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Parental involvement in youth sports

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PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN YOUTH SPORTS

by

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to understanding the motivating factors pertaining to the involvement of youth in sport and how parents can assist in providing their children optimal sport experiences. The paper will begin by providing a background of youth sport involvement, and include the benefits and drawbacks of youth sport participation. To ensure that young athletes are positively motivated toward sport participation, it is important to understand their reasons for participation, as well as how others, such as parents, impact their motivation toward sport. This paper will address a number of motivational theories. Deci and Ryan's cognitive evaluation theory and self-determination theory will provide the foundation for the paper. Discussion will also include Csikszentmihalyi's theory of flow, Bandura's self-efficacy theory, and Nicholls' achievement goal theory. Based on the theoretical literature discussed, this paper will provide recommendations for parents to create optimal sport experiences for their children, as well as implications for future research.

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And everyone else, who kept asking me all these years: "Have you finished your paper yet?" I am proud to answer, "YES!"

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Introduction

Over 52 million United States youth participate in sport (National Council of Youth Sports, 2006). Many physical, psychological, and social benefits can be gained from youth sport participation, such as an increase in health, physical fitness, skill development, academic achievement and self-esteem (Coakley, 1993; Marsh & Kleitman, 2003; President's Council on Physical Fitness & Sports [PCPFS], 1997; Smith, 1986; Tracy & Erkut, 2002). Other benefits are the development of teamwork and leadership skills, along with involvement in a potentially constructive alternative to risky, negative behaviors (Lopez & Moore, 2006; Murphy, 1999; Seefeldt & Ewing, 1996)

Even though youth sport can yield many benefits, there are issues that can undermine these benefits, such as the high expectations and the pressure to win. This pressure to win makes it difficult to achieve the optimal athletic experience. Pressure can lead the child to do whatever it takes to win, such as illegal drug use, a higher level of aggression, overtraining, burnout, and ultimately the withdrawal from sport.

Many children choose to participate in sport at a young age out of curiosity and to have fun. Parents often initiate the sporting experience for young children, and also can be the ones who drive them away from sport. A 2005 release by the Citizenship Through Sports Alliance (CTSA) suggests that parents continue to misbehave, and parents and coaches continue to pressure children with a win-at-all-costs approach. The parental involvement continuum by Jon Hellstedt (Byrne, 1993) suggests that the involvement of parents in their children's sporting careers range from underinvolvement to overinvolvement. Optimal parent involvement falls into the moderate range. These parents encourage their child's sport pursuits, yet are able to control their emotions, and recognize that the game is for their children, not for themselves.

A number of theories can be used to understand the environments that should be fostered by parents to promote youths' persistence and enjoyment of sport. In the cognitive evaluation theory, Deci and Ryan (1985; 2000) proposed that individuals have three basic needs, which are autonomy, relatedness and competence. In their self-determination theory (SDT), they suggest further that there are two forms of motivation, extrinsic and intrinsic motivation. Extrinsic motivation is in evidence when individuals seek out rewards or recognition for their participation. Intrinsic motivation is evident when the behavior is engaged in for the pleasure and satisfaction derived from participation (Deci, 1971). Vallerand (1997) proposed the hierarchical model of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (HMM) which delineates a variety of types of intrinsic motivation. Csikszentmihalyi (1996) has developed the theory of flow, which articulates the elements of enjoyment. Bandura's (1977; 1986) self-efficacy theory can be used to understand the motivation to approach challenging situations, such as sport. Finally, Nicholls (1984; 1989) achievement goal theory (AGT) focuses on understanding the ways by which participants define success in achievement contexts. Research is provided to support the relevance of these theories to youth sport.

The purpose of this paper is to understand the factors that contribute to the optimal youth sport experience, as well as to develop a comprehensive understanding of the role parents play in creating these experiences for children. This paper will provide theoretical frameworks and research, which address the variables necessary to create optimal experiences that keep youth motivated. Recommendations for optimal sport parenting will also be included to assist parents in the quest to provide their children the optimal athletic experience.

Literature Review

Introduction to Sport Involvement

Sport is a major influence in the lives of America's youth (Danish, 2002). The National Federation of State High School Associations stated that since their introduction in the mid-1940's, organized athletics have grown so rapidly that nearly every community offers one or more forms of competitive athletics to its youth and virtually every secondary school and many middle and junior high schools provide interscholastic athletic programs (Ewing & Seefeldt, 1996). Organized sport participation is a universal form of physical activity involvement for children, and youth sport participation numbers in the United States are up to 52 million boys and girls (National Council of Youth Sports, 2006). Recreational leagues are most heavily populated by kids ages 5 to 11. By age 11, many of the talented players are selected through tryouts to participate on travel teams (Fullinwider, 2006).

The involvement of children in sport has become a very controversial area. Some researchers view sport as a means for youth to grow and develop their physical, mental and social skills (Byrne, 1993; Chambers, 1991), whereas others may see sport as an avenue that yields drug abuse, violence and physical aggression (Bredemeier, 1985; Huang, Cherek, & Lane, 1999). In the United States, adolescents and children are becoming involved in sport at earlier ages and with higher levels of intensity and competition (Stanitski, 1989). This competition is of concern to those who want youth to participate in the informal physical activity that is essential to a healthy childhood.

The attitudes, beliefs and behavior of the parents and coaches undoubtedly affect the child's experiences in sport (Byrne, 1993). Leagues have been started by adults who had good intentions, yet turned them into highly competitive environments. When the training sessions

become so intense that they result in social isolation, disempowerment, and permanent injuries among children (Coakley, 1992), one must question the adults' motives and tactics. With millions of children participating in youth sports each year, it is important to understand how sport can most effectively meet the needs of youth. Seefeldt, Ewing, & Walk (1992) had 8,000 youth identify the reasons that they participated in sport. In order of importance, the youth reported: to have fun, to do something I am good at, to stay in shape, to learn new skills, to improve my skills, and to play as part of a team. Petlichkoff (1992) states that an understanding of what motivates children to participate in sport, as well as drop out of sport, could have profound effects on how it is structured. To keep youth involved in sport, it is also necessary to understand how adults influence the sport experience. An optimal sporting environment should be provided by the coaches and parents to meet the demands of the children, emphasizing skill improvement and matching the skill levels with the appropriate demands.

The Benefits of Youth Sport Participation

The literature suggests that sport involvement provides important physical, psychological and social development benefits. The benefits reported in the literature include increased health, physical fitness, skill development, academic achievement, self-esteem, teamwork, deterrent to negative behavior, and citizenship.

Increased health, physical fitness, and skill development.

Childhood and adolescence are critical times to lay the foundation for lifelong physical activity (PCPFS, 1997). From early childhood, children should be exposed to the potential benefits of sport involvement. The Surgeon General's report on nutrition and health (Public Health Service, 1988) identified obesity as a major public health problem in the United States. In addition to this, the Surgeon General's report on physical activity and health (United States

Department of Health and Human Services [USDHHS], 1996) identified physical inactivity as a serious public health problem nationwide, and emphasized that physical activity must become a top priority.

Ewing, Gano-Overway, Branta and Seefeldt (2002) acknowledged that youth who participate in sport programs should derive an appreciation of physical fitness. In fact, youth 10 to 18 years of age frequently identify some aspect of fitness among their top ten reasons for participating in sport (Ewing & Seefeldt, 1989). Moderate to high levels of physical activity, and the consequent increase in health-related fitness, are important for children for at least three reasons: (a) they may lead to a habit of physical activity which may carry over to adulthood; (b) they may contribute to overall health status in later life; and (c) they may have a preventive function in some adult diseases (PCPFS, 1997).

Academic achievement.

Sport can offer excellent educational opportunities for development because many of the social and moral requirements for participation in sport parallel how individuals must function in a law-abiding society (Seefeldt & Ewing, 1996). Participation in youth sport offers children a special set of learning experiences that are positively correlated to academic aspirations, especially when it alters important relationships in a young person's life (Coakley, 1993). Fullinwider (2006) and Jesiorski (1994) point to links between sport and positive outcomes, such as higher levels of college attendance, girls' interest and success in math and science, better school attendance, fewer drop-outs, more parental involvement, and better grades, compared to those who did not participate in sport. They further suggested that these positive outcomes are correlational, not cause and effect, and may be due to the discipline and work ethic associated with cocurricular activities, which then carry over into the classroom. Star high school basketball

players in Snyder's (1975) study were reported to have greater aspirations for attending college. Furthermore, when athletics is combined with service and leadership activities, research suggests that academic performance is improved (Chambers, 1991).

Sport provides the opportunity to gain important life skills, such as planning and decision-making, which can be used both on the playing field and in the classroom (Snyder, 1975). Student athletes learn to manage their time, as they must focus on schoolwork, practice and game schedules, along with many other activities. Planning and decision making are important tools that athletes need to utilize, because most athletic programs have minimum standards of achievement that must be met in order to participate in athletics. Communication is also viable both in the classroom and on the playing field. Research suggests that sport-involved youth are seen by teachers as more socially skilled and less shy and withdrawn (McHale et al., 2005). Sport provides important growth opportunities that will help children as they enter high school and eventually college.

Relationships seem to be the vehicles for change; and in some cases, sport participation may cause young people to be noticed by those who can make a positive difference in their academic lives (Coakley, 1993). Snyder (1975) found that a greater proportion of starting players perceived the coach to be a significant influence on academic achievement and in their personal lives. The study did not state whether or not the coach was helping the starting players in an effort to field a stronger team, thus making him look like a better coach.

Increased self-esteem.

Adolescence is a notoriously turbulent emotional time during the development of the individual (Trulson, 1986). In recent years, several studies have demonstrated empirical links between sport involvement and higher levels of self-esteem (Marsh & Kleitman, 2003; Tracy &

Erkut, 2002). Self-esteem refers to a person's global evaluation of his or her overall worthiness (Coopersmith, 1967) and reflects feelings about one's skills, abilities, and social relationships. One familiar belief about youth sport is that children who are involved in sport have higher levels of self-esteem than those who are not (Coatsworth & Conroy, 2006; McHale et al., 2005). Some research suggests that the effects of sport participation on youth self-esteem depends on contextual factors, such as the relations one forms with important adults and peers within the context (Brustad, Babkes, & Smith, 2001; Smith, 1999). Harter (1999) states that a child's self-esteem is partly a function of the quality of interactions (e.g. supportive and accepting vs. demeaning and rejecting) youth have with important adults in different "relational contexts" (e.g. parent-child relational context, athlete-coach context). For example, youth who participate in athletics and rate athletics as an important dimension of self-worth may be particularly sensitive to the type of feedback provided by the coach within the context of the athlete-coach relationship. When the athlete-coach relational context is characterized by high levels of support, social acceptance, loyalty, trust, and evaluative feedback that is accurate, contingent and positive, it is likely to foster healthy global self-worth (Harter).

Younger children are less cognitively mature, their thinking is more concrete, and they rely more on direct feedback and easily interpretable sources of evaluation such as parents' or coaches' comments (Harter, 1999; Horn & Weiss, 1991). The researchers further state that younger children are more likely to use the praise, attention and reinforcement given by important adult figures as a source of information on which to base their self-esteem. In extreme cases, coaches may assume a central role in the youth's life, such as becoming a father figure to the athlete.

When sports give young people an opportunity to cultivate and display their talents, self-esteem is promoted. If this occurs in settings where young people are treated well and respected in the larger community in which they live, self-esteem may then grow into a sense of moral worth (Coakley, 2002). Bandura (1986) contends that children are thought to discover moral standards from a variety of influences, such as direct instruction, modeling of moral standards by their peers, and behavioral feedback from significant others. Bandura further states that in developing a moral self, individuals adopt standards of right and wrong that serve as guides and restraints for conduct, and they tend to act in a way that will result in a sense of satisfaction and self-worth.

Teamwork.

Team sports can provide a special thrill not often found in other life areas, where a group pulls together for a common cause (Murphy, 1999). Members of team sports work together in the same ways as families and co-workers. There needs to be an agreement about the goal that is to be achieved and each person must understand the importance of their role on the team.

The social dynamics of team sports mediate the control that adults have over the lives of athletes (Coakley, 1992), as new friendships are established and bonds are made among youths with various backgrounds. Children are also able to gain a sense of identity and hone in on their likes and dislikes through relationships with other teammates. For young children, sport involvement may provide the opportunity to play with new friends (Murphy, 1999). The new friendships will assist the children in having a voice of their own and better enable them to let the parents know how they feel. By adolescence, belonging to a sports team may be a very significant experience. The athletes will now start to gain a sense of identity with a group that involves a complex web of relationships and friendships (Murphy).

Deterrent to negative behavior.

Along with the positive attributes of sport involvement, sport can also act as a deterrent to negative behavior (Seefeldt & Ewing, 1996). Concerned communities throughout the United States have been searching for effective strategies to keep young adolescents meaningfully occupied during times when they would otherwise not be monitored (McHale et al., 2005). The ultimate goal is not to take young children off the streets, but to enable them to become agents of progressive change and social development in their communities (Coakley, 2002). School-age children who are unsupervised after school are more likely to use alcohol, drugs and tobacco, engage in criminal and other high risk behaviors, receive poor grades, and drop out of school than those children who have the opportunity to benefit from constructive activities supervised by responsible adults. Sport involved boys are less likely than noninvolved boys to have experimented with marijuana (McHale et al.).

