I want to figure out if I like it, or is it something they just absolutely love.

Doing this allows him to create an individualized approach to coaching based on each player. He believes that this is easily accomplished through talking and communicating with the kids on his teams.

Being a positive influence on the kids is also important to Coach G. He has seen other coaches "yelling and screaming and cussing at kids" and he does not believe that there is any reason for a coach to treat a player like that. He believes that kids are kids, and the adult coaches should not do anything detrimental "to their emotional well-being." For Coach G, part of being a positive influence on his players is not pushing or pressuring them too much. He sees kids who are constantly pressured into playing sports when they don't want to play, or kids who only play because their parents want them to, and he doesn't believe that this benefits the child. He said, "especially at earlier ages (...) that's not what [the kids] are there for. They're there to have fun, figure out if this is something they like and enjoy and want to do and have fun with it," so he sees his role as being a positive influence in helping the kids enjoy what they're doing.

Coach H also believes that coaches should treat their players as individuals and that coaches are responsible for setting the tone for their players. He said:

I found that in order to get your children to play, you have to understand each child individually and what motivates them personally. Uh, every child's different. Some kids they, um, they can't be necessarily coerced into, um, playing sports if they don't want to play the sport. So, sometimes you cannot get the child to, to really get into the game.

He believes that to treat each child individually and understand what motivates them,

The coach needs to be active in the child's life and understand what's going on with them individually because, um, if, if you don't, you could be not necessarily yelling at them, but telling them sternly that they need to go to a certain position and they need to do this or that and they might take it as you yelling [sic] at them, you know. So you, you need to be familiar with your, your, your team and their personal lives, so to speak.

Coach H believes that he plays an important role in setting the all-around tone for his players when they're at practice and during games. He tries to set a family tone for his team so that his players know that they are all in this together. He said:

You know, think of this person as your family and, uh, if there's animosity or anything going on, on the, on the team, I try to cut that out quickly and say, but everyone's equal, um, nobody's above another person. Um, hey, I mean there's a, a lot of things I could say about that, but it's, it's really just the atmosphere that the coaches and players, uh, present to each other.

Coach J's coaching philosophy is focused on modeling attitude, behavior, and skills for her players and encouraging them as they develop. "I guess always having a positive attitude is the main thing," she said of what is important to her as a coach. When her players make mistakes, she focuses on maintaining a positive attitude with them. If a player misses a shot, she said that coaches should "still tell them good job. Just make 'em want to be out there. Don't fuss at them when they mess up. Just always encourage them." When one of her own players makes a mistake, she still tells them:

They're doing a good job. I just try to show them the correct way to do it and tell them they can do it this way next time, but I don't say it in a mean way, just, just tell them and show them the correct way.

She has seen behaviors from other coaches that she thinks are detrimental to the players, and these are behaviors that she would not resort to if a kid made a mistake. She reported that "some [coaches] might yell at them or maybe even like I saw older, like older kids, they might even curse at them or grab them or something like that, but I would never do that." Kids that continue playing sports "probably they have a good coach and one is not always yelling at them," according to Coach J. "As long they are learning the game and improving each week that's what's important to me," she put it simply.

Coach K believes in the importance of being patient with his players and modeling the correct way to play sports for them. Having patience is especially important for younger kids. He believes that "the younger they are, the more, the more patience you have to have with them. So, you know, just have as much patience as you can with kids."

He does not like some of the behaviors that he has seen other coaches exhibit, like coaches getting in the faces of their players. He reported that "I don't do stuff like that, as

far as you know, uh, uh, getting on to them, you know, I don't like to really just get in their face, you know." He also doesn't find negative repercussions, like running extra laps, to be effective means of developing his players. Instead, he likes to focus on teaching and correcting his players. If a player makes a mistake, he said he would:

Come up to him and you know, uh, and tell him you know, uh, the correct way to do it and you know how we've done it in practice, you know, just remember what we did in practice and, and then you tell him just to practice, you know, just do what we've done in practice you know. And uh, and if it's uh, if, if they mess up then, then, then it's, uh, then you know we'll have to, we'll have to address that issue again.

As coach, he tries his best to teach the fundamentals of whatever sport he is coaching and show kids how to play the best way that he knows how. He said he tries to "teach them, you know that as an adult you know that, you know, you've seen these things, you've been there, and you know, you just try to teach them, uh, you know, the best way you can."

Coach L believes in the importance of meeting kids at their level and treating them as individuals. He tries to communicate with his players on their level and avoids talking over or above them. He focuses on communicating with his players in ways that they can understand. He said:

I think the main thin, uh, I try to do is just, uh, talk to them on their level and, uh, see what they like to do so you find out kind of what motivates them, what's, what they enjoy doing and just, um, I think just, uh, communicating with them just, uh, getting down, uh, you know, look at them, you know in the eye, you

know face-to-face and not stand over them, but just getting down at their level, you know, um, and, when, a lot of times when I talk to them.

He also tries not to lose his temper when a player makes a mistake, because he has seen this happen with other coaches. When this happens, he thinks that things have gone “a little too far.” He stays positive and, when talking to kids about mistakes they make, he first highlights for them something that they did well before bringing up what they did not do well. He said,

Another way is, just, uh, you know, not trying to uh, trying not to, you know, don't get caught up in the, I guess the uh, just the uh, I guess emotion or excitement of the game, but just trying to stay calm and you know when, whenever I'm talking with him.

