RELATIONAL INTERSECTION OF YOUTH SPORT PARTICIPATION AND
IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

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by
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RELATIONAL INTERSECTION OF YOUTH SPORT PARTICIPATION AND
IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

presented by Taylor BreAnn Moore Casey

a candidate for the degree of master of education,

and hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

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ABSTRACT

Youth sport has continued to grow in attraction, particularly in the United States. Many youth, at younger and younger ages, are entering the confines of sport yet expansive research is still lacking in fully exploring the many facets that are a part of youth sport participation. It is of the upmost importance that research in this area is conducted, as youth are participating in sport at a significant time in their growth and development. Youth development is not only impacted by internal processes but also through experiences, such as sport. This analysis explores the positive, neutral, or negative relationship of identity development with sport participation in the hopes of bringing awareness and understanding to the relationship of youth sport participation on the development of youth.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

One of the most popular past-times, and extra-curricular activities, that youth participate in is sport. Children and adolescents around the world, particularly in the United States, participate in a variety of sports that are both individual and team oriented; and that have a vast range of different levels of competition. Competition can vary from recreational to organized sport, which yields the most statistical information about youth sport participation. In the United States, roughly 60.3 million children and adolescents, ages 6-18, participate in agency-sponsored sport (National Council of Youth Sports, 2008). A decrease in youth participation from childhood to adolescents occurs, with only 7.4 million athletes participating in high school athletics; but this marked decrease in sport participation is also relative to an increase, as evidenced by 2007-2008 being the 19th consecutive year that the number of high school athletics participants has increased (National Federation of State High School Associations, 2009). A significant decrease in sport participation occurs again, as only 7.4 million high school athletes, only 6%, 460,000 adolescents, end up being NCAA student-athletes (NCAA, 2014). This colossal decrease in organized sport participation of youth is a steady trend as sport participants’ age but research has yet to fully explore the impact of sport participation on participants, from those who end their sport careers prior to, during, or after they have fully developed (NCAA, 2014).

The context of youth sport is important to explore as although sport does, “not automatically contribute to development or the acquisition of critical life skills (p. 303),” it is important to have an understanding of the impact participation has on athletes,
particularly at the youth level when participants, between 6-18 years-of-age, are still developing cognitively, psychologically, and physically (Theokas, 2009). Based on the context and agents involved within the confines of sport, sport can have a positive, neutral, or negative impact on participants in areas of physical, psychological, emotional, intellectual, and social development (Fraser-Thomas, Côté, & Deakin, 2005; Merkel, 2013). As the rate of younger youth begin participating in sport increases, with the inevitable decrease in organized sport participation due to competitive skill requirements and other factors, the limited research and knowledge about the impact of sport on youth participants needs to keep up with this pace. A particular and unique area that has yet to be fully explored is the relationship of identity development of youth as they participate in sport, as well as if this relationship is positive, neutral, or negative. There are many different elements and contexts of consideration with examining this relationship in a youth population, particularly at this time in their development, such as: cognitive maturity, personality development, moral development, impact of competition, development of identity, and the current knowledge about the impacts of sport participation.
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The following chapter will discuss a collection of literature that has a direct impact on analyzing the positive, neutral, or negative relationship of youth development with sport participation.

NEUROLOGICAL AND COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT

As an individual ages, cognitive and neurological development and maturity occurs. Any individual who has taken a basic psychology course has likely learned of Piaget’s Stages of Cognitive Development. Within this model, Piaget outlined four key stages of development based on age, which include: sensorimotor (birth to 2 years), preoperational (2 to 7 years), concrete operational (7 to 11 years), and formal operational (11 years and older) (Cohen, Kim, & Roeper, 1999). During the sensorimotor stage infants understanding the world around them though senses (e.g., touch, taste, see, hear), which transitions to utilizing language and symbols during the pre-operational stage (Cohen, Kim, & Roeper, 1999). Thinking up until this point is still not logical, due to neurological development that has not yet occurred (Cohen, Kim, & Roeper, 1999). As children enter the concrete operational stages children’s thinking becomes logical but still lacks abstractness until the formal operational stage (Cohen, Kim, & Roeper, 1999). As a previous statement alludes to, cognitive and neurological development has a unique relationship that impacts the development of youth.