Seefeldt and Ewing (1996) state that participation in youth sport is a highly desirable alternative for gang membership, and the role of sport as a safe alternative activity to violence and intimidation is gaining interest, due to increasing concern with flourishing gang membership. Growing interest in this subject has brought up debate as to whether sport can offer a socially acceptable arena for aggressive behavior or whether the aggressive nature of sport encourages violent behavior (Seefeldt & Ewing). Wang (1994) conducted a study on male high school students and concluded that the absence of either a parent or teacher role model was the best predictor of gang membership, indicating the importance of positive role models in the lives of youth. Adolescents look for a feeling of comfort from those who welcome them and who reinforce their sense of belonging (Clark, 1992). Involvement in a gang is known to fill a void in ones' life, providing a sense of affiliation, self worth, companionship, and excitement (Clark).

Providing the at-risk children with a positive role model in the sporting environment will not only assist in improving their self image, but also provide them an alternative to gang membership and other negative social behavior. As the at-risk students spend a large amount of hours per week without any after school commitment, involvement in sport will give them less of an opportunity to become involved in negative or criminal behavior.

Some sports may reduce aggression. Trulson (1986) found that martial arts practice is associated with, and sometimes clearly affects, lowered rates of aggression. Trulson assigned juvenile delinquents to three groups. Group I received traditional Tae Kwon Do training, which included meditation upon their position, aspirations, and goals in life, calisthenics, stretching, lecture and training. Group II received non traditional “modern” martial arts training, in which only fighting and self defense techniques are taught, along with calisthenics and stretching. Finally, Group III participated in football, basketball, and jogging. The subjects in Group I displayed a decrease in aggressiveness, lowered anxiety and increased self-esteem. Group II displayed an even greater tendency toward delinquency and greater aggressiveness, and Group III showed no notable differences.

Citizenship.

People who were involved in youth sports reported higher levels of voting, volunteering and engagement in their community than those who did not participate (Lopez & Moore, 2006). The data show that young people who participated in sport activities during their high school years were more likely than non sport participants to have:

- volunteered (32 percent vs. 21 percent)
- registered to vote (58 percent vs. 40 percent)
- voted (44 percent vs. 33 percent in 2000), and

- followed news closely (41 percent vs. 26 percent)

Even though youth sport can yield many benefits, there are also issues that need to be addressed, such as high expectations and pressure to win. Parents often neglect to keep in mind the most desired outcomes for youth, which are more action, involvement, a sense of excitement during practice and games, and new friendships (Murphy, 1999). When organized sport fails, it often fails to meet the needs of young athletes in one or more of these areas.

Drawbacks of Youth Sport Participation

It is estimated that around 35% of children drop out of sport each year (Fullinwider, 2006; Gould, 1987; Gould & Horn, 1984). There are events reported in the literature that can have a negative impact on youth athletes, potentially leading to withdrawal from sport. The events are an increased pressure to win, illegal activity, aggression, and overtraining. The pressure to win may be the key factor in sport withdrawal, as the athlete may feel that in order to succeed in sport, they must utilize other means in an effort to accomplish their goal.

Pressure to win.

Pressure affects every person differently. For some, pressure is a challenge to be met. It brings out one's best qualities, because they feel most alive when they have risked everything and pushed themselves to the edge of their capabilities. But for most, pressure is more draining rather than invigorating (Ryan, 1995). A "get ahead at all costs" atmosphere can be harmful to a child. Ryan described many incidents of girls being over-pressured by the adults in their lives, instead of the adults allowing the child to enjoy sport for fun, which led many of them toward anorexia, bulimia and, more severely, to their death.

Winning is often associated with success, as programs, coaches and teams are only deemed successful if they have a winning season (Petlichkoff, 1992). With the pressure put on

coaches to gain recognition for the team and their school, many will succumb to this pressure and forget the reason kids play, which is to have fun. Pugh, Wolff, DeFrancesco, Gilley, and Heitman (2000) found that male youth baseball players consistently rated fun as their most important motive for participation, followed by challenge, and social interaction. Seefeldt, Ewing, and Walk (1992) found that “to win” was rated 8th in participation motives for school-sponsored sports and was not even listed by non-school sport participants. Because the inherent nature of sport produces more losers than winners, product outcomes such as winning a baseball game or tournament should be de-emphasized (Pugh et al., 2000). In the same study, the athletes were asked their win-loss record of the previous season, and only one of the twelve could remember.

In an effort to improve skills, athletes must practice and receive effective feedback from the coaches and parents, and therefore the byproduct of winning will come naturally, instead of being forced. For example, baseball players often attend camps, which teach the kids physical and mental techniques that they can use in the game setting. The children will inherently become better athletes with the proper training from camps or simply from the experience of playing another season.

Participation in sport alone does not result in the development of positive physical and emotional characteristics (Ewing et al., 2002). Participation in sport has the potential to be a negative experience for youth, driven by the way coaches and parents handle themselves. Children who experience disappointment or failure may seek adult intervention, as they try to understand why certain events happened and how to learn from the experience (Ewing et al.). While athletic involvement can have a major impact on children, it can also have a tremendous impact on the parents. Youth sport parents are often dedicated and emotionally invested (Herbst,

2000) in the athletic experience of their children and this involvement is an integral part of their relationship.

Prior to the 1980's, in the United States, the majority of youth sport programs were publicly funded and neighborhood-based, so children could manage their participation without extensive parental involvement (Coakley, 2006). The inception of organized leagues, often run by parents, such as Little League, Pop Warner and Youth Hockey, has increased the level of involvement required by parents for their child's athletic career. Lewko and Greendorfer (1988) point out that parents play a central role in early and middle childhood by determining children's initial sport involvement, driving them to and from practice and games, attending games, and, in some cases being a coach or official. It has frequently been shown that an important feature in determining the nature of the sport experience is the quality of adult leadership (Byrne, 1993) that can be provided to the children. Parental expectations can help to motivate children to participate in sport; however, in excess, they can cause pressure that may result in dropout or burnout (Cote & Hay, 2002). Once the athletes' motives for participation are identified, coaches and parents should structure the athletic environment so that these motives are filled (Gould & Petlichkoff, 1988).

The children participate in sport due to the influence of their parents (Brown, Frankel, & Fennell, 1989; Gould, Feltz, & Weiss, 1985), therefore the parents should be encouraged to show support and interest in their child's sport pursuits, but need to keep their involvement in a proper perspective. Another reason children participate in sport is due to the fact that it is generational in nature. A father may want his son to play, because each generation of the family has played football. For some parents, their adult pursuit of social acceptance and accomplishment is almost completely wrapped up with the achievements of their children, leading the child to feel

pressured to perform up to the set expectations, so the parent doesn't feel a sense of embarrassment from society (Coakley, 2006). The pressure put on athletes may also be due to monetary reasons, as parents may push their child to achieve a college scholarship through athletics, and in extreme cases, become a professional athlete.

Not only does the pressure come from the parents, but also the coaches. A self imposed pressure to win drives some coaches to engage in unethical and illegal recruiting, conduct excessive practices, schedule too many games and tournaments, emphasize early specialization, and implement favoritism. The pressure on coaches to produce a winning season can lead the less skilled players to have fewer opportunities to compete and hone their skills. Hellstedt (1988) cites studies showing that many children ages 9-14 drop out of sports due to lack of playing time. This may also lead the child to feel pressured to willfully participate in illegal activities in an effort to be noticed by the coaches or to live up to the expectations set by their parents. Not only can the lack of playing time directly affect the athlete, but also the perception of the athlete's peers, leading some to believe the athlete is not a skilled player. The perceived lack of skill may result in the withdrawal from the sport, as the athlete may feel that there is no potential to play the sport on the collegiate or professional level, thus freeing up time for other activities or academics.

Children are not the only contributors to high levels of aggression and violence, as parents are a major contributor to sport violence in today's society. Parents must remember that children are involved in sport to have fun, not always to win. Parental rage or abuse can increase the pressure perceived by youth and may turn the child off to exercise and sports participation, preventing the development of healthy lifestyles that will promote wellness through the life span

(Bigelow et al., 2001). Children who witness atrocities may be so affected that they lose interest in sports and more importantly, exercise.

Illegal activity.

Both athletic competence and physical appearance are viewed by youth as key social status determinants (Chase & Dummer, 1992). Society has stereotyped the body types that are associated with specific sports. Basketball draws tall men and women; football draws men with large physiques; and race horse jockeys are known to be short and lightweight. Many athletes in the search of the highest level of physical fitness rely on illegal drugs to either trim down or bulk up ("Athletes and Drugs," 1992). Wrestlers, for example, will starve themselves to make the proper weight limit prior to a match or a defensive lineman will take supplements, such as steroids, in an effort to gain more muscle mass. These blatant, sometimes illegal, efforts to gain an edge on opponents are all a reflection of the pressure to win. Smolak, Murnen, and Thompson (2005) found that parental and peer pressure, as well as higher levels of social comparison and lower body esteem, was also found to increase the use of supplements and/or steroids in middle school boys.

The Michigan State University Institute of the Study of Youth Sports (2005) conducted a study with involvement from the presidents of the high school coaching associations. The results indicate the presidents believe that there is an increased level of substance abuse among high school students, as well as peer pressure to use them. Athletes looking for external rewards, such as a college scholarship or better peer recognition, may feel that the use of ergogenic aids is their only avenue to achieving their goals. Ergogenic aids are substances or devices that enhance energy production, use or recovery, which athletes feel can provide them a competitive advantage (Ahrendt, 2001). Anabolic steroid use is a common ergogenic aid among athletes,

potentially leading to an increase in strength, lean muscle mass, and motivation, yet can also have side effects such as acne, increased aggression, nausea, and even more dangerous effects such as hypertension, liver tumors, psychosis, and premature closure of growth plates, causing shorter stature in adolescents (Ahrendt).

Aggression.

Adolescence is an emotional time as children are developing mentally, physically, emotionally and socially (Mentoring Partnership of Long Island, 1990). Sports are often an avenue for children to test their boundaries, and by trial and error, find out who they are and where they fit in with their peers. The playing field is an arena in which one can either control their emotions or misbehave through violence or aggression. Terry and Jackson (1985) describe aggression as behavior which causes harm, occurs outside of the rules of the sport, and is unrelated to the competitive objectives of the sport. In contrast, proactive assertion is the use of verbal or physical force that is task-oriented, constitutively acceptable, and involves no intent to injure (Bredemeier & Shields, 1986).

There is a clear trend toward increased aggression as a person participates longer and at higher levels of competition (Silva, 1981; Smith, 1983). As children get older and become involved in higher levels of sport, they are socialized into new value orientations that legitimate greater frequency and intensity of aggressive sport acts (Silva, 1983). Athletic aggression is compounded when there are external rewards for performance outcomes (Bredemeier & Shields, 1986). Violence is most prevalent in team contact sports, such as rugby, ice hockey, and football. Too much aggression can be damaging to a child, yet those who don't display a high enough amount of aggressiveness in sport may receive negative reinforcement through criticism from parents and coaches, may see a decrease in playing time, and also may receive harassment by

teammates, opponents, or spectators (Abdal-Haqq, 2006). Lack of playing time may alter youths' enjoyment and make sport less fun, thus leading to frustration and, eventually, withdrawal.

Although sport may be associated with aggression, it is important to note that much of the research is correlational. Boys who play contact sports, such as football or hockey, might be more disinhibited and aggressive than their peers who play noncontact sports or do not play sports at all (Huang et al., 1999). It is possible the athletes were more aggressive prior to participation in high contact sports, as the level of aggression from the parents or peers, as well as the parental enforcement (positive or negative), may impact the child's behavior (Huang et al.).

Bredemeier and Shields (1986) suggest that the moral reasoning fostered by sport may affect aggression. Bredemeier and Shields add that sport is an ambiguous context that may have negative as well as positive effects on moral development. Morality is a process of balancing one's own needs and interests with those of others (Bredemeier, 1985). Bredemeier and Shields further state that moral reasoning is an important dimension of the ongoing sport experience, and is a process of growth whereby a person comes to increasingly approximate the most adequate moral principles.

Sport involvement has been linked to the adoption of lower levels of moral reasoning (Shields & Bredemeier, 1995). Lower levels of moral reasoning correspond to higher levels of athletic aggression (Bredemeier, 1983). Bredemeier and Shields (1986) proposed that moral experience in sport differs from moral experience in everyday life and is an important dimension of the ongoing sport experience, as many aspects of the sport structure function to release participants from the responsibility of moral decisions. The sport structure functions to diminish athletes' sense of moral engagement by concentrating responsibility in the roles of coaches and

officials and by codifying appropriate behavior in the form of rules (Bredemeier & Shields, 1986). Participants must weight the various implications of different behavioral options in their decisions about when and how much physical and emotional force to express or tolerate.