Theme 4. Reasons Kids Quit Sports

Seven of the participants I interviewed for this research study spoke of the reasons that they believe kids drop out of youth sports, contributing to the creation of this theme. Coaches outlined the experiences that they have had with kids dropping out of youth sports, noting situations like family problems, behaviors by other coaches, and being overcommitted to extracurricular activities.

According to Coach A there are two primary factors that influence a child's decision to quit playing youth sports: a more interesting extracurricular activity and parental inconsistency. Coach A provided an example of this by describing the situation he is in with his son now, who has scheduling conflicts between drama, choir, and basketball. He said:

I think sometimes we have too much going on. Then if a kid has too many options, then at the same time you, you know that they, they're going to pick something and that something might not be the sport, it might be an art.

This tendency of parents, himself included, to overschedule children forces children to make choices about what extracurricular activities they really want to do, and that may decision may be to quit playing sports in favor of something that they enjoy more. This is not only his experience with his son, but a dilemma that he faced in high school as well, when he had to give up football in favor of band, which turned into a music scholarship for college.

The other factor that influences kids is parental involvement and consistency. He believes that a kid might quit sports if a parent or guardian is not showing involvement or interest in the child. This might be in the form of getting the kid to practice sports outside of formal practice. He described imploring parents to encourage their kids to practice at home, saying:

I have kids that, you know, I've had to go to the parents and say, "can you get them to practice," because, you know, I'm playing them in the game because it's not their fault they're not at practice, but it's going to tear them down when they go to a game and they can't do any of the things that we're asking them to do.

On the other hand, he also sees cases when parents are too involved, which might force kids to see sports as a chore. He recounted an experience he had with the father of a player who was "so strict and disciplined" toward the child, and the child felt scared at practice because he felt like he could not do anything correctly. As Coach A sees it,

parents need to maintain a healthy balance of interest and encouragement in their kid's sport of choice so that the kid will want to continue playing.

Coach B has only experienced one scenario personally in which a kid dropped off his team but believes that there are myriad factors that might influence such a decision. In his experience, the child's parents divorced during the season and the kid moved farther away from the school. While his mother insisted on keeping her son at the same school, he had to quit playing on the team because of the distance and associated time constraints.

Coach B also thinks that kids might quit playing sports because they were only playing for their parents in the first place, not for themselves. As a parent he also experienced this with his own son, who played soccer and baseball when he young. He and his wife knew that their son did not enjoy either of those sports, but they wanted him to play anyway, which he recognized was perhaps not the best approach, though he did not say whether his son was still playing any sports.

Coach F sees that kids quit sports when they do not get enough play time in practice or in games. If kids don't get play time in sports, they might start to feel discouraged. He believes that this discouragement will lead kids to quit playing sports because they might not want to come to practice if they don't see their work at practice pay off with play time during games. He said:

I think if kids quit, they are mostly quitting because for some reason or another they feel that maybe they're not getting a fair shake. Um, even though, you know, you have so many kids on the team, but um, in some cases, not everybody is going to be the starter and I, I think most kids will quit because of lack of playing.

Coach G has not seen kids quitting sports a lot. “I have seen kids miss practice,” he said, but that this has only really happened when the child comes from a single-parent home where the parent had a scheduling conflict. He has also seen this happen if one parent is in the military and deployed, so the parent at home has to take on the responsibilities of both parents.

Coach H believes that both internal and external factors might influence a child’s decision to quit playing sports. He has seen some kids drop out due to injury and lack of interest in the sport, and also because of what he referred to as “bad coaching skills” by other coaches, though he did not specify what these bad skills might be.

Bullies and cliques might also be reasons why kids quit playing sports. He said: In every, uh, childhood range, there’s, uh, uh, cliques, so to speak. You’ve got your popular kids, you’ve got your nerds, you have got, you know, etc., and uh, as kids we don’t always, um, we don’t always, um, we’re not always sensitive to other people’s feelings. So we say or do things that we don’t necessarily intend to be hurtful or mean, but it happens. (...). You’ve got bullies that are just, you know, they’ve got anger issues or whatever’s going on in their life that, uh, uh, needs to be dealt with, they take it out on somebody else.

According to Coach I, “kids just quit because they give up on themselves.” For this reason, she believes that coaches and parents must be there for kids. She said that “there are times when kids get into trouble, people give up on them, so if they get in trouble you still have to be there for them.” If kids have that support, Coach I suggested that they will have a better chance at staying active in sports.

Coach K has noticed that kids who play multiple sports and, thus, have less time to devote to any given sport, are probably the ones who will quit playing. He said that kids “think [they] don’t have the time to, you know, to play the sports,” and that they might be playing other sports. He thinks that with kids involved in so many extracurricular activities, they might simply be too tired play sports.

Coach K also suggested that kids might quit sports if they’re less involved in practice. Kids might feel that showing up for practice isn’t important, which leads them to quit. He suggested a reason for this:

Maybe because they’re not getting involved in, in practice as much as, uh, they would like, uh, you know, you sometimes you, if a kid is not getting involved in practice in whether who, whoever’s, uh, whoever’s fault it is, whether it’s the, whether it’s the, uh, coaches or their fault themselves. Uh, they kind of, they feel like, uh, they feel like they don’t have to come to practice so they either, you know, leave or, or quit practice or they’ll, you know, not come.