Recent research has shown that as the brain structure and function maturates during adolescence it has an impact on emotional, intellectual, and behavioral development – yet this relationship and connection is still being studied and examined.
Much of research on adolescent brain development has concluded with sound research about how the brain structure is developing, but lacks in areas exploring the connections between brain structure development and cognitive performance (Steinberg, 2005). Although research is limited on this relationship, current findings about brain structure development can assist in increasing the understanding of the growing and maturing mind of an adolescent as they go through their daily lives. During adolescent brain development, the, “response inhibition, the calibration of risk and reward, and emotion regulation (p. 69),” regions are changing (Steinberg, 2005). Hypothesized to be linked to puberty, age, and/or experiences, young adolescents experience heightened arousal and sensations due to the frontal, and prefrontal, cortex not being fully matured until late adolescents (Steinberg, 2005). A unique and fitting example of what is occurring for individuals during the early and middle adolescent stage is a situation, “in which one is starting an engine without yet having a skilled driver behind the wheel (Steinberg, 2005, p. 70).” These findings suggest that these specific brain structures of the developing minds of youth are evolving, it is likely impacting their actions on a daily basis since these structures have a lot to do with the interconnection of cognition and action, as will be further examined below.

This maturation process that occurs during adolescence not only involves the larger brain structures, but also the interconnecting nerve fibers through neurological processes that increase information processing (Steinberg, 2005). The development and maturation of the frontal cortex of the brain, both the macrostructures (e.g., grey matter, white matter, specific regions of the brain) and microstructures (e.g., nerves), is critical for proper executive function (Steinberg, 2005). How an individual is able to carry out
their executive functions (e.g., planning, time management, problem solving) impacts how they interact with their world on a daily basis, from school to sport. The development and maturation of the prefrontal cortex is also critical since this structure regulates cognition and action (Steinberg, 2005). It is likely that this development is seen during sport participation since sport, as well as other activities, requires a combination of cognition and action.

Cognition and emotion are integrated during adolescence through the development of regulatory systems that gradually mature to control the executive functioning (Steinberg, 2005). Interestingly, the ability to fully control and coordinate the regulatory systems does not occur until later in development (Steinberg, 2005). The length of time, and processes, required for adolescents to develop cognitively bring up the importance of not only what is going on for the individual internally, but also externally. If a youth’s developing brain has an impact on their daily functioning (e.g., executive functions), is it too far a stretch to consider how the daily tasks, situations, and experiences they are involved in, such as sport, are likely impacting their development at this critical time in their lives?

**TEMPERAMENT**

Personality development and temperament area areas of research that continue to grow and expand; as the more these constructs are explored the more intriguing findings are discovered and further developed. Personality traits have been defined as, “the relatively enduring patterns of thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that distinguish individuals from one another (Roberts & Mroczek, 2008, p. 31).” How one views the development of personality traits depends on how one defines, “relatively enduring (p.
31),” as some researchers believe personality traits develop throughout the lifespan versus others believe they are more consistent and develop during adolescents and young adulthood; but researcher do agree that personality traits are a combination of genetic and environmental factors and interactions (Caspi, Roberts, & Shiner, 2005; McCrae, Costa, Terracciano, Parker, Mills, De Fruyt, & Mervielde, 2002; Roberts & Mroczek, 2008; Roberts, Wood, & Smith, 2005). Temperament, also impacted by a variety of factors, is less broad than personality traits, and is defined as, “… individual differences in affect, activity, attention, and self-regulation… (p. 182)” (Caspi & Shiner, 2009). Any individual who interacts with a tenacious three-year-old cannot deny that they have “personality,” and a certain “temperament,” yet it is interesting to observe an individual over their lifetime and see if this “personality” and “temperament” is still prevalent when they have reached middle adulthood.

A five-factor model of personality is the typical framework used within psychology to analyze traits, which includes: neuroticism, extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness, and conscientiousness (Caspi, Roberts, & Shiner, 2005; Caspi & Shiner, 2009; McCrae et. al., 2002). Each are uniquely defined but together, “… account for emotional, interpersonal, experiential, attitudinal, and motivational styles (p. 1457),” of an individual (McCrae et. al., 2002). Research on personality trait development in youth tends to follow in accord with cognitive development, as described above, therefore findings suggest older adolescents typically have high neuroticism and extraversion and low agreeableness and consciousness (McCrae et. al., 2002). Research with younger adolescents is still being fully explored, but findings suggest much fluidity in personality traits at this time in development (McCrae et. al., 2002). With considering
how personality has, and is currently, being analyzed one must also consider the connection to temperament and how temperament is studied.