Research indicates that when faced with moral choices, players' perceptions of their coaches' norms for cheating and aggression were most influential in their decision to engage in the inappropriate act (Guivernau & Duda, 2002). If a coach autocratically points to the importance of winning while simultaneously being supportive of his or her athletes regardless of the tactics they use to win, team norms may be more likely to condone cheating and aggression (Shields, Bredemeier, Gardner, & Bostrom, 1995). Coaches need to be aware of the messages they convey and deem appropriate, as their actions can indirectly affect the moral decisions of their athletes.

Not only do the coaches affect ones' decision to be moral, but peers also influence the decision. Stephens and Bredemeier (1996) support the relevance of moral atmosphere in sport, as they found that the best predictor of young female soccer players' self described likelihood to engage in unfair game tactics was their belief that their teammates would play unfairly. Guivernau and Duda discovered that male athletes perceived most players (i.e. from half to everyone on the team) would cheat rather than lose an important game (50%) more than the female players did (28%).

Sport participation may facilitate moral reasoning among children in cases where sport programs have been carefully and explicitly designed and administered to produce positive changes in moral reasoning (Bredemeier, Weiss, Shields, & Shewchuk, 1986). Examples of this would include a church sport league that displays appropriate rules and boundaries for the youth

involved or a league that is run by qualified individuals with the best interest of the children in mind.

Overtraining.

With the increasingly competitive world of youth sports, overtraining in children and adolescent athletes is becoming more common (Metzl, 2003). Overtraining is best defined as a chronic syndrome where systemic function is disrupted by tension, emotional instability, diminished concentration, personality shifts, and apathy (Fry, Morton, & Keast, 1991). Overtraining in the pursuit of higher performance, although often leading to burnout and injury, is part of the sport experience for a number of athletes (Gould, Udry, Tuffey, & Loehr, 1996). The rationale for the increased intensity of training and the extended duration of seasons in youth sports stems from the assumption that optimal performance can only be achieved after prolonged periods of practice (Seefeldt & Ewing, 1996). Even those who survive the rigorous training sessions and play professionally may have long lasting negative physical and psychological consequences as a result (Coakley, 1992; Hollander & Meyers, 1995; Patel & Nelson, 2000).

The increase in overtraining has led to a dramatic increase in overuse injuries, such as fractures and sprains (Pennington, 2005). Strain injuries (e.g., tendonitis) are more common than acute injuries (e.g., fractures) and account for 30-50% of all injuries (Patel & Nelson, 2000). The muscles of children can develop and strengthen like those of adults, but their bones do not keep pace (Pennington). For example, gymnasts who train more than sixteen hours a week are at high risk for repetitive stress fractures, most dangerously in the back (Ryan, 1995). The pressure put on athletes from parents and coaches, along with the number of hours spent at practice, may lead to higher levels of anxiety to perform up to the set expectations. Hellstedt (1988) points out that the anxiety to win can impede performance and makes players more susceptible to injury.

Patel and Nelson (2000) mention that 48% of youth sport athletes have been found to have at least one injury during an athletic season. According to the American College of Sports Medicine (1993), 50% of youth injuries are preventable. The injuries can be prevented by coaches and parents' monitoring the amount of time the child spends participating in the sport, along with watching for symptoms of soreness and fatigue. If a young athlete misses more than 10 percent of a sports season due to injury, the possibility of overtraining should be strongly considered (Metzel, 2003).

Not only can athletic involvement cause physical damage to a child, but it can also lead to mental and emotional damage. Depression is one of the cardinal signs of overtraining in athletes (Hollander & Meyers, 1995). Psychologically, a child that plays on multiple sport teams simultaneously will often treat sport much like a disliked job, lacking enthusiasm at practice and games (Metzl, 2003). With improved recognition through effective parent and coach education, the damaging issues of mental and physical overtraining can be easily prevented (Metzl). In an effort to decrease the risk of overtraining, a clear system of rewards and scheduling should be set for the children (Hollander & Meyers).

Ewing and Seefeldt (1996) note that multi-sport participation is the norm. Not only does multi-sport participation increase the potential of injury, but it also increases the risk of burnout. Highly talented young athletes who leave high performance sport programs in a state of extreme emotional duress are referred to as "cases of burnout" (Coakley, 1992). Burnout is defined as a psychological, emotional, and physical withdrawal from a formerly pursued and enjoyable sport, as a result of excessive stress, which acts on the athlete over time as the demands on them exceed their capacities to meet those demands (Smith, 1986). Metzler (2002) describes burnout as an undesirable state in which athletes are psychologically and physically exhausted by the constant

failure to match the training stress imposed resulting in a loss of energy and enthusiasm for sports.

Young athletes facing burnout may experience signs of depression, such as lack of energy, sadness, frequent illness and a loss of interest in training and competing (Hellstedt, 1988). Too often, parents mistakenly assume that a child really wants to continue the sport in which she's shown promise, while excluding other youth activities. For example, if an athlete is in her fifth consecutive season of soccer without a significant rest period, she may begin to feel the symptoms of burnout, which are characterized by physical fatigue, carelessness, and lack of desire. Studies show that the number of dropped sports increases substantially in the teenage years compared to the elementary years (Butcher, Lindner, & Johns, 2002; Lindner, Johns, & Butcher, 1991). As children are introduced to other social activities, it is important for the parents to remember to let the child decide what sport interests them, and support the child in their decision.

Coakley's (1992) recommendations for preventing burnout call for changes in the social organization of high performance sport, changes in the way sport experiences are integrated into the lives of young athletes, and changes in the structure and dynamics of relationships between athletes and their significant others. Not all parents are eager to push their children into sports with a high risk of injury, such as football; however, Otago, Spittle, Garnham, Reynolds, and Finch (2005) found that while parents acknowledged that they were worried about the risk of injury to their children, they accepted the risks because the advantages of participation in sport were seen to outweigh the injury risks. Coaches and parents need to focus their attention on the child's interests, and keep in mind that overtraining in the pursuit of higher performance can often lead to burnout and injury (Coakley).

The literature suggests that sport involvement has the potential to contribute positively to youth development. It also has the potential to cause emotional, moral and physical harm. Sport impacts the lives of millions of youth. It is extremely important to understand how adults can create sport environments that maximize the benefits and minimize the harm. An understanding is needed to determine what motivates children to participate in sport and how parents can positively influence this motivation.

Motivation

Young people have much to gain from their participation in sport; therefore, it is essential to explore how their involvement can lead to optimal experiences. Optimal experiences are characterized by a state of high psychological involvement or absorption in activities or settings (Mannell & Kleiber, 1997) and are associated with long term commitment and enjoyment.

Motivation refers to dispositions, social variables, and/or cognitions that come into play when a person undertakes a task at which he or she is evaluated, enters into competition with others, or attempts to attain some standard of excellence (Roberts, 1992). Simply, motivation is referred to as the direction and intensity of one's behavior (Roberts). People can be motivated because they value an activity or because there is strong external coercion (Ryan & Deci, 2000). To ensure that young athletes are positively motivated toward sport participation, it is important to understand why they choose to participate, as well as how others, such as parents, impact their sport experience and motivation toward sport.

Motivation in sport.

The PCPFS (1997) stated that those who leave organized sport, either temporarily or permanently, tend to have multiple reasons for sport withdrawal, such as lack of fun, success or skill improvement. Gould and Horn (1984) extended this list to include conflicts of interest, lack

of play time, boredom, competitive stress, and dislike of coach. If coaches and parents can understand the direction and intensity of sport-related behavior, they can more effectively help athletes achieve optimal motivation, thus leading to sustained behavior (Finch, 2002). When the athlete is highly attracted or directed toward a specific activity, then he or she is more likely to be intense in that situation or more willing to work hard to accomplish a goal.

Many researchers have explored how young people are socialized into sport participation and how parental support and beliefs are associated with enjoyment, enthusiasm, self-esteem, beliefs, achievement, and continued participation of children (Averill & Power, 1995; Brustad, 1996; Leff & Hoyle, 1995). A number of theories can be used to understand the environments that should be fostered by parents to promote youths' persistence and enjoyment of sport. Among the most well known theories are cognitive evaluation theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985; 2000) and self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Cognitive Evaluation Theory

Cognitive evaluation theory (CET) is a sub theory of Deci and Ryan's (1985; 2000) self determination theory (SDT), addressing the effects of social contexts on intrinsic motivation (IM). In Deci and Ryan's (1985; 2000) CET, it is proposed that individuals have three basic needs, which encourage intrinsically motivated behavior. These needs are feelings of autonomy, relatedness and competence. Each of these needs is essential because they contribute independently to healthy psychological growth (Ryan & Deci, 2000). CET conceptualizes IM as the prototypic form of self-determined, motivated, and intrinsically regulated behavior (Ryan & Deci). Feedback, communication, and rewards that lead to feelings of competence can enhance IM. Optimal IM occurs when the environment includes challenge, effective feedback, and freedom from demeaning evaluations (Ryan & Deci).

Autonomy.

Deci and Ryan (1991) defined the need for autonomy as an individual's efforts to determine their own behavior. The satisfaction of the need for autonomy involves the experience of choice and the feeling that one is the initiator of one's own actions (deCharms, 1968).

Autonomy support is a key social environmental factor that refers to the readiness of an individual in a position of authority (e.g., a coach) to take the other's (e.g., the athlete's) perspective, provide appropriate and meaningful information, offer opportunities for choice, and minimize external pressures and demands (Black & Deci, 2000). Kasser, Ryan, Zax, and Sameroff (1995) found that teens exposed to controlling parental care were more likely to develop materialistic orientations, compared to nurtured teens with stronger intrinsic goals of personal growth, community, and relationships.

Pelletier, Fortier, Vallerand, and Briere's (2001) study showed that swimmers' perceptions of coaches' autonomy support positively predicted intrinsic motivation and identified regulation. In contrast, swimmers' perceptions of coaches' controlling style predicted swimmers' amotivation, external regulation, and introjected regulation. Standage, Duda, and Ntoumanis (2003) studied students in physical education classes and revealed similar results, in that the perceptions of an autonomy-supportive climate were strong positive predictors of students' perceptions of autonomy. Choice, opportunity for self direction, and acknowledgement of feelings were found to enhance IM because they allowed people a greater feeling of autonomy (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

Parental involvement continuum.

John Hellstedt's parental involvement continuum (Figure 1) suggests that the involvement of parents in their children's sporting careers falls on a continuum ranging from underinvolvement through moderate involvement to overinvolvement (Byrne, 1993).

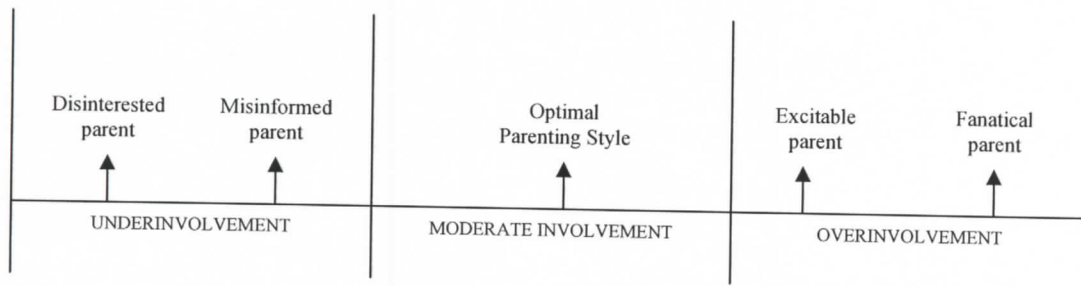


Figure 1: Parental Involvement Continuum (Adapted from Hellstedt, 1988).

The involvement of a parent in the quest for the optimal athletic experience is important, yet some parents may not understand the role they play. Byrne (1993) states that the disinterested parent may see the child's sporting involvement as a babysitter, while he or she attends social functions or cocktail parties. A single or overworked parent may find that sport may fill the void left by parental unavailability due to the overtime worked. The misinformed parents may speak to their child about deciding to compete in sports, yet choose not to attend practice or competitions (Byrne). In reality, the children want the parents to see them display their talent or simply be there to console them in a loss. The excitable parents are loud, dramatic, overly protective, and self absorbed, often known to become emotional at games and to be caught in the heat of the moment. The fanatical parents are the most problematic parent, as they tend to dominate their children's sport experience and are controlling, confrontational, hard to please, and preoccupied with winning and losing (Byrne). Further research should include the influence of a parent that is overinvolved time wise, but is not fanatical, such as that of a team mom.

Players have stated that they did not like being yelled at and reported feeling uncomfortable when they were yelled at by parents, teammates, and coaches, as they were being publicly criticized for poor skill execution (Pugh et al., 2000). The optimal parent would fall into the moderate involvement category, providing the child a sense of autonomy by displaying encouragement in their sport pursuits, yet able to control their emotions, and recognize that the game is for the children, not the parents.

Relatedness.