Coach L suggested several reasons why kids might quit playing sports. He believes that the competition can impact some kids negatively. “If they can’t compete, uh, you know, physically and athletically,” he said, “they start to lose interest.” This can be hard on kids’ confidence.

He also thinks that peer pressure plays a role in kids quitting sports. He said:

Peer pressure, uh, becomes pretty powerful too. As they get older and like in early junior high school or late grade school, if it’s not seen as something as, a, as I said earlier, something that’s cool to do or something that’s kind of, I guess out of step

with what their peers are doing or their friends are doing and they're not likely to continue it.

He also suggested that scheduling conflicts might lead kids to quit playing sports. Playing youth sports requires a commitment to practice and to games, and this may leave little time for kids to play other sports or participate in other extracurricular activities that they want to play. He said, "other competing activities that are coming along," might be more appealing to kids, and so they might choose to participate in those and quit playing sports.

Theme 5: Good Coaches Keep Kids Engaged

Seven participants contributed to the creation of this theme. They spoke of the significance of keeping kids engaged in sports, especially as it pertained to their role in keeping kids involved with youth sports. They shared their strategies for keeping kids interested in sports and motivated to continue practicing and playing.

Coach E shared three strategies that he uses to keep kids engaged and motivated to play sports. The first strategy that he employs is to tell them to "just work on their practice, uh, just work on their own," because if they practice outside of organized practices, then they will become better players and develop their skills even further. This will translate to improvement at practices and games and he believes it will help them do their best at all times. Second, Coach E sets his players up for success by giving each of them an assignment during practices and games. He plays to their strengths to keep them motivated and to ensure that they know to be "in the right place at the right time" during games. Finally, he keeps his players engaged by having fun with them. He believes that players must have fun to stay motivated to play, so this is always his focus.

Coach F understands that his role as coach is to keep his players motivated and engaged. He uses three techniques to keep kids motivated and coming back to sports. The first is by expecting discipline from his players. He said:

So I, uh, you know, basically take them from the beginnings and show them, hey, this is what we're gonna do and I hold them to those standards of practice, being on time, and we'll go through the normal rou, uh, routines of exercising, preparing ourselves before the game, through exercise and stretching and doing things prior to practice. And then leading on into the practice of actually doing our plays and, uh, running plays.

He believes that winning is crucial to keep kids engaged in sports as well. With good coaching, the kids will win games, which he said keeps them "motivated, um, and keeps them focused and lets them understand that through practice, that's what, that's what the results will be." Finally, having fun keeps kids engaged in sports. He wants his players to know that they should always play their best, but tries to get all of his players into a position so they get lots of experience and play time. With these opportunities to play, not only do they build confidence but also have fun playing, and if they're having fun they'll keep coming back to sports.

Coach G likes to "switch it up" to keep his players engaged in sports. He believes that players will get bored if they keep doing the same drills over and over again, so at practices he uses variation to get them focused on skill building. Part of this includes watching out for individual players' talents and building on those. He also believes that kids will stay engaged if they are prepared for practice.

Part of the experience of playing youth sports is practicing on their own time, and if they do this then they are prepared for drills when they come to organized practices. He said, “you got to [sic] have a plan based on the kids you have and what skills they need to develop and gear your practice in a way that your keeping ‘em busy and keeping ‘em engaged.” This includes helping the players out and making sure that they keep moving. He sees some of his players only practice at official practices but thinks that getting them to play on their own, for fun, would go a long way to keeping them engaged in sports.

According to Coach I, parents play an important role in keeping kids engaged in youth sports. “Encouragement and parent support,” keeps kids playing sports, as does the role of the coach by providing them with motivation. Coach I believe that this motivation comes from encouraging them. “Encouragement is, is, is, is, a big part of coaching,” relayed Coach I, because “a lot of children just don’t believe in themselves and then if they have someone beating them up all the time, they’ll never think they can.” So, she thinks that by motivating and encouraging them, this lets players know what they are capable of and that they can do more than they think they can do, and this keeps them engaged.

Coach J’s strategy for keeping kids engaged was simple: provide them with lots of encouragement. She believes in the power of positive speech and interactions with her players, even when they make a mistake. This is not a time to put them down but to “speak positive things to them,” according to Coach J. When they’re doing well, she said, “always encourage them to do better and cheer them on.” Doing this will keep them excited and feeling positive and will hold their engagement and attention in sports.

According to Coach K, the love for the sport keeps engaged, even when they don't want to practice. Loving the game means that they'll want to play even if formal practices feel like a chore. At practice, he encourages his players to play with energy and passion, and to play for their teammates, who are counting on them to do well.

In Coach K's experience, working with kids under the age of 12 is best because at that young age, they are more likely to find out if they like playing sports and will stay involved. As they get older, "they'll have a good knowledge of, you know, if they want to stay in that sport or not," he described. If the players are older when they start, they might find out that they don't like the sports and drop out midway through rather than sticking to it for several seasons or years.

Theme 6: Winning and Losing

Half of the participants shared their experiences with winning and losing, which provided support for the creation of this theme. They spoke of how the importance of winning for themselves personally, but also for the kids. Most were less interested in winning games for themselves than they were for the kids. They provided myriad reasons for what they thought kids learn from winning, and what they learn from losing.