Many models have been utilized with analyzing temperament, with the temperament and character inventory being a popular model that interfaces temperament with the five-factor model (Caspi & Shiner, 2009). Formulated by Cloninger, Przybeck, Svrakic, and Wetzel, the temperament and character model found four temperament dimensions within personality that tend to be viewed as fairly stable, and are best understood when examined with their relationship to the five-factor model, such as, “…extraversion (high reward dependence); neuroticism (high harm avoidance and low self-determination); conscientiousness (low novelty seeking and high persistence); agreeableness (high cooperativeness); and openness (high self-transcendence) (Caspi & Shiner, 2009, p.183).” Temperament and personality have this unique relationship, as temperament is the more stable constructs that an individual is born with, where as personality is what an individual makes of their innate temperament traits (Caspi & Shiner, 2009). In order to have an understanding of personality development, one must first consider the context of temperament.

Cognitive development has provided a basis for why we should also explore temperament and personality at this critical time, as it has shown the immense change and growth that occurs during this age in development that is not only impacted by genetics, but also one’s environment. Sport is a unique and distinctive context that many youth participate in, as shown in the statistics described in the introduction, therefore sport should be an area explored so there is an awareness of its implications on personality development.
RELATIONSHIP OF MORAL DEVELOPMENT IN SPORT

In addition to cognitive and personality development, adolescents are also developing specific morals and values as they age. Research on the youth sport environment has found that the contextual factors of mature sociomoral reasoning, a positive sociomoral atmosphere within sport, a good relationship with teammates, and a quality coach-athlete relationship are predictors of prosocial behaviors of these youth as adolescents (Rutten, Stams, Biesta, Schuengel, Dirks, & Hoeksma, 2007). More specifically in order for youth sports to have a positive impact on youth participants when they reach adolescents, athletes must experience high sociomoral reasoning within the context of sport and coaches must maintain a positive relationship with athletes’ over time (Rutten et al., 2007). The aforementioned reflects an ideal within sport – an aspiration we hope for sport to achieve in our youth. However, quite the opposite tends to be present with sport participation today.

If a youth sport participant experiences the opposite of the contextual factors listed above, findings suggest this leads to antisocial behavior in adolescents (Rutten et al., 2007). This brings to the forefront the difference between moral will and desire. One may have the moral desire to act a certain way, but not always follow through with such action, which is particularly relevant with youth and sport – as this disconnection is present in sport (Blasi, 2005). The concept of bracketed morality appears to be a perspective of sport that some agree exist. Bracketed morality supports the notion that an individual can suspend their typical moral reasoning within sport due to the context and nature of sport (Kavussanu et al., 2013). Research suggests that prosocial and antisocial behavior is morally relevant since these behaviors can impact the recipient’s well-being.
Findings from the Kavussanu and colleagues article (2013) suggest higher levels of competition could have led to the transferability of antisocial behavior from sport to university students; therefore it is not far to assume that this also occurs in youth sport when young athletes are still developing regulatory systems that would encompass moral reasoning. Both of these research findings suggest that bracketed morality may not always be true since behaviors within sport are also seen outside of sport. This brings to question the context of sport and how it may be impacting the morality and character of athletes. If sport is such a powerful agent, the impact it has on the athletes needs to be evaluated. This relationship of youth sports impact on moral decision making and function in adolescents speaks to the importance of understanding the impact youth sport can have on a developing youth, particularly when it comes to the impact sport has on the lens the individual uses to make and process decisions.

**IMPACT OF COMPETITION**

A component that is typically associated with any type of contest, such as sport, is competition. Being competitive in nature is a descriptive term commonly associated with athletes and others who perform certain tasks or skills in a contest setting, with the goal of winning or showing superiority over another. Gender differences exist in how men and women interpret and react to competition. Research findings suggest that men, as compared to women, are more reactive to and are likely to experience an enhanced performance when competition is present (Gneezy & Rustichini, 2002). Competition also increases within individual performances, for both men and women, when compared to an individual situational baseline (e.g., running a short distance individually, racing an individual a short distance)(Gneezy & Rustichini, 2002). As described in the findings, the
component of competition is changing how individuals normally perform at a given task, adding an additional element that causes individuals to have this competitive edge against their opponent. This is particularly relevant to sport participation since competition is an innate part of the context of sport, from practice against a teammate to competing against an opponent during formal competitions. This shift in mentality that occurs when competition is introduced an interesting segway into how some individuals identify with the term competition within a given context, or as a contributing factor of who they are as an individual.