Relatedness pertains to feeling that one is securely connected to and understood by significant others (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Social support that one may receive is the perceptions that they are loved, valued, and esteemed by others (Pierce, Sarason, & Sarason, 1992). Athletes often gain a sense of belonging or a feeling of importance in a team setting, and the need to be accepted by others or belong to groups is critical to a healthy perception of self (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Vallerand, 1997). Smith (1999) found that middle school girls and boys who reported they had a close friend in sport, felt better about themselves physically, liked physical activity and sports more, were motivated by challenging activities, and were more physically active. Athletes not only should find a sense of belonging with teammates, but also with family. Studies show that the attachment to parents and support from the family is associated with lower levels of depressive symptoms (Crocker & Hakim-Larson, 1997), and attachment to parents and peers is associated with higher self-esteem (Noom, Dekovic & Meeus, 1999).

Competence.

Expanding upon the earlier work of White (1959), Deci suggests that people are motivated to feel competent (Deci, 1975). The construct of perceived competence is integrally

woven throughout the major theories of sport motivation (Duda & Nicholls, 1992). Competence is a sense of mastery over one's capacity to act in the environment. The satisfaction of the need for competence is fulfilled by the experience that one can effectively bring about desired effects and outcomes (White). A dimension of the sport environment which may satisfy the need for competence is the emphasis placed by the coach on athletes' self referent improvement, mastery, and effort (Reinboth, Duda, & Ntoumanis, 2004). If the needs aren't met, individuals might yearn for more extrinsic goals as a substitute or "compensatory mechanisms" (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Demonstrating improvement and effort are probably more controllable sources of competence evaluation than competitive outcomes, such as winning, and may make it easier for individuals to feel good about their abilities in achievement contexts such as sport (Reinboth et al.).

Scanlan and Lewthwaite's (1986) study of young male wrestlers looked at the enjoyment of sport participation and perceived competence of the athletes. Results indicated that the boys who had high levels of perceived competence reported more enjoyment than those with lower levels of perceived competence. The perceived competence of the child will affect the attrition process, with dropouts being characterized by lower levels of competence than participants (Harter, 1978). Those who perceive themselves to be highly competent at a particular skill will persist longer at that skill and maintain interest in improving that skill, whereas those with low competence at a particular skill will withdraw from the activity (Harter). Females reported that lack of competence and pressures to perform well were more important reasons for withdrawal than did males (Butcher et al., 2002). Studies also show that children involved in youth sport, when compared to their peers who were not involved in sport, reported higher perceived physical

competence, as well as higher social competence and general self worth (Roberts, Kleiber, & Duda, 1981).

Cognitive evaluation theory in sport.

Ryan and Deci (2000) state that the basic needs for competence, autonomy, and relatedness must be satisfied across the life span for an individual to experience an ongoing sense of integrity and well being. When these three psychological needs are satisfied, self motivation and mental health are the result, yet when they are thwarted, the result is diminished motivation and well-being (Vallerand, 1997). The negative effect can also facilitate non self-determined forms of motivation and amotivation. In the sport context, coaches' behavior is expected to have important effects on athletes' motivation. Blanchard and Vallerand (1996) revealed that the more the basketball coach was perceived as autonomy-supportive by his or her athletes, the more competent, autonomous, and related to the team they felt. Feelings of competence; however, will not enhance IM unless accompanied by a sense of autonomy (Ryan, 1982). Parents need to be cognizant that conditions supportive of autonomy and competence are optimal for the child to become intrinsically motivated (Deci, 1975).

Parents and coaches should be sure there is a good match between the child's ability and the sports environment. The status upheld by peers for athletes who do or do not "make the team" can potentially have a negative effect on the child who did not succeed, leading to the withdrawal from sports altogether. Young children need to be given every opportunity to feel successful. Being on the "top" team may be a mistake for a child who is not as skilled as other children, and a lower level team may be better suited to his/her level of ability (Hellstedt, 1988). Playing on a winning team on a level above one's ability may be detrimental, in that if personal success suffers, and the athlete may not feel as if he/she is contributing much to the team's

success. A sense of contribution may be more important to a player than being on the winning team.

The motivational climate that a parent creates for a child is significant, because the feedback and behavior provided can impact the child's perceived abilities. Parents must never withdraw love or affection when their child loses, as this pressure can lead the child to believe that they are not competing to have fun or win a match, but to win the attention and love of the parents. As Petlichkoff (1992) points out, "We must remember, however, that not every child is going to be an athlete, but we can at least let him or her play sports" (p. 109).

Self-Determination Theory

People do not always want control, but they wish to maintain a sense of control over what happens to them. Deci and Ryan (1985) refer to this as self-determination. One theoretical approach that may shed light on the impact of different aspects of the sport environment on the well being of athletes is the self-determination theory (SDT; Duda, 2001). SDT proposes that people, from infancy through old age, have an intrinsic desire to explore and understand their environment (Deci & Ryan, 1991). SDT is a useful framework for understanding varying levels of motivation for activity engagement addressing conditions of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2000).

There is a fairly high level of agreement between the SDT and Vallerand's (1997) hierarchical model of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (HMM), of which the latter will be highlighted throughout the section. Drawing its roots in SDT (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000), the HMM (Vallerand) has received much support in the field of sport and physical activity. The model provides a conceptual framework for organizing and understanding the relationships between the determinants and consequences of intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, and

amotivation at the global, contextual, and situational levels (Mallett & Hanrahan, 2004). According to this model, a number of social factors (e.g., autonomy-supportive or controlling styles) can impact on the various types of motivation via the satisfaction of the fundamental human needs for competence, autonomy, and relatedness. Social factors that satisfy these needs will promote self-determined forms of motivation. In contrast, social factors that undermine these needs will result in controlling motivation and amotivation. Intrinsic motivation and identified regulation predict the most positive behavioral outcomes, whereas amotivation and external regulation predict the most negative behavioral outcomes (Vallerand, 1997).

Self-determination continuum.

Deci and Ryan (1985) proposed a self-determination continuum (Figure 2) to describe motivational variables associated with different degrees of self-determination. This paper displays an adapted version of the SDT to reflect its similarity to the HMM. The continuum displays five types of motivation. These types of motivation are based on the premise that intentional behavior can be correctly understood in terms of the degree to which it is self-regulated versus regulated by forces outside the self (Ryan, 1995). Self-regulation addresses how people take in social values and extrinsic contingencies, and with time, transform them into personal values and self-motivations (Ryan & Deci, 2000). The more one internalizes the behavioral regulation, the more it is seen as a reflection of one's free choice or intrinsically motivated (Deci & Ryan). At one end of the continuum is amotivation (AM), which is behavior that is nonintentional and nonregulated (Deci & Ryan, 2000). At the other end is intrinsic motivation (IM), whereby one engages in an activity because it is interesting or for the satisfaction derived from participation (Baldwin & Caldwell, 2003). Between AM and IM are 3 types of extrinsic motivation (EM), which include external, introjected, and identified

regulations. Extrinsically motivated behaviors vary in the extent to which their regulation is perceived as autonomous, with externally regulated behavior being the least autonomous (Ryan & Deci).

The assessment of psychological self-determination is based on the notion of perceived locus of causality. Malhotra (2004) states that internal perceived causality occurs when athletes feel they have initiated their actions. In contrast, external perceived causality refers to the intentional actions for which one perceives the source of initiation to be outside oneself, such as excessive demands from a parent or coach.

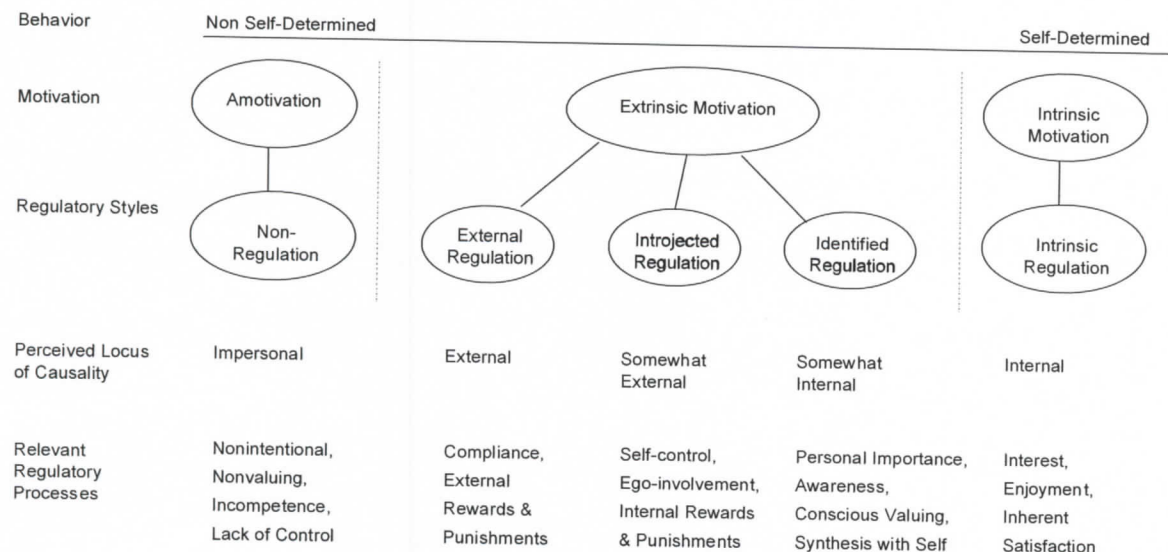


Figure 2: Self-Determination Continuum (Adapted from Deci & Ryan, 1985 and Vallerand, 1997).

Amotivation

In order to fully understand human behavior, Deci and Ryan (1985) state that one needs to understand amotivation. Amotivation occurs when there is no sense of purpose and no expectation of reward (Vallerand & Bissonnette, 1992). This behavior is neither intrinsically nor extrinsically motivated, and is situated at the lowest end of the self-determination continuum

(Deci & Ryan, 1985; 2000). Simply, the lack of intention to act or just “going through the motions” (Deci & Ryan, 2000) results in not placing value on the activity in which one is involved (Ryan, 1995). People with amotivation may have had good reasons to participate in sport in the past, but now are questioning if they should continue doing it.

Intrinsic Motivation

Deci developed the SDT in response to earlier theories that suggested humans do everything for extrinsic rewards (Mannell & Klieber, 1997). “Perhaps no single phenomenon reflects the positive potential of human nature as much as IM” (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p.70). IM refers to the behavior engaged in for itself and for the pleasure and satisfaction derived from participation (Deci, 1971; 1975; Ryan & Deci, 2000). This highly autonomous behavior is usually voluntarily performed and absent of material rewards or constraints (Deci & Ryan, 1985; 1987; Ryan & Deci, 2000). From the time of birth, children, in their healthiest states are active, inquisitive, curious and playful, even in the absence of rewards (Harter, 1978). One with IM has the inherent tendency to seek out novelty and challenges, to extend and exercise one’s capacities, to explore, and to learn (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Research by Ryan and Deci (2000) revealed that not only tangible rewards, but also threats, directives, deadlines, pressured evaluations, and imposed goals, reduce IM. In contrast, acknowledgement of feelings, choice, and opportunities for self-direction were found to enhance IM (Deci & Ryan, 1985). An example of a young athlete who is intrinsically motivated is one that may enjoy running for the sake of involvement itself. There do not need to be awards or recognition for the athlete to run, as the athlete is satisfied with the pleasure derived from simply running.

SDT and HMM have proposed three forms of IM: toward knowledge, toward accomplishment, and toward experiencing stimulation (Pelletier, Fortier, Vallerand, Tuson,

Briere, & Blais, 1995; Vallerand, 1997). The first is the motivation to know, which describes the circumstances in which individuals find satisfaction while learning new things or skills, such as learning a new play in football or finding new ways to fake out a basketball opponent. The second dimension is the motivation to accomplish, which describes the pleasure experienced while one strives to improve on already learned skills or reach new personal goals, such as a tennis player that works on her serve for the pleasure she experiences while trying to hit an ace. Focus is placed on the process of accomplishment rather than the end result (Vallerand & Fortier, 1998). The final dimension is the motivation to experience stimulation, referring to the pleasure of participating in sport to experience stimulating or pleasant sensations, such as a “runners high”.

Flow

Csikszentmihalyi's (1975) theory of flow articulates the elements of enjoyment and suggests that people are intrinsically motivated to engage in activities that produce flow. Csikszentmihalyi states that flow is not dependent upon the objective nature of challenges or the objective level of one's skills, but that flow is entirely dependent on one's perception of the challenges and their skill. This holistic sensation of being totally involved in an activity occurs when there is a match between the perceived challenge of an activity and one's perceived ability in the activity (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975). As Mannell and Kleiber (1997) point out, “It is not the skills people actually have that determine how they feel, but the ones they think they have” (p. 90). Therefore, the individual must be able to structure their consciousness to make flow possible.

By identifying the psychological factors that enhance, inhibit, and disrupt flow, coaches and parents may be better able to assist athletes in achieving optimal experiences. Optimal

experiences occur when there is a feeling of control with one's own actions, a sense of exhilaration, a deep sense of enjoyment that is long cherished and that becomes a landmark in memory of what life should be like (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Involvement in an activity does not guarantee flow will be experienced, because the correct choices must be made and certain conditions must be present (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975).