When asked about winning and losing games, Coach B said, "last week is gone, it's history." No matter what happened, "you have to move on." Sometimes, teams lose simply because they are "just kind of outmanned," so he wants his players to know that sometimes a loss is inevitable and does not reflect how they played the game. In these cases, he teaches his players to "just fight," because even if the team is down by several points in the last few minutes of the game, "people will recognize" that they fought, and the players will feel better knowing that they played their best.

Coach E believes that there are always lessons to be learned from winning and from losing. Of winning and losing he said, “you ain’t [sic] going to win every game and hopefully you won’t lose every game.” Whether his team wins or loses a game, he said, “learn from whatever you didn’t do in a previous game and try to do it in the next game. Winning is important, but he does not believe that his players should be upset if they don’t win every game.

“I love winning. Everybody loves winning,” Coach F declared. This declaration came with caveats, however, because Coach F. believes that there is more to sports than just winning. He said he teaches his players that “winning is what our goal is, but should we not win, it’s okay because life is a bunch of, is, ups and downs.” He sees the benefit in winning in terms of providing motivation for his players. He thinks that winning “keeps their attention, uh, on practice and doing what they need to do,” but said that in the end, “fun is what it’s all about.”

Winning and losing games provides motivation for players, according to Coach G. He said:

Whether you take it and yell, scream, and act a fool or you sob about it and decide you’re going to give up or you’re going to take that as motivation to work harder, so you don’t lose like that again.

He believes that learning how to handle a loss is an important lesson for players.

Coach G also shared that winning is important for him because players see their success through winning. “If the kids lose every game,” he said, “they’re not gonna feel confident in themselves or their ability and they may give up.”

Coach H does not believe that winning is the most important aspect of sports but does admit that it is somewhat important. He said, “It’s really not as important to win necessarily, but when we do win, I love watching their faces, I love seeing the, the excitement and, uh, accomplished feeling that they have.” In the context of accomplishment, winning does become important. Playing sports also teaches kids that there will always be a winner and a loser. He thinks that this is a fact of life and lesson that kids should learn and that “just because you won or lost this particular game, does not make you better or worse than any other player.”

Coach K expressed mixed feelings about the importance of winning in youth sports. He shared that winning is “pretty important because you, you know that if you’re, uh, you’re, if you’re not winning, then the kids, uh, they get into a, a way of losing and then they almost think that it’s okay to lose,” and he thinks that this can continue if it goes unchecked. Instead, he wants his players to “have a winning mentality.” However, he recognizes that winning certainly is not everything when it comes to playing sports. If his team wins, he feels that it is important to “put your head up and, and, and go on to the next, uh and, and go on to the next game,” recognizing that teams “can’t win ‘em all.” As long as his kids are having fun, this is the most important thing to him.

Summary

In this chapter I presented the results of the data analysis. Themes 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6. I addressed research question 1, which asked: How do you youth coaches perceive their role in a young person’s decision to continue participating in their sport of preference? Youth sports coaches believe that they play a significant role in keeping kids playing sports. They see themselves as responsible for providing a fun atmosphere to play

in, an atmosphere that fosters development of the child's skills at sports and in life. They believe that youth sports are about so much more than sports, and as coaches they are able to use this medium to teach their players what it means to be a good teammate, to build communication skills, and foster lifelong friendships. They see the opportunity to keep players engaged in sports through providing them with a positive environment that is encouraging and motivating.

Theme 4 addressed the research question 2 and its associated subquestion: How do youth coaches perceive the attrition of youth in sports? and what explanations do youth coaches provide as the reasons for youth attrition in sports? While kids do sometimes elect to drop out of sports, coaches do not think that this is inevitable if they are dedicated to their players and take an interest in their players' lives and ensure that their players are having a good time and reaping the benefits of their hard work through winning. In the next chapter, I will discuss the implications and applications of these findings, particularly in terms of keeping kids engaged in youth sports.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore youth coaches' perception of their role in a young person's decision to continue participating in their sport of preference. Additionally, it explored how coaches perceive the high attrition rate among youth; and what reasons they attribute to this attrition. This chapter includes a discussion of significant findings as related to the literature on coaching youth sports.

The following research questions guided this study:

RQ1: How do youth coaches perceive their role in a young person's decision to continue participating in their sport of preference?

RQ2: How do youth coaches perceive the attrition of youth in sports?

SQ2.1: What explanations do youth coaches provide as the reasons for youth's attrition in sports?

The coaches were asked to discuss their perceptions of why there is a high attrition rate in youth sports. Six themes emerged from the interviews: (a) games are about having fun, (b) developing life skills, (c) coaching philosophy, (d) reasons kids quit sports, (e) good coaches keep kids engaged in sports, and (f) winning and losing. In this chapter, I interpret these findings as they relate to the existing literature on the topics of coaching and youth persistence in sports. I also provide limitations and recommendations for future study.

Interpretation of the Findings

Participants in this study extensively stated that not having fun while engaged in a sport was a primary contributing factor related to youth leaving sports. Each of the

themes emerged as prominent factors in motivating youth participants to continue participation or move away from the activity. Results also revealed that youth coaches perceive that they play a significant role in youth attrition rate. The research estimated that approximately 45 million children are involved in youth sports every year (Engh, 2002; Merkel, 2013; Moreno, 2011). However, 70% of all these children will quit the game before age 13 due to an unpleasant experience. Each theme described in detail in the following sections.