Flow model.

In an effort to understand the choices that need to be made and conditions that need to be present in the search for flow, Csikszentmihalyi (1975, 1990) developed the flow model (Figure 3), which provides insight into how daily activities can become meaningful and experienced as optimal. The two most important dimensions, represented on the two axes, are challenges and skills. Balance of these two elements is essential for one to experience flow.

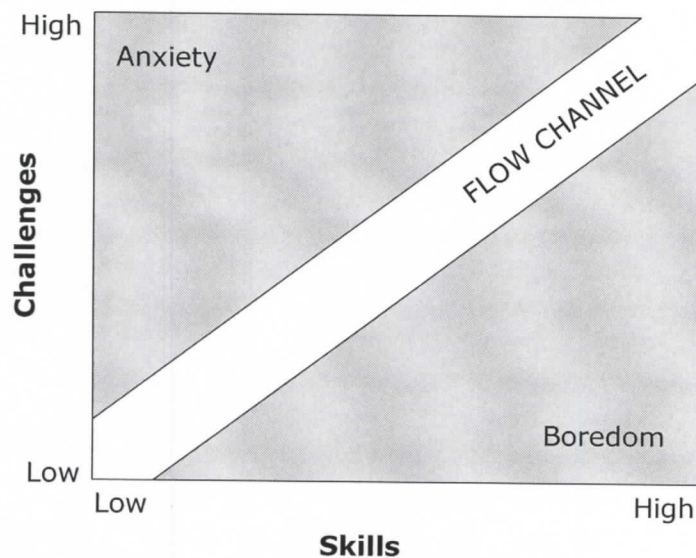


Figure 3. Original Flow Model (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975; 1990)

The flow experience often takes place when one's mind and body are stretched to the limit to accomplish a difficult task (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990), as one cannot enjoy doing the same

thing at the same level for a long period of time. For example, youth are much more likely to experience flow in sports or hobbies than from watching television (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997). Csikszentmihalyi (1997) states that flow acts as a magnet in an effort to learn new skills and to increase challenges. If challenges are too low, boredom may set in. One can get back to flow by increasing the challenges; whereas if the challenges are too great, one can return to flow by learning new skills. This model shows that the flow experience can vary from modest involvement to a more intense, peak involvement. If children are provided with a challenge that is beyond their athletic ability, anxiety is likely to result. People are happiest when the challenge they are facing is equal to the skills they have.

Csikszentmihalyi (1975) outlined the concept of flow and introduced dimensions that are associated with the concept of being “in the zone” or experiencing flow. Perhaps the clearest sign of flow is the merging of action and awareness. This is dependent on one’s concentration levels, when one is able to concentrate their attention and energies on the immediate task at hand, rather than let their mind think about other things, such as their homework, friends, or their chores. An example is a tennis player whose sole focus is on the ball and the opponent, not the people in the stands or players on the court next to him. The loss of self consciousness or loss of ego occurs when an individual has lost focus on evaluations of his or her performance, and thus becomes one with the activity. Another element is the paradox of control, which involves a sense of control over one’s ability to respond successfully to the demands of an experience. Direct and immediate feedback provides information on the successes and failures in the course of the activity, so that the behavior can be adjusted as needed. In flow, one does not stop to evaluate the feedback, as action and reaction have become so well practiced as to be automatic. Finally,

transformation of time is experienced when the sense of time is distorted because the person is completely involved in the activity and not focusing on when it is going to be done.

Flow in sport.

Flow, or being “in the zone,” is a highly sought experience in sport and leads to IM. Jackson (1992) interviewed young adult figure skaters and found those with high flow experiences had a positive mental attitude, high focus and a feeling of readiness. Those with low flow experiences made mistakes, lacked focus, had a negative attitude, and had preparation problems.

The atmosphere created by the coach or parent helps to enhance or undermine the flow experience (Bloom, 2002). In an effort to avoid boredom and loss of interest in an activity, the athletes require incremental challenge to their skills. Csikszentmihalyi, Rathunde, & Whalen (1993) found that the athletes who received emotional and material support from their families tended to have an easier time developing and honing their skills. They further stated that although parents and coaches cannot increase the inborn gifts of children, if the parents had a better understanding of the elements of the equation that are controllable, they may be able to protect and nurture the unique human potentials of young people. Coaches should focus on providing a learning environment for the athletes, because if the athletes enjoy learning, they will focus on the new skill and eventually become more proficient, increasing the opportunity for the achievement of flow.

Russell (2001) identified five factors that disrupt the athletes' flow experience. The first and most influential factor identified was non-optimal environmental and situational influences, which included negative feedback from coach, negative refereeing decision, stoppage in play, environmental distraction, mechanical failure, and concern with what opponents are doing.

Performance errors, such as turnovers and missed third down conversions, were the second factor disrupting flow. Inappropriate focus was the next area, including loss of concentration and excessive performance related worry. The final two, and least influential factors, were non-optimal physical state (e.g. physical injury, pain during performance, and feelings of fatigue) and self-pressure and self-doubt.

Both Deci (1975) and Csikszentmihalyi (1975) have emphasized the importance of challenge, self-testing, skill development and a feeling of accomplishment as important aspects of enjoying an activity. At the same time, they have also emphasized that motivation is also influenced by extrinsic factors, such as tangible rewards, winning, and recognition from others. Research shows, though, that extrinsic rewards undermine the enjoyment of intrinsically interesting activities (Deci).

Extrinsic Motivation

Sport often becomes an intense internal proving ground for the self. People pressure themselves and base their self-worth on their athletic performance, which is extrinsically motivated, rather than their enjoyment of the game (Ryan, 1982). The engagement in EM refers to the performance of an activity to attain contingent outcomes outside the activity (Deci, 1971; Ryan & Deci, 2000). The introduction of extrinsic rewards tends to undermine people's experience of self-determination, induce a shift in perceived locus of causality from internal to external (deCharms, 1968), and consequently their motivation from intrinsic to extrinsic. Extrinsic rewards should not always be avoided. Individuals are unique in that one athlete may be affected by extrinsic rewards and one may not. If an athlete begins with a high level of IM, then a reward may not have a negative affect on the athlete, as it would be seen as a prize instead of a bribe to participate.

Human beings can be proactive and engaged or passive and alienated, largely as a function of the social conditions in which they develop and function (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Research has shown that parents can influence a child's motivation, perceived competence, and enjoyment of sports (Brustad, Babkes, & Smith, 2001). One study revealed that 32% of the children interviewed participated because their parents wanted them to (Byrne, 2003). Children should be involved in sports because they want to, not because they have to (Lee, 1993).

Parents often take their children's sport involvement personally and are driven to keep up, to be accepted, and to be seen as one of the popular crowd (Bigelow et al., 2001). Instead of athletics being centered on the child, the adult-centered motives, such as winning, are now taking its place. There are some parents who automatically sign their child up to play without the consent of the child, some who may bribe their children to participate in sports, and even some parents who willfully punish their children if they choose not to participate. Adults may exude this type of behavior for various reasons, such as social acceptance, achievement by proxy (parents who try to live vicariously through the success of their children), personal pressures, deprivation, experimentation with cultural norms and the necessity of parental roles (Tofler, Knapp, & Drell, 1998). The child may believe that their involvement in sport is for their parents' personal gain, instead of for the benefit of their child, which can eventually lead to withdrawal.

External regulation.

Within the SDT, EM is separated into four categories, yet this paper will focus on the three categories common to both the SDT and HMM. The first is external regulation, which is behavior that is not chosen or self-determined, and may be fueled by a desire for rewards (Vallerand & Bissonnette, 1992) or to avoid punishments (Baldwin & Caldwell, 2003). External regulation refers to doing an activity to satisfy external demands (Ryan & Deci, 2000), such as

from a coach or parent. Regardless of whether the goal of behavior is to obtain rewards or to avoid punishment, the individual experiences an obligation to behave in a specific way, and feels controlled by the reward or the constraint (Deci & Ryan, 1985). External regulation is typically controlled or alienated, and the person's actions have an external perceived locus of causality (Ryan & Deci). A soccer player that participates in the sport to receive trophies or special recognition, or shows up to practice on time so his coach or parents won't reprimand him or so he can start in the upcoming game, is demonstrating external regulation.

Introjected regulation.

Both external regulation and introjected regulation are considered to be controlling or low self-determined forms of motivation. Introjected regulation is a conceptually challenging construct. It occurs when individuals begin to slightly internalize the reasons for their actions and feel that they should partake in an activity, yet action is driven by a concern for the approval of others, guilt, and esteem-contingent beliefs (Baldwin & Caldwell, 2003). In spite of the fact that these pressures are internal to the person, such behaviors are said to have an external perceived locus of causality because the source of their motivation is external to the person's sense of true self or what is really important to them (Malhotra, 2004; Mannell & Kleiber, 1997). Rewards or constraints are now imposed by the individual and not by others, as exhibited with external regulation (Vallerand & Bissonnette, 1992). For example, an adolescent may become more aware of peer pressure in regard to their choices (Baldwin & Caldwell) and this pressure soon may lead to feelings of guilt and internal pressure to act responsibly. An athlete who joins the soccer team to feel good about himself and to be esteemed as a jock by his friends is demonstrating introjected regulation.

Identified regulation.

Identified regulation is a self-determined form of extrinsically motivated behavior. This occurs when a behavior is highly valued by the individual and is perceived as being chosen by oneself (Vallerand & Bissonnette, 1992), but the choice is limited to the particular activity. Baldwin and Caldwell (2003) defined it as being internally associated with behavior that is motivated by the feeling that engaging in an activity is the result of valuing the activity, not being controlled by external rewards. This level of EM leads a person to identify with an action or the value it expresses, and thus personally approving the behavior (Malhotra, 2004). Even though the behavior is extrinsic, it is positive because the individual internalizes the values of working hard. Identified regulation provides the athlete a sense of direction and purpose, instead of obligation and pressure, as the activity is performed because it's a good way to learn things that can be useful in other areas of life. There is a high degree of autonomy associated with identified regulation and has a somewhat internal perceived locus of causality (Malhotra). A soccer player who chooses to stay late after practice to work on his shooting accuracy because he feels it would improve his performance in a game, as well as be useful in other areas of life, is an example of identified regulation.

Self-determination theory in sport.

The results from Vallerand and Losier's (1994) study indicated that athletes who were motivated out of prominent feelings of pleasure and autonomy towards sport participation were also more inclined to behave in a sportspersonlike manner. Self-determined athletes were more respectful and more concerned about the rules, officials, opponents, and also of their own athletic commitment in the sporting environment, compared to athletes who were dominated by extrinsic forms of motivation (Chantal, Robin, Vernat & Bernache-Assollant, 2005).

The CTSA (2005) reports that youth sports need to focus less on winning games or external rewards and more on the child's experience. Gill (1992) has suggested that "competition and a focus on winning may act as extrinsic motivating forces to decrease IM and that the undermining of IM is especially likely for females" (p. 149). Conversely, Snyder and Spreitzer (1979) reported that females had more intrinsic reasons for sport involvement than males, and males had more extrinsic reasons than females. In a study by Deci (1971) involving subjects that were rewarded with money for participating in an interesting puzzle, it was concluded that participation in an interesting activity in order to receive an extrinsic reward led to a decrease in IM. The subjects that were offered money spent significantly less time with the puzzle than the subjects who had not been rewarded for doing the task. Not all extrinsic rewards, though, are shown to decrease IM. Ryan (1982) found that there was an increase in IM when material rewards and verbal feedback were used to convey positive competence information. The IM resulted as long as the feedback and rewards were not used in a manner that controlled or pressured then subjects. Therefore, in order to enhance the IM of all athletes, it is important to provide an environment that is conducive to learning and not focused exclusively on winning.

Being labeled as powerful socializers and role models of children's sport participation (Jambor, 1999), parents look for ways, such as percentile ranks, higher levels of competition, and number of trophies earned to determine how their child is doing compared to his or her peers (Coakley, 2006). This information helps parents assess their children's achievement in relation to their peers, yet it can often cause problems if this is the only way they are valuing the ability of their child. Parents should create a context that fosters IM and identified regulation in an effort to provide the optimal experience for their child.

Self-Efficacy Theory

Bandura's (1977; 1986) self-efficacy theory is defined as a person's belief that he or she is capable of the specific behavior required to produce a desired outcome in a given situation. Simply, if one believes in his or her abilities, the probability of achieving what one has set out to do is higher than if one does not believe in their abilities. As people come upon a situation, they will assess the abilities that are needed to be successful, as well as assess whether or not their own abilities will bring them this success. Bandura (1997) stated that self-efficacy helps to determine people's choice of activities and how much effort and persistence they put forth. Therefore, similar to those with higher levels of intrinsic motivation and competence, those with higher self-efficacy are known to exert more effort and be more persistent when faced with obstacles or failure. Those less efficacious, or with less intrinsic motivation, are known to demonstrate less tenacity when faced with the same obstacles. The strength of people's convictions in their own effectiveness is likely to affect whether they will even try to cope with given situations (Bandura, 1977), and either quit or pursue the challenge.