Sports are About Having Fun

According to my finding, participants reported that kids face high expectations from their parents and sometimes from other coaches. Placing such high expectations on these children can lead to burnout, so participants felt it was essential to keep things fun at practice. At least at practice, participants felt that kids could be themselves and have a good time without the worry and pressure of winning. Having fun emerged as a significant factor contributing to youth persistence in sports. According to participants, kids who had fun playing sports wanted to keep playing. Having fun playing became more important than winning games. They also felt there was a connection between having fun and winning. Ryska et al. (2002) reported that the lack of benefits for the younger age group contributes to the dropout rate.

Having fun as a significant contributor to youth retention in sports is consistent with Stewart and Taylor's (2000) study. They surveyed 221 female athletes ranging in age from 12-20 and discovered that their number one reason for dropping out of sports was that they were not having fun. The survey given to the participants showed that 58% of the participants listed having fun as their main reason for involvement in their sport

activity. Eighty-three percent listed having fun as one of their top five reasons for participating in sports. Other reasons youth participate in sports ranged from wanting to be with friends and have fun, to the desire to become an Olympian or professional athlete (Merkel, 2013; Ryska et al., 2002).

Developing Life Skills

This theme refers to how participants described the benefits of playing youth sports. When it comes to youth sports, kids learn much more than the skills needed for success in the sport and winning on the court or field. Participants felt that they played an essential role in the lives of the kids they coached. They felt responsible not only for coaching and teaching kids how to play the game, but they were also responsible for teaching kids important development skills that will serve them in life. For example, participants asserted that, in sports, kids learn about themselves as individuals and how to work with others as a team. They also learn the importance of discipline and hard work, along with respect for others. Empirical research shows that youth sports activities positively connect developmental outcomes in many areas of a young athlete's life. These positive outcomes include academic achievement (Singh, Uijtdewilligen, Twisk, van Mechelen, & Chinapaw, 2012), social skills (Weiss & Ferrer Caja, 2002), and self-esteem (Bowker, 2006). Supporting the role of the coach in these developmental outcomes, Smith, Smoll, and Cumming's (2009) found that coach initiated the motivational climate played an important role in the young athlete's development.

In sum, participation in youth sports/physical activity has numerous benefits for young participants including better health, increased academic achievement, improved self-esteem, social competence, and emotional stability (Bailey, 2006; Bowker, 2006;

Coatsworth & Conroy, 2009; DeBate et al., 2009; Findlay & Coplan, 2008; Loprinzi et al., 2012). These benefits were in congruence with participants' descriptions.

Coaching Philosophy

This theme highlighted the roles and responsibilities that coaches believed they had regarding youth sports. Many coaches adopted the philosophy that they must maintain a positive attitude for their players. Others thought that they needed to meet kids at their level and treat the players as individuals. Most of the coaches spoke of the ways that they handled mistakes and drew from behaviors that they had seen other coaches exhibit in constructing their own beliefs of how coaches should handle errors. Some participants believed that the coach should be a leader and role model for children. They recommended maintaining a positive attitude, making children feel comfortable, and celebrating with them when they did something right. They believed they set the stage and climate for children to feel comfortable playing.

Coatsworth and Conroy (2009), in a research project with 119 youth between the ages of 10 and 18, found that coaching climate (perceived coach behavior) is a predictor of the benefits derived from sports participation. Developing self-perception in the children played a significant part in increasing the benefits of sports in young athletes. Kurtines et al. (2008) identified that coaches showing an autonomy-supportive style of coaching resulted in need satisfaction of their athletes. In turn, need satisfaction had a positive relationship with self-perception, and a positive self-perception predicted positive youth developmental outcomes.

Reasons Kids Quit Sports

Participants spoke about the reasons that they believe kids drop out of youth sports. Coaches identified situations such as family problems, behaviors by other coaches, parental inconsistency or lack of interest in child's sports, and overcommitment to extracurricular activities as negatively impacting in sports. For example, one of the coaches stated that parents' tendency to overschedule children forces children to make choices about what extracurricular activities they want to do, and that they may decide to quit playing sports in favor of something that they enjoy more. Participants mentioned that children might drop out of sports due to not being internally motivated to continue. My research found bullying and cliques might also be reasons why kids quit playing sports.

Ryska et al. (2002) examined the dropout rate of young gymnastic participants in Australia. Using a sample of 349 participants, they found that young athletes, ages 9-18, who entered activities for external reasons, tended to drop out at a higher rate than did young athletes entering sports for internal reasons. External reasons included parents making the child participate or because of their friend's participation. Internal reasons included a need to be around others, social recognition, and a sense of being challenged.

In their study of 803, 9-15-year-old children, their parents, and coaches, Shields et al. (2005) found that 42% of the coaches, self-reported yelling at a child for making a mistake. This behavior did not go unnoticed by the youth; 48% of the youth reported the coach yelling at them following an error. Also, 4% of the children said being physically abused (hit, slapped, and kicked) by a coach. The researchers commented that if the number reported is representative of the total population of youth in sports; it means that

over two million children are being hit, slapped, and kicked by their coaches each year. Fifty-eight percent of the participants in Stewart and Taylor (2000) studied had quit a sport in the past, and the top three reasons were injury (26%), time conflict (18%), and coaching issues (16%).

Good Coaches Keep Kids Engaged

Participants spoke of the significance of keeping kids engaged in sports, especially as it pertained to their role in keeping kids involved with youth sports. They shared their strategies for keeping kids interested in sports and motivated to continue practicing and playing. The majority of coaches in the study believed that winning is crucial to keep kids engaged in youth sports. Participants stated that good coaching would contribute to winning games, which keeps kids motivated. Finally, having fun keeps kids involved in sports. Keegan, Spray, Harwood, and Lavalley (2010) explored perceptions of 79 youth, aged 9 to 18. They found that coaches influenced the young athletes' motivation as much as parents influenced their child athletes. The positive feedback that is high in supportiveness generated a more positive response from the child when a child's performance or effort was notable. Overall, research was congruent with participants' perceptions indicating that coaches play a major role in motivating youth in continuing sports participation (see Keegan, Spray, Harwood, & Lavalley, 2000; Prichard & Deutch, 2015; Smith, Smoll, & Cumming, 2007; Stewart & Taylor, 2000).

Winning and Losing

Participants shared their experiences with winning and losing. They spoke about the importance of winning for themselves, but also the kids. Most were less interested in winning games for themselves than they were for the kids. They provided a myriad of

reasons for what they thought kids learn from winning and what they learn from losing. Research indicated that in the younger age group, the lack of benefits directly contributes to the participant dropout rate. Lack of playing time and the overemphasis on winning at the expense of having fun both contributed to the dropout rate (Merkel, 2013; Ryska et al., 2002). In a survey taken by parents, Armentrout and Kamphoff (2011) found that parents listed fun and enjoyment, and friendships as the top two reasons for their children's satisfaction in sports.

Children with high sports performance anxiety are especially sensitive to failing (Smith, et al. 2007). The high stress is brought on by the child worrying about making a mistake, not playing well, and losing. Children do not want an unfavorable evaluation from coaches, friends, and parents. Smith et al. (2007) indicated that the coach dramatically influences the experience of a youth participant. The way the coach promotes goals, values, and attitudes play a part in the youth sport's experience. The way the coach interacts with the child makes a difference in how the child manages the anxiety. High sports anxiety can exacerbate if the child receives critical or punitive feedback from the coach. When winning is secondary to having fun, children are more likely to stay with the team.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework in this study consisted of the use of two theories, including the autonomy-supportive coaching strategy, and Erickson's theory of development. The autonomy-supportive coaching strategies, as proposed by Carpentier and Mageau (2014), Conroy and Coatsworth (2007) and Fenton et al. (2014), constitute the main theoretical framework of this study. These authors hypothesized that coaches

play an important role in how young athletes experience youth sports. One of the tasks a coach performs is being the motivator, helping to keep the child interested and motivated in the sport of choice. The autonomy-supportive coaching strategy specifically emphasized the importance of coaches' motivational and developmental climate.

Autonomy support is one construct of the motivational environment as described in self-determination theory (Carpentier & Mageau, 2014). Results of this study were congruent with the importance of autonomy supportive concept. The research participants felt they were the leaders and were expected to guide the youth to a successful season. They acknowledged the essential role they play in ensuring the young participants have a positive experience and stay motivated to continue participating in their selected activity.

In more recent research on autonomy-supportive coaching, Amorose and Anderson-Butcher (2015) concluded that autonomy-supportive style of coaching is a valid style of motivation for coaches. These researchers also indicated that a controlling form of motivation is an ineffective style of coaching. According to Bartholomew et al., (2009), the controlling method of motivation uses reward and punishment, criticism, and comparison. Coaches in this study were in line with the autonomy supportive style. The first theme, having fun, supports this concept. Coaches felt the children responded positively to a more supportive style of coaching versus an autocratic style of coaching.

Erik Erickson's stages of development identify ages 6-12 as the industry versus inferiority stage (Erickson, 1963). In this stage, children learn to be effective versus inadequate; if children perceive criticism, they pushed closer to feeling inferior to other children. It is the stage of competence during which failure to meet specific cultural and school skills at this stage could lead to a sense of inferiority. Accomplishing tool usage in

the industry versus inferiority stage increases competence in the child. The child learns to be adequate or inadequate, wonders how things work or become timid and withdrawn; finishes what is started or procrastinates, likes to experiment or questions his or her ability. During this stage, the child's peer group influences the child's self-esteem (McLead, 2013). The successful development of self-esteem at this stage leads to the child's winning approval from society. If the child is discouraged from developing the initiative in this stage, they will begin to feel inferior. This sense of inferiority will impact the child's ability to reach their full potential because they doubt their abilities. The stage is affected by the relationship with both peers and parents or significant people. Success in the industry versus inferiority phase leads to the child's feeling of competence. Participants in this study encouraged young athletes to be active and have fun and supported them in the development of their skills. They also acknowledged the importance of developing self-esteem and how self-esteem develops through successful participation in sports.