Bandura's (1997) self-efficacy theory focuses on expectancies for success and proposes that efficacy expectations are the major determinant of goal setting, activity choice, willingness to expend effort, and persistence. When performance involves interdependence, success can greatly depend on the efficacy beliefs of all team members. Bandura (1999) stated that if people are to be successful and work together, there must be a high sense of self-efficacy present.

Bandura (1997) described two kinds of expectancy beliefs, which are outcome expectations and efficacy expectations. Outcome expectations refer to the belief that certain behaviors will lead to certain outcomes, such as the conviction that one can successfully execute the behavior required to produce the outcomes (Bandura, 1977). An example of this is the belief

that practice improves performance. The athlete is more likely to practice if he or she envisions favorable outcomes as a result of the effort in practice. Efficacy expectations refer to the belief that one can effectively organize and execute the behaviors necessary to produce the outcome (Bandura, 1997). They determine how much effort one will expend and how long one will persist in the face of obstacles (Bandura, 1977). Therefore, the stronger the perceived self-efficacy, the stronger the effort will be from the individual. An athlete with the confidence that practicing hard will result in a win the next game is an example of efficacy expectation. Outcome and efficacy expectation alone will not produce the desired performance if the capabilities are lacking, but with the right skills and intrinsic motivation, the goals may be accomplished.

Determinants of personal efficacy are derived from four principal sources of information: performance accomplishments, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion, and emotional arousal (Bandura, 1977; 1997). Performance accomplishments are based on personal mastery experiences, whereby success will raise the expectations and failures will lower them (Bandura, 1977). Repeated success will likely lower the negative impact of occasional failures. Many expectations are derived from vicarious experience (Bandura, 1977). If one watches another person that is perceived as similar to oneself, attempt and succeed at a difficult situation, they may believe that they should be able to succeed as well. Vicarious experiences are important sources of information, and research suggests that, although teachers, parents, and coaches make good role models for teaching skills, peers may make better models (Schunk, 1995). Therefore, coaches should identify athletes with similar skills and have them challenge each other in an attempt to increase the chances of success through vicarious experience. Verbal persuasion refers to when people are led, through suggestion, into believing they can cope successfully with what has overwhelmed them in the past (Bandura, 1977). It is aimed at raising outcome expectations

rather than enhancing self-efficacy. The encouragement and support from teammates to push through a difficult task is an example of verbal persuasion. The impact of verbal persuasion may vary depending on the perceived credibility of the persuaders' expertise, prestige, and trustworthiness (Bandura, 1977). Finally, emotional arousal is when people rely partly on their state of physiological arousal in judging their anxiety and vulnerability to stress (Bandura, 1977). High arousal usually weakens performance; therefore, athletes are more likely to succeed under levels of low arousal.

Self-efficacy is also linked to IM and CET. McAuley, Wraith, and Duncan (1991) reported the similarities between self-efficacy and IM in aerobic dance participants. Those with more self-efficacy perceived themselves to enjoy exercise more, put forth more effort, experienced less pressure-tension, and felt more competent than those with less self-efficacy.

Self-efficacy theory in sport.

Self-efficacy has been the most extensively used theory for investigating motivational issues in sport and exercise (Roberts, 1992). According to Bandura (1977), performance accomplishments provide the most dependable and influential source of self-efficacy. Bandura's theory is used to approach challenging situations, such as sport. A high degree of self-efficacy is an essential component of successful athletic performance (Manzo, 2002). It is possible that athletes competing at higher levels of ability might have higher performance expectations than those competing at lower levels of ability (Weigand & Stockham, 2000). When faced with failure, athletes with high self-efficacy are more persistent, work harder, and are more likely to choose tasks they can accomplish, whereas those with low self-efficacy have shown decreased performance (Schunk, 1995). For example, a volleyball player who attributes her success to the mistakes made by the other team, experiences little to no increase in self-efficacy. If this same

player believed her success was due to hard work and skill, she will likely experience an increase in perceived self-efficacy. In Cleary and Zimmerman's (2001) study on adolescent basketball players, the goals and strategies the players developed prior to free throws were also related to self-efficacy beliefs. Higher self-efficacy was displayed in those athletes with specific outcome goals and technique-related strategies. The athletes with focus on specific goals and strategies displayed higher confidence levels and enjoyment while practicing free throws.

Achievement Goal Theory

Just as individuals will be intrinsically motivated to approach situations in which they perceive themselves to be competent, are self-efficacious, and anticipate success, they may make competence judgments based on 2 different goal criteria in achievement settings through task or ego involvement (Nicholls, 1984; 1989). Achievement goal theory (AGT) focuses on understanding the function and the meaning of goal directed actions, based on how participants define success and how they judge whether or not they have demonstrated competence in achievement contexts (Ames, 1992; Dweck, 1999; Nicholls; Sarrazin, Vallerand, Guillet, Pelletier, & Cury, 2002). AGT proposes that goal orientations are developed and altered through various socialization processes, including the motivational climate created by parents and coaches (Nicholls).

Task involvement.

Task involvement occurs when the goal of the individual is to master tasks, solve problems, or make progress (Sarrazin et al., 2002). Task-involved people feel successful and competent when they have learned something new, experienced skill improvement, mastered the task at hand, and/or given their best effort (Nicholls, 1989; Smith, 2006). Perceptions of success and failure are determined by whether or not personal performance standards were improved,

such as achieving a personal best in the 50-yard dash. Coaches that place emphasis on the learning process and progress of an athlete, along with the cooperation of teammates, are task-involved. Higher levels of IM are most likely to take place when task involvement is encouraged, as an athlete invests in an activity for its own sake and thus, considers it to be an end in itself (Nicholls). A proneness to endorse sportspersonship attitudes has been associated with athletes displaying a dominant task goal orientation (i.e. success is self-referenced and translates into striving for personal improvement and mastery) (Duda, Olson, & Templin, 1991; Dunn & Causgrove Dunn, 1999).

Athletes who participated in a predominately task-oriented climate reported greater effort-based beliefs of sport success, positive perceptions of leader behavior towards low achieving participants, positive attitudes towards physical activity, and lower performance-related worry (Seifriz, Duda, & Chi, 1992; Papaioannou, 1995; Theeboom, De Knop, & Weiss, 1995). Task involvement has a positive main effect on scholastic, athletic, and job competence, whereas ego involvement interacted with sport self-confidence to predict lower levels of scholastic, athletic, and global self-perceptions (Ryska, 2002).

Ego involvement.

A predominant concept in the field of social psychology, ego involvement occurs when the goal of the individual is to avoid being perceived as incompetent, while being able to demonstrate a high level of talent (Sarrazin et al., 2002). When ego involvement is encouraged, the self-determined motivation decreases as a feeling of pressure to maintain self-esteem is experienced (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Vallerand, Deci, & Ryan, 1987), and the activity becomes a means to an end (Nicholls, 1989). The goal of ego-involved individuals is to show that one is superior to relevant others (Elliott & Church, 1997) or that one can perform equally well but

exert less effort (Nicholls). Duda et al. (1991) found that ego-oriented athletes were more likely to approve of intentionally injuring another while task-oriented individuals were more likely to endorse sportspersonlike behaviors.

Athletes with dominant ego orientation have reported unsportspersonlike behaviors such as physical intimidation, deception, negative attitudes, and cheating, in an effort to be the best (Carpenter & Yates, 1997; Duda et al., 1991; Dunn & Causgrove Dunn, 1999; Roberts, Treasure, & Kavussanu, 1996). Not only is it the athlete that may have a dominant ego orientation, but the coach as well. Coaches that place emphasis on winning, punish athletes for mistakes, and encourage an environment that promotes rivalry among teammates are fostering athletes' ego involvement.

Unlike task-involved individuals, a person with ego involvement might not gain a feeling of success from personal improvement or knowing one did his best, but if one tried his best and failed, there would be a feeling of incompetence. Therefore, if ego-involved athletes start to question their ability in order to meet the performance demands or to successfully compete with others, they are more likely to reduce persistence and avoid the challenge at hand (Nicholls, 1989). When faced with evaluation of performance, ego-oriented athletes tend to respond negatively, avoid challenging tasks, exert minimal effort, and are reported to have elevated anxiety and a disruption in concentration (Duda, 1989). Roberts (2001) concluded that although some researchers have argued that ego involvement may be necessary for success in elite sport, being task-involved is beneficial, as it promotes higher levels of physical competence, providing stronger effort and persistence. AGT predicts that elite sport is characterized by ego involvement because of this inherent emphasis on winning (Duda, Chi, Newton, Walling, & Catley, 1995). In a competitive environment this attitude can lead to a decrease in IM and self-determined forms

of EM. As one moves out of recreational sports and into a more elite role, the inherent goal of sport is focused on winning versus learning.

Motivational climate.

The motivational climate created by coaches and parents through the socialization processes (Nicholls, 1989) within sport settings can have significant effects on the goal orientations athletes develop (Ebbeck & Becker, 1994). Climates can influence the effort, persistence, cognitions, behavior and emotions of individuals in the physical activity context (Ntoumanis & Biddle, 1999). Over time, and with continued support, children will adopt values and beliefs similar to their parents (Eccles & Harrold, 1991). This climate will reflect the actions of the coaches and parents, such as their use of rewards, punishment, and feedback (Ames, 1992). A successful climate would be created as athletes' goal orientations become more in line with the climate's emphasis, and the athletes themselves contribute to the creation of a particular motivational climate (Smith, 2006).

The optimal climate that emphasizes personal improvement is task-oriented. Parents and coaches that encourage a task-oriented climate place emphasis on the team, as well as individual goals, provide action plans for improvement, value effort over outcome, and persist in the face of difficulties (Newton, Duda, & Yin, 2000; Smith, 2006). Duda (2001) mentions that a task-oriented climate should foster perceptions of competence, because the self-referenced criteria (e.g., effort) underlying competence judgments and ensuing feelings of success are more controllable and achievable compared to normative criteria (e.g., winning). Sarrazin et al. (2002) and examined whether coaches are perceived to evaluate and reward their athletes on the basis of task or ego competence criteria. The results showed that a task involving motivational climate was more conducive to the satisfaction of the three psychological needs of competence,

autonomy, and relatedness, compared with an ego involving climate (Mallett & Hanrahan, 2004). Parents and coaches that encourage an ego-oriented climate place an emphasis on winning, provide talented athletes more attention than those with less skill, and give positive reinforcement for the outcome as opposed to effort from the athletes (Newton et al., 2000; Treasure & Roberts, 1998). This may lead the players to believe they will be punished when a mistake is made, and may also increase rivalry among the teammates, due to the need to compete for attention.

Parents and coaches play a significant role in the development of the athlete. Younger children have not solidified their personal goal orientations and it is likely that children may be more sensitive to the motivational climates than older adolescents. Unfortunately, as children get older, involvement in higher levels of competition increases, which leads to higher levels of ego-involved motivational climates (Chaumeton & Duda, 1988). With increased maturity, individuals become more independent and autonomous in their thinking. Wankel and Kreisel (1985) state that as the athletes get older, there will be less emphasis on pleasing others, and more importance on the enjoyment or excitement of the game.

A young athlete's decision to withdraw from sport is determined by his or her achievement goals and by the perception of success in achieving these goals (Maehr & Nicholls, 1980). Nicholls (1989) stated that in achievement settings, a task-involved climate would be associated with adaptive motivational responses, such as high effort, persistence, and commitment. Conversely, in an ego-involved climate, there would be a greater tendency to be linked to maladaptive motivational responses (e.g. attribution of failure to lack of ability, use of ineffective strategies, focus on ability), and decreased motivation (e.g. low levels of effort, commitment, and persistence) (Ames & Archer, 1988). Two studies (Seifriz et al., 1992;

Walling, Duda, & Chi, 1993) on the perceptions of a task-oriented climate by high school girls and boys confirmed these statements. Nicholls confirmed that if individuals are in an environment long enough, their natural disposition to either a task or ego orientation might change.

Comparison of Motivational Theories

SDT and AGT share certain characteristics and also have their differences. Overall, these studies have shown that task involvement is positively related to IM, while ego-involvement is negatively related to it (Duda, 2001; Ntoumanis & Biddle, 1999). Dispositional and situational factors influence the type of experience derived from sport participation (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Vallerand, 1997), and influence motivation through autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Vallerand stated that goal orientations are also known to influence these three psychological needs. Duda et al. (1995) suggested that differences in goal orientations may influence IM through their mediating effect on either perception of competence or perceived locus of causality.

Reinboth et al. (2004) found that based on Nicholls (1989) AGT, perceptions that the coach was mastery focused emerged as a positive predictor of athletes' perceptions of competence. This facet of the social environment could be considered one of the most crucial dimensions of a task-involving motivational climate (Ames, 1992; Newton et al., 2000). In the sport context, demonstrating improvement and effort are often more controllable sources of competence evaluation, making it easier for athletes to feel good about their abilities.

Studies have shown that when subjects become ego-involved in an activity, they are likely to lose IM for the task (Butler, 1988; Ryan, Koestner, & Deci, 1991; Vallerand, Gauvin, & Halliwell, 1986). Therefore, ego orientation is more likely related to controlling, rather than self

determined motivation (Ntoumanis, 2001). Evidence in the literature suggests that ego orientation undermines autonomy and fosters an external locus of causality, whereas task orientation facilitates the autonomy of behavior (Brunel, 1999; Ryan, 1982). Ryska (2002) identified athletic identity as a negative predictor of academic, social, and behavioral competence among athletes who were high ego, low task motivated, whereas athletes with high task, low ego motivation had greater academic and vocational competence. The athletes with high ego orientation are not likely to feel autonomous because their conception of ability will lead to a concern with the adequacy of their competence (Ntoumanis). This assessment may help coaches and parents identify individuals whose sport experience places them at risk for decreased perceived competence in non-sport-related achievement activities.

In regard to the need for relatedness, Duda (1992) suggests that the ego-involved person, who is constantly comparing his or her performance to other athletes, is unlikely to strengthen the social links amongst the teammates. The task-involved athlete is not focused on the peer to peer comparison, suggesting that there would be fewer relatedness issues. Reinboth et al. (2004) stated there was a stronger sense of relatedness on the team when the coach provided assistance and emotional support to the players. This is in line with SDT (Deci & Ryan, 2000) which suggests that showing care for and valuing the athlete as a person, without providing special attention based on performance, should lead the athlete to feel more valued and attached to others on the team.

Although SDT and AGT have conceptual differences, these social-cognitive theories of motivation have several similarities. Ryan and Deci (1989) attempted to integrate the two theories, as they complement each other in explaining motivated behavior in achievement contexts. Both theories of motivation emphasize the way individuals construe the meaning of an

activity and how it will influence the quality of their engagement in it (Ntoumanis, 2001).

Ntoumanis further emphasizes the role of social factors, such as competition, cooperation, and social evaluation, as “antecedents of achievement-related behavior” (p. 400). Brunel (1999) has shown that a positive relationship exists between task orientation and the different forms of IM. Both theories agree that the role of perceived competence is what guides achievement behavior (Ntoumanis). Task orientation is shown to satisfy the needs for autonomy as well as competence.

As one moves out of recreational sports and into a more elite role, the inherent goal of sport is focused on winning versus learning. AGT predicts that elite sport is characterized by ego involvement because of this inherent emphasis on winning (Duda, Chi, Newton, Walling, & Catley, 1995). In a competitive environment this attitude can lead to a decrease in IM and self-determined forms of EM. Conversely, Reeve and Deci (1996) found that winning increased IM through increased perceptions of competence. The individuals in the study felt successful in accomplishment, leading them to feel better about their efforts and ability, which positively influenced their self-determined motivation.

Perceptions of Parental Support

Horn and Weiss (1991) have emphasized the importance that young children place on feedback from parents, coaches and teachers. Parents are the central element to the social support system of young athletes (Lafferty & Dorrell, 2006). A large number of studies on sport socialization point out the importance of parental influence on children’s involvement in sport (Green & Chalip, 1997; Lewko & Greendorfer, 1988). Many youth sport programs would not have existed if it weren’t for dedicated parents and the sacrifices they have made for their children. Parents also help to shape the child’s psychological development through their involvement in their child’s athletic experience (Cote & Haye, 2002). A healthy and successful

sport experience will depend on the parents' ability to instill confidence and self-esteem in athletes.

The literature suggests that it is the perceived amount of parental support that has the most influence on an athlete. Collins and Barber (2005) reported that athletes who perceived their parents to have high expectations exhibited greater levels of confidence than those who perceived parents to have lower expectations. Young athletes who perceived that their parents had realistic expectations, provided support and encouragement and rarely responded negatively to performance outcomes exhibited more enjoyment in sport, when compared with their counterparts (Brustad, 1996; Leff & Hoyle, 1995; Scanlan & Lewthwaite, 1986). Hoyle and Leff (1997) found that parental support was positively associated with participants' enjoyment of tennis. Good performance led to increased enjoyment, only if the children perceived their parents to be a positive part of their athletic experience. Babkes and Weiss (1999) examined children's perceptions of parental influence in competitive soccer and concluded that parents who were perceived as positive role models, had positive beliefs in their child's competency, and gave frequent positive feedback, were associated with athletes who had higher perceived competence, enjoyment, and intrinsic motivation. Additionally, it is important for parents of girls with low levels of competence to encourage their girls to participate in physical activity. Davison, Downs, and Birch (2006) reported that young girls with higher perceived athletic competence at age 9 received higher parental support and were more physically active at age 11.

Power and Woolger (1994) reported that parental support was positively associated with child enthusiasm, whereas parental performance outcome (ego-oriented) goals and directiveness showed curvilinear effects. The parents reporting moderate levels of directiveness and performance outcome goals reported having children with the greatest amount of enthusiasm for

swimming, versus those that provided too little or too much directiveness. The children in this study tended to model their swimming behavior after that of their mother, yet only girls used their fathers' as a role model. Duda and Hom (1993) highlighted that it is the child's perception of his or her parents' goal orientation, versus the parents' actual goal orientation, which is important. They found a positive relationship between the task and ego orientation of youth basketball players' perceptions of their parents' degree of task and ego orientation. Children high in task orientation perceived their parents to be high in task orientation, and children high in ego orientation perceived their parents to be high in ego orientation. Ebbeck and Becker (1994) found that perceived parental goal orientations were a primary predictor of motivational goal orientations in youth soccer players. Task involvement was positively related to the confidence the parents instilled in their child, and ego involvement was positively related to cognitive anxiety derived from the parents.

In an effort to develop an optimal sport experience for the child, the perception athletes have of the parental support may be what influences positive coping strategies (Brustad, 1996). Lafferty and Dorrell (2006) examined the performance coping skills of swimmers and whether the coping strategies changed with their perception of parental support. Results showed that the ability to adapt the coping skills to different situations is dependent on the perceptions of perceived parental support. It was concluded that lack of parental support, or support that was perceived to be contingent on the performance outcomes, will have a negative emotional effect on the child. The athletes may then be less inclined to improve performance, as they may feel the rewards for success may be limited. When the perceptions of parental support were low, the swimmers used coping strategies such as self-blame and venting of emotion. If they were unable

to cope with an event, they may have turned to denial, avoidance, or the use of drugs and alcohol (Lafferty & Dorrell).

High levels of perceived parental support can sometimes negatively affect the athlete. In Lafferty and Dorrell's (2006) study, some swimmers, who perceived their parents to be highly supportive, felt the need to respond to a poor performance by increasing the training, in an effort to live up to parental expectations and not let them down. Scanlan and Lewthwaite's (1986) study on youth wrestlers revealed that the parental pressure was a major cause of pre-competitive stress. For many children, the pressure forced upon them by sport involvement can lead to low self-esteem, excessive anxiety, and aggressive behavior (Huang et al., 1999). These children may eventually experience "sport burnout" and develop a lifelong avoidance of physical activity (Hellstedt, 1988). This increased pressure to succeed has led young athletes to experience higher levels of self-confidence, but also high competitive anxiety, as they are concerned about how their performance outcomes may effect the interactions with their parents (Brustad, 1996; Collins & Barber, 2005). Therefore, as Power and Woolger (1994) stated, the parents should attempt to provide moderate levels of support for their children. If an athlete is conditioned to cope with a stressful event, when faced again with the same or similar situation, it may be perceived as less threatening, and they may be better able to accept a decline in their performance.

The theoretical research provided has shown that sport involvement has the opportunity to influence the lives of millions of youth in America. The environment provided by parents can impact these children positively or negatively and the motivation of children has proven to be the primary factor of whether they continue sport or drop out of sport.

Management Implications

Young children need to be given every opportunity to feel successful. There are societal pressures on parents to keep their children involved in organized programs, and sport participation is an attractive option. Children participate in various sports, ranging from recreational to competitive and unstructured to highly structured. Youth sport can promote positive values, such as teamwork, discipline, and a feeling of success, if it provides positive learning experiences and keeps the children's goals in mind. Sport involvement can also provide children who may be at risk of gang involvement or other negative social behavior with a positive, developmental experience that helps them avoid such problems.

Sport is a good way for parents to spend time with their children. Youth sport parents register their child for youth sport, drive their child to practices and games, spend money to provide their child with the proper equipment, and provide emotional support throughout their athletic career. However, parental involvement can be negative, as well as positive. Oftentimes, parents who are too involved in their child's athletic career contribute to their child's burnout through the pressure placed on their child. An environment should be created by the parents and coaches that can assist athletes in their achievement of the optimal sport experiences and maintain their motivation toward sport.

Physical and skill development occur at different times for different children. Understanding this will help parents and children appreciate the reasons why their children are not performing at the same level as others. Many youth sport programs fail by introducing competition too early. The emphasis on results instead of skills may create a high level of anxiety. The competitive environment and the importance it places on winning can lead children to attempt to gain a competitive edge through illegal substance use or to coaches increasing the

intensity of practices, eventually leading to children's burnout. Involvement on the "top" team may be a mistake for less-skilled children. Parents should consider placing their child on a lower level team that is better suited to their ability level. Playing on a winning team on a level above one's ability may be detrimental, in that personal success may suffer, and the athlete may not feel a sense of contribution to the team's success. A sense of contribution is more important for the child than winning, as a lack of playing time can eventually lead to lack of enjoyment, frustration, and withdrawal from sport.

Parents should adopt a moderate level of involvement with their child's athletic career, displaying encouragement, controlling their own emotions, and recognizing that the game is for their child. Children will be more intrinsically motivated when sport involvement is viewed as an opportunity to have fun, learn skills and increase confidence, and is not focused solely on winning. Parents can inadvertently turn sport into a pressurized situation when the competitive element is over-emphasized and they find themselves comparing their child's performance with others. This pressure can lead the child to view winning as the only acceptable outcome, and most of their energies will be spent trying not to make mistakes in an effort to please their parents. Once a mistake is made, the pressure may lead the athlete to make excuses and blame others, often decreasing their perception of competence.

Motivating children involves more than a simple high five or pat on the back after a good play, or punishment for a negative performance, such as extra sprints. Most importantly, it is imperative to gain an understanding of what the most important motivational factors are for each child and how to use this knowledge to attain the optimal sport experience. What motivates one boy or girl may not necessarily motivate another. Some athletes may be more motivated during competition than in practice, or vice versa. The parents and coaches should understand that each

athlete is unique and carries different interests, desires, opinions, and attitudes toward sport. A better understanding of these characteristics, along with the importance each athlete places on sport, can help the coach increase the opportunities for optimal sport experiences. Each sport situation will have different psychological motivating factors on the athletes. For example, a child may be intrinsically motivated to play basketball, as he knows he is good at the sport and has fun when he is playing with his friends. The same child may not be as motivated to play football, for example, as he may have fear of injury due to the high contact nature of the sport, and he has not mastered the basic skills of the sport.

Parents can approach the athletic careers of their child in a variety of ways. Based on the research discussed in this paper, suggestions for parents are provided below, in an effort to create the optimal sport experiences for child. The most important point to understand is that a suggestion that may work for one child may not work for another, as it is the support the child perceives that is essential.

Achieving Optimal Sport Experiences through Cognitive Evaluation Theory (CET)

CET proposes that individuals have three basic needs that encourage intrinsically motivated behavior and contribute to healthy psychological growth. These are the needs of autonomy, relatedness, and competence. When these needs are met, self-motivation and mental health are the result, yet when these needs are not met it can lead to a decrease in motivation and well being.

Autonomy.

Autonomy is defined as the perception of choice and the feeling that one is the initiator of one's own actions. Parents can help their children gain a sense of autonomy through the following actions:

- Let the child make their own sport decisions. Choosing a sport and deciding how long to stick with it should be the child's choice, because the sport loses its fun when the child is not intrinsically motivated or feels pressured to compete. Encourage participation in a variety of sports so the child can choose which sports are interesting through trial and error.
- Help the child become self-reliant. Children will succeed when the parent encourages the goals of the children, not their own goals. When the children are younger (ages 5-8), they may need more help getting ready for practices or games and may thrive on the support of the parents. As the child gets older (ages 9-11), he or she should begin to display a sense of independence. This can be done by holding the child responsible for having his or her gear ready for practices and games, knowing the daily schedule, finishing their homework on time, and maintaining good grades. Around the age of 12-15 when the child is becoming involved in competitive sport, along with the previous mentioned responsibilities, he or she can begin to take more of a leadership role on the team, help the coach set up for practice, and set a positive example for other teammates to model their behavior after.
- Acknowledge the child's decisions and be supportive of their athletic career. For example, talk to the child about making good moral decisions, such as fair play, respect, and leadership, not decisions such as harm toward others, cheating, or drug use. The more knowledge the child has about good sportpersonship and the more perceived support from the parents, the better the chance will be for the child to continue the sport.

Relatedness.