Limitations

My study has two primary limitations. First, I completed the interviews over the phone. The phone interviews eliminated the opportunity to observe nonverbal behavior (facial expression and body language) of the participants. These cues would allow me to investigate the answers given by the participants with more in-depth questioning. However, the interviews followed a standard line of questions, and I provided the participant every opportunity to elucidate and restructure any part of their interview. The second limitation involved the recruitment of the participants, all participants were from the same youth sports facility, and none of them have formally trained as a youth coach;

although many had participated in some type of coaching or playing experience in the past. First, having all participating from one organization and not having diversity in terms of training experiences can limit the transferability of results. Participants in this study learned to coach by doing it. They did not have any training experience to which they could compare their actual coaching experiences. It remains unknown how training shapes coaches' behaviors or perception in coaching.

Recommendations

More research is needed to understand better what elements play a part in the high attrition rate in youth sports and what factors contribute to youth continued participation in sports. Participants interviewed in this study indicated fun should be the top priority when coaching youth sports. Additional qualitative observational research could help in understanding why some coaches are more about winning and losing than having fun. Although the interviewed coaches said fun should be the priority, it is not always the case. Some coaches said winning is not important to them as a coach, but winning motivates the children to stay in sports. Actual observation of practices and games from an inside team might be a more efficient tool of data collection. It would help to understand how coaches and children respond to the balance between having fun and winning or losing a game.

Another angle to explore the impact of receiving rewards and winning or losing games could be explored using a quantitative comparison study. A study could be designed to understand the impact of receiving rewards and youth continuing participation in sports by comparing a sports system that does not give rewards, one that offers only exclusive rewards to individual children, and a system that provides

participation rewards to all children. These three systems when used in sports, but without research to compare how these systems impact children's satisfaction or continuation in playing sports.

Additional qualitative observational research would also be beneficial in a follow-up study. Coaches interviewed in this study indicated sports help children developing life, social, and communication skills. More observational research can tell the youth sports community exactly what life skills a young athlete learns and could learn from participating in sports.

Longitudinal research may help with the question: "Why Kids Quit" sports? Following a cohort of children throughout their youth years and recording why they started and why they quit would give the sports community a better picture of the process of youth engagement and disengagement from sports. We can not only learn why a child quits but learn why some children stay engaged until they graduate out of the sports youth system.

Results of this study point at the importance of coach training. Coaches play a leadership role in guiding youth not only in learning sports but also in valuing teamwork and in promoting a healthy attitude towards physical activity. A recommendation for practice is to regulate coaches' training and to require training before being assigned a head coaching position. I also recommend a recognized certifying organization should certify all youth coaches before working with children, or they can coach under a trained coach and hold the job as an assistant until that individual is thoroughly trained and certified. Current youth programs that do not have their coaches formally trained should locate a certifying agency and help their coaches get certified.

Implications for Social Change

A vast majority of youth sports coaches are volunteers; most of the volunteers are parents with little or no formal training as a youth coach. In this study, no coach interviewed had formal training; most were forced to volunteer due to a lack of coaches for their child. They did not possess the knowledge in child growth and development, and some were lacking basic knowledge and skills of the sport itself. No fault of the volunteer, many are in the position because no one else was available to coach the number of children signed up to participate. (Wiersma, & Sherman, 2005). The research estimated that tens of millions of children are involved in youth sports every year (Engh, 2002; Merkel, 2013; Moreno, 2011); however, 70% of all these children will quit the sport before age 13 due to an unpleasant experience. According to Merkel (2013), over 70% of children drop out of sports by the age of 15. Contributing factors to these experiences by children include the win at all cost coach, the overzealous parents, and untrained coaches and administrators (Merkel 2013).

This study indicates the importance of keeping children engaged in their sport of choice, with having fun as the primary component according to the 12 study participants. Some parent volunteers seem to have problems recognizing that having fun is important to lowering the attrition rate in youth sports. Training by a youth sports professional who understands growth and development as well as psychological, physical, and personal needs of young athletes helps to eliminate the training void. The training will increase the positive experience for youth across all sports and other youth activities. There is evidence that children who participate in youth sports perform better in school, live a healthier lifestyle, and are more fit than children who do not participate in youth athletic

activities (Carlson et al., 2008; Findlay & Coplan, 2008; Zarrett et al., 2009). Finally, coaches, parents, and administrators can learn from the results of this study. This study increases the empirical data for coaches, parents, and administrators in determining the needs of the children in their programs. Results of this study provide knowledge on what coaches think about the important elements that keep a child in youth sports, and what they believe contributes to the high attrition rate. Club by-laws can be developed to promote a positive experience for children; for example, do not yell at children, do not exclude any child from equal participation, winning is not important, and most of all children participate in youth sports to have fun.

Significance of the Study

Currently, there is a small amount of empirical data regarding youth coaches' perceptions of the attrition rate of 6–12-year-olds in youth sports (Gervis & Dunn, 2004; Merkel, 2013). The current research project helped fill that gap by identifying the role of a youth coach on young athletes' ages 6–12 continued participation in youth sports. The information rendered from this study would help youth sports parents, coaches, and administrators understand how youth coaches may contribute to the significant youth dropout rate in youth sports. As a result, training programs can be revised or developed to address what successful behaviors enhance children continued participation in sports. In turn, this would allow more children to experience the benefits of participation in youth sports. Also, coaches would understand how their verbal behavior and attitude impact a child's desire or lack thereof to participate in youth sports. Gervis and Dunn's (2004) research study with elite athletes showed the negative impact a coach's verbal behavior has on that group of athletes. Cook and Dorsch (2014) found that coaches' behaviors are

often abusive and warrant monitoring through surveillance. Determining how the average recreational participant feels would extend the research to cover a larger group of youth participants. The results could be beneficial in informing policy and procedure to help keep children involved in recreational sports and other activities. Establishing behavior and verbal guidelines for coaches builds an empirical base, showing the impact of their communicative style on the retention of youth in recreational activities.

Barber et al. (1999) explained that improved mental and physical health is a benefit of youth sports participation. Bailey (2006), Coatsworth and Conroy (2009), DeBate et al., 2009; and Findlay and Coplan, (2008) concluded that participation in recreational activities increases academic achievement, self-esteem, and emotional stability (Donaldson & Ronan 2006). Hannon (2008) postulated that youth obesity problems could reduce if youth engage in and stay involved in sports. Schaub and Marian (2011) indicated that obesity is a major contributing factor to the following diseases in young people: cardiovascular disease, hypertension, and type-two diabetes. The authors stressed the role physical fitness plays in preventing and correcting obesity in our youth. Schaub and Marian (2011) said that obesity is equal to or a more significant contributor to preventable death than is smoking, and that obesity has surpassed smoking as the leading cause of preventable death. These authors highlighted that overweight children remain overweight into adulthood. Allender et al. (2006) indicated that the lack of physical activity is a public health problem in the world, and childhood obesity is expected to reach 40% in the United States in the next 20 years. In a review of 2010, Center for Disease Control Report, it reported a positive correlation between student's participation in sports activities and improved academics, decreased the risk of diabetes,

and weight control. This current research study contributed to the understanding of one of the factors in the retention of 6-12-year-olds in youth sports. Keeping more children engaged in youth sports may counter the negative impact that not exercising has on youth.

Conclusion

The youth sports coach can have a significant influence on young athletes' development and enjoyment of the sport. Several physical, psychological, and social benefits come from gains of youth sports participation (Donaldson & Ronan, 2006). Youth coach background and experience can range from inexperienced volunteer parents to skilled paid coaches working in elite youth sports programs. While most youth sports organizations are providing some training their youth coaches; there are still a significant number of youth programs that do not train their volunteer coaches. A good youth sports program can provide children with the value expected of the parents sending their young child to participate in the sport of their choice. A good training program for all youth programs can be invaluable to the child's health, education, and psychological well-being. All youth coaches can benefit from an intense training program provided by an organization specializing in training youth coaches.

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Appendix A: Letter of Cooperation from a Community Research Partner

Community Partner, Alabama

Contact Information

Date of Letter

Dear Mr. Spencer,

Based on my review of your research proposal, I give permission for you to conduct the study entitled "Coaching Youth Sports" within the Community Partner. As part of this study, I authorize you to invite members of my organization, whose names and contact information I will provide, to participate in the study as interview subjects. Their participation will be voluntary and at their own discretion. We reserve the right to withdraw from the study at any time if our circumstances change. I understand that the data collected will remain entirely confidential and may not be provided to anyone outside of the research team without permission from the Walden University IRB.

Sincerely,

Authorization Official

Contact Information

Appendix B: Interview Questions

Research Question 1:

RQ1: How do youth coaches perceive their role in a young person's decision to continue participating in their sport of preference?

Interview Questions:

1. What sport(s) do you coach?
2. How long have you coached youth sports?
3. What age groups have you coached?
4. What motivates you to work with 6–12-year olds?
5. How do you engage children to practice and advance in their goals or performance?
6. What types of coaching behaviors or strategies do you use to help children stay engaged in sports?
7. When a child makes a mistake in practice or a game, how do you correct them?
8. What are the coaching practices that you don't approve?
9. In general, what factors make a child stayed engaged in sports?
10. How do you think that you contribute to a child staying connected to his or her practice?
11. What is the most important lesson you teach your team, why?
12. What do you teach your team about winning and losing?
13. How important is it for you to win, why?
14. How important is having fun and why?

Research Question 2:

RQ2: How do youth coaches perceive the attrition of youth in sports?

SQ2.1. What explanations do youth coaches provide as the reasons for youth's attrition in sports?

Interview Questions:

1. In general, what are the reasons children quit sports?
2. What are the reasons children quit practicing in your team?
3. What recommendations do you have to prevent children disengagement from their sport of preference?
4. What are the benefits of sports for children ages 6-12? Why?

Appendix C: Demographic Items

Age

Gender

Areas/Sports of Coaching

Athletic experience

Training experience to coach

Number of years as youth coach

Appendix D: Recruitment Flyer

Ph.D. Candidate Research Study

Subject: Coaching Youth Sports

Topic: Six (6)-Twelve (12)-year-old attrition rate

Participants: Youth Sports Coaches of 6-12-year-olds

Required Number of Participants: Twelve (12) +

Please volunteer by _____

Coaches will be asked their opinion for the high attrition rate in youth sports. All interviews are confidential, and all participation is voluntary.



Contact: Ronald R. Spencer, Sr., Ph.D. Candidate, Education Psychology, Walden University

Ronald has coached youth sports over 30 years, and he is a Gold Level Certified Youth Coach, by the National Youth Coaches Association.