Relatedness pertains to feeling that one is securely connected to and understood by significant others, such as peers and family. Athletes often gain a sense of belonging or a feeling of importance in a team setting, and the need to be accepted by others or belong to a group is critical to a healthy perception of self. Parents can help their child gain a sense of relatedness through the following actions:

- Emphasize social interaction. Sport provides an avenue for children to communicate with other athletes they may not have approached before, as well as communicate with the coach, building their social skills. Too often, sport fosters cliques within a team. To decrease the likelihood of this occurring, the coach should have the children pick a new partner with whom to stretch or perform a drill in practice. This will not only help the children get to know each other better on a personal level, but also enable them to know the strengths and weaknesses of their teammates.
- Encourage the child to develop close, supportive friendships through sport. Children will often stay in sport when they have friends who are involved. Parents can assist by forming a carpool to take their children, as well as other teammates, to practice or games. This will allow time for the children to bond off of the playing field, as well as free the parents of the responsibility of driving to each practice.
- Communication is essential. Building positive communication between the athletes, coaches, and parents is key to the child attaining an optimal sport experience and ensuring that all parties have the same goals in mind for the child. On the playing field, children need to communicate to let their teammates know, for example, if they should pass the basketball, if there is a defender approaching, or if they should shoot the ball.

- Listen. Part of great communication is the ability to listen. Parents need to listen to what the children say and analyze their responses. A child may be telling the parents that he or she does not want to play the sport, yet the parents may not have understood the message. This could lead the child to be depressed due to lack of enthusiasm for the sport.
- Focus on sport as a family activity, such as traveling together to and from games or tournaments, talking about experiences, and providing emotional support, win or lose. Children need to understand that they are not the only ones experiencing feelings of frustration in a loss or doubt of their ability. Parents should give examples of times during their sport career or in their lives when they encountered the same experiences or feelings, along with ways to cope during these situations.

Competence.

Perceived competence is the level of talent the athlete believes that he or she has in the specific sport or skill. Youth who perceive themselves as competent persist longer at a specific skill, maintain interest in improving that skill, and experience more positive experiences, whereas low perceived competence may lead to a decrease in motivation and eventual withdrawal. Higher levels of competence can assist athletes in attaining their goals and provide them with a sense of satisfaction as they feel effective in their sport. Parents can help children increase competence through the following actions:

- Emphasize skill development. Ensure the coaches provide adequate training and reinforcement of basic skills, as well as development of new skills, to allow the child to successfully perform an activity, which in turn, will build their confidence. For example, a soccer player will be able to act morally, as he or she will be able to utilize the proper

dribbling skills needed to get past an opponent, versus simply shoving the opponent off of the ball.

- Set achievable goals. The athlete, parent, and coach need to set realistic individual and team goals to show progressive improvement in skill level. The athlete should understand how his or her individual talents will fit into the overall team goals. Assist the child in goal setting by writing down short term and long term goals, as well as steps to achieve those goals. Stress the importance of progressing in small steps in order to attain the main goal. Revisit the goals periodically to show the child a sense of accomplishment.
- Know the goals of the league. Along with setting personal and team goals, it is also important to know how competitive the sports league is, and whether it promotes all athletes to play (recreational) or places emphasis on winning (competitive), thus decreasing the playing time of the lower-skilled athletes. The goals of the athlete must be in line with the goals of the league to increase the opportunities for the athlete to achieve optimal sport experiences.

Achieving Optimal Sport Experiences through Self-Efficacy

The importance of competence is at the center of the self-efficacy theory. Self-efficacy is a person's belief that he or she is capable of the specific behavior required to produce a desired outcome in a given situation. Simply, if one believes in their abilities, the probability of achieving what one has set out to do is higher than if one does not believe in their abilities. The most powerful source of self-efficacy is past performance, and it is enhanced through direct skill development and goal setting. The other three sources of self-efficacy are vicarious experience, verbal persuasion, and emotional arousal. Parents can help increase self-efficacy through the following actions:

- Reinforcement through verbal persuasion. Provide and promote positive feedback that is clear and specific, yet be careful not to interfere with the coaches, as the child needs to be given a consistent message. When the child is young, reinforcement can be continuous, but it should be intermittent as they get older. For example, tell the child that the way he set his feet up prior to making the basketball shot was perfect and to strive for that each time, or give praise for the strong effort he gave to hustle down the court on defense after the rebound. Reinforcement can also come from the teammates, such as cheering on a batter in baseball, or praising a teammate after a great pass that led to a goal in soccer.
- Establish role models. Vicarious experiences are important sources of information, and research suggests that teachers, parents, and coaches make good role models for teaching skills. For example, a mother may have been a college athlete in soccer, thus making her a role model to her child that helps to peak the child's interest in soccer. For older children, peers may make better role models. Parents should help the child make appropriate comparisons with peers of similar ability. A child who has been competing in recreational soccer for a year should not compare himself to a peer who has been competing competitively for 4 years.
- Decrease emotional arousal. High arousal can lead to a decline in the child's performance. To decrease these occurrences and calm the child down prior to a game, discuss breathing techniques or have the child listen to his or her favorite music. The child can also mentally rehearse, or envision himself performing the task perfectly. During the game, have the child practice a routine to get them mentally prepared, such as tapping the bat on the plate before a hit or bouncing the basketball 3 times before taking a free throw.

Achieving Optimal Sport Experiences through Flow

It is important for parents to understand the needs of their child. The needs are developed at a young age and are a continual work in progress, changing as the children get older. Flow is the feeling people get when they are intrinsically involved in an activity and the skill level matches the level of challenge. However, in order to experience flow, both the skills of the athlete and the challenge should be moderate to high. If the challenge of the sport is more than the child can handle, they may become highly aroused, creating an intense pressure, and eventually decreasing the opportunity to experience flow. Similar to self-efficacy, the parent and child should set challenging, but achievable and clearly defined goals, and make sure these goals also reflect those of the league. Parents can assist in the occurrence of flow by being a positive role model, along with the following actions:

- Challenge and skill balance. Spend time in mutual activities, and as the child grows, adjust the level of activities accordingly. Parents should focus on achieving a balance between what makes their child happy and what motivates their child to succeed. Encourage the child to participate in activities in which they already feel confident, yet explain to the child that it is okay to push past their comfort zone and to try new and more challenging activities. Coaches should slowly introduce new drills or activities into their existing activity plan, to increase the challenge, so the child does not become bored.
- Provide proper equipment. It is important to remove any distractions from the child in order to experience flow, which includes making sure the child has the appropriate clothes and equipment to succeed. Children who fear injury as a result of participation or feel they don't fit in with the other kids may not experience flow due to the distraction.

- Decrease self-consciousness. Children may feel like a failure after a bad game, or they may have a fear of looking bad to their peers or parents. Children who are over-concerned about making mistakes have difficulty experiencing flow. Parents must help their child understand that they love them no matter what the outcome and that fun is the most important element of the game. As long as the child gave their best effort and didn't give up, they should feel a sense of accomplishment.
- Decrease distractions. In order to focus solely on the activity, the athlete must not be bothered by distractions. Parents and coaches must not yell at the children, and they should be a cheerleader for the entire team. If a player on the opposing team makes a great pass or shot, it is also respectful to cheer for them, as this is setting a positive example for the children.
- Assist in coaching. Teams with players of multiple skill levels should have the coaches identify the experienced and competent athletes to have them assist in developing the skills of those with less ability. This will help maintain the skilled athlete's interest in the sport and present them with the optimal challenges that contribute to flow.

Achieving Optimal Sport Experiences through Intrinsic Motivation (IM)

A young athlete has IM when the behavior is engaged in for the pleasure and satisfaction derived from voluntary participation, rather than material rewards or constraints. The support of parents, coaches, and peers is essential to increase and maintain the intrinsic motivation of the athletes. The passion found in youth when they begin playing sports is difficult to maintain as they get older and external rewards, such as trophies, scholarships, and peer recognition, become the motivating factors. The external rewards that accompany success may cause a problem if the athlete begins to participate for the reward, rather than the enjoyment of the game. If the athlete

feels coerced to perform, has no control over the rewards, or when the rewards go away, he or she may ultimately lose motivation for the sport. Therefore, in line with competence, the internal rewards, such as fun and improvement in sport, should be emphasized, as they will help to increase the athlete's intrinsic motivation and ensure continued interest and participation. Parents can help increase intrinsic motivation through the following actions:

- Communicate at an early age. Expose the child to a variety of sports to find out what the child finds genuinely enjoyable and increase those opportunities. This can be accomplished by simply playing catch, roller skating, kicking the soccer ball, or riding bikes.
- Provide feedback and encouragement focusing on what the athlete did well, not the outcome. In team sports, winning the game is out of the children's control, but the effort put forth is under their control. Children need to be taught that it is okay to fail, as failure can be used as a source of motivation and feedback to improve.
- Winning should not be the only goal of competition. The first question out of the parent's mouth should not be "Did you win?" Winning is important, especially at the elite level, but for youth, emphasis should be on improving skills, discipline, sportspersonship, following the rules, and fun. The lessons learned from losing a game can be more important than winning.
- Ensure the coach is providing activities or drills that are fun, especially for the young children. In soccer, for example, the children can be taught dribbling skills and then be split into teams to practice their new skills in a relay race. Another example to work on dribbling and possession skills is to let each child have a soccer ball, and while trying to keep possession of their own ball, they try to kick their teammate's ball out of the circle.

For speed work drills, the team can do what is called “leapfrog.” The athletes lay down in a line and one at a time, each player sprints while jumping over the bodies of the teammates.

- Avoid putting pressure on the child about how much playing time they receive and their level of performance. Parents should not take the game too seriously or be too harsh on the children for their performance. A positive comment could be “Great game. You gave it your all out on the field today!”

Achieving Optimal Sport Experiences through Identified Regulation

Identified regulation is a self-determined form of extrinsic motivation. It is displayed when an athlete chooses to participate in a specific activity and internalizes the values of hard work, which they feel can ultimately influence other areas of life. This choice allows the child to gain a sense of autonomy and thus increases the intrinsic motivation. Parents can help increase identified regulation through the following actions:

- Explain the benefits of sport. Help the child understand the personal benefits they can obtain from being active, such as increased health, physical fitness, and skill development, academic achievement, increased self-esteem, and an opportunity to meet new friends. Parents should be enthusiastic when telling the children about the benefits of sport and believe in the benefits as well.
- Allow extra practice. If the child wants to stay after practice to work on his shooting accuracy, the parents and coach should not take away that opportunity. If the practice field is closed or the parent needs to get home, provide the child with an alternative, such as kicking the ball against the wall at home.

Achieving Optimal Sport Experiences through Achievement Goal Theory (AGT)

AGT focuses on understanding the function and the meaning of goal directed actions, based on how participants define success and how they judge whether or not they have demonstrated competence in achievement contexts. The way parents and coaches communicate the purpose of achievement influences the degree to which task and ego-oriented goals are perceived as significant by the athletes. The optimal sport environment is one that is task-oriented and not solely focused on winning, but on skill improvement. The skill development will eventually result in the athlete gaining a higher level of competence and intrinsic motivation. It is shown that over time, and with continued support, children will adopt values and beliefs similar to their parents, which can influence the child's attitude as well as perception of success in sport. Parents and coaches can help promote a task-oriented environment through the following actions:

- Structure the environment and present drills in a variety of ways to meet the needs of individual athletes. If an athlete performs a task incorrectly, explain what needs to improve in order the next time to correct the mistake that was made. Clearly praise the athlete for the effort given and explain that mistakes will naturally happen in sport and are part of the learning process.
- Ensure the teammates build a strong support system and care how each other perform. A sense of relatedness can be accomplished through social gatherings off of the playing field, such as an athlete can host a team dinner or “pasta party” at their house the night prior to a game or a pool party at an athlete's house after a major tournament.
- Emphasize skill development, not cheating. For example, a football player should understand that more effort put forth prior to competition to learn new skills, study play

books, and be familiar with the strengths and weaknesses of his opponents will provide him a better chance of success during competition, rather than relying on ways to cheat or harm the opponent.

Implications for Future Research

Research has proven the powerful influence parents can have on the motivation of their children, as well as others. Two areas that have not been highly researched are the influence of peers and coaches on the motivation of athletes. Further research in these two areas, combined with the research provided on parental involvement, may further assist children in an effort to attain optimal sport experiences. This paper highlighted the importance of communication between the athlete, parents, and coaches, and stressed that all parties must agree and understand the goals of the child are more important than their own personal goals.

This paper also provided a general overview of the motivating factors for young athletes. Further studies should focus on the differences in motivating factors among athletes of various ages and competitive levels. For instance, youth at age 5 are involved in sport primarily because their parents influence them and sport is fun; whereas, a high school athlete may be more motivated to gain peer and community recognition, and have hopes of continuing the sport on a college scholarship. The optimal goal is to maintain the intrinsic motivation of youth, through the teenage years, and into adulthood.

In addition to the age of athletes, possible differences in the motivating factors of boys versus girls, as well as ways to increase the motivation of these athletes can be addressed through future research. Once again, the age, combined with the gender of the athletes, will dictate how to approach them in an effort to keep them intrinsically motivated.

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