DEVELOPMENT OF IDENTITY

Identity is described as the many different selves that an individual categorizes himself or herself as; or as some commonly refer to as “the different hats one wears.” Identity is all the multidimensional, multicultural, and contextual self-elements of an individual that encompasses past, present, and future identities (Oyserman & Destin, 2010). Examples of identities may include the following and many more: parent, grandparent, sibling, spouse, outdoorsman/woman, leader, southerner, athlete, an individual’s race, and/or religious beliefs. When considering Erikson’s Theory of Psychosocial Development, adolescents (roughly ages 12-18) are undergoing identity versus role confusion (Rosenthal, Gurney, & Moore, 1981). Based on the identity status model, created by Marcia, identity forms through exploration and commitment (Meeus, 2011). The identity statuses of identity diffusion, moratorium, foreclosure/early closure/closure, and identity achievement are established based on the amount of exploration and commitment an individual has made in a specific identity domain (Meeus, 2011). This is typically seen as being a developmental continuum from diffusion
to achievement. Diffusion refers to an individual who has yet to commit, and may or may not have yet explored alternative identity domains (Meeus, 2011). Moratorium refers to an individual who is actively exploring, but has yet to commit. Foreclosure, or early closure or closure, refers to an individual who has committed without much exploration (Meeus, 2011). Achievement refers to an individual who has adequately explored, finished exploring, and committed to an identity domain (Meeus, 2011). With achieved identity being the ultimate goal, individuals partake in the statuses described above with each different, and unique, identity they decide to identify with. Currently research findings support both sides – that many individuals do not change identity, and identity is stable during adolescents, and that identity progression is a life-long process (Meeus, 2011). With a divided consensus in research findings, this is an area of further exploration and discovery – particularly if identity is ever evolving and changing sport is being introduced at a very tragic time in development.

Identity-Based Motivation is an area of study that, at it’s core, speaks to the importance of how an individual identifies, as this is the basis for taking action that aligns with their identity (Oyserman & Destin, 2010). The Identity-Based Motivation model describes how an individual’s identity is created through contextual experiences; in that individuals have certain feelings and actions with experiences that are identity-congruent and identity-incongruent, which then determines how they interpret the experience with their identity (Oyserman & Destin, 2010). Research shows that individuals have a preference for identity-congruent behaviors and experiences; therefore, they also prefer to look at the world with an identity-congruent perspective (Oyserman & Destin, 2010). Findings suggest that the longer an individual participates in certain experiences, the
more they identify with the experience and how that experience defines them. Initial interest in any given area, through experience, is to facilitate self-exploration to see if an individual is truly interested and wants to identify with a specific context.

Identity is something that is relevant to anything an individual is involved in, as individuals who partake in sport are said to have an athletic identity. Athletic identity, in sum, refers to how much an individual identifies with their identity as an athlete (Cieslak, 2004). Athletic identity can be a strong self-concept that can have both positive and negative impacts on the individual who identifies with this identity, such as how they view themselves after a good or poor performance. It is to no surprise that athletes tend to develop this strong identity since sport requires much time, energy, sacrifice, and dedication (Poux & Fry, 2015). When considering this identities impact on identity development, it can likely lead to foreclosure, as described in the identity statuses, which can lead to limited exploration of identities outside of sport (Poux & Fry, 2015). If identity is a large component of how an individual sees himself or herself, it is important to have a better understanding of how this identity impacts development. This is especially relevant to further exploring identity development prior to adolescents, within youth, since youth are enter sport at younger and younger ages – typically between three to six years of age.

Within the confines of sport, retirement or cessation of sport participation is inevitable; therefore, eventually one’s identity as an athlete will be challenged and change from it’s original context. Since youth athletes are beginning to participate in organized sport at younger and younger ages, athlete identity is likely to be an a component that impacts development due to the many factors that are unique to sport.
YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN SPORT

Motives for participation. Youth enter sport for many different reasons and out of a variety of motives, from wanting to join in on an activity their friends are getting involved in to parents signing them up in hopes of them enjoying sport as they once had. In early descriptive studies on youth sport participation motives, researchers found, “fun, skill development, affiliation, fitness, challenge, and success/status (p. 322),” to be the most consistently appearing youth motives for sport participation (Weinberg, Tenenbaum, McKenzie, Jackson, Anshel, Grove, & Fogarty, 2000). The previous research focused more on young youth, ages 6-13, where as more recent studies have focused on older youth. When examining youth participation motives for 13-18 year-olds, competitive factors were more salient for their reasons for sport participation, such as: winning, status, reward or prize, and enjoyment and excitement that comes along with competing at a higher level (MacDonald, Côté, Eys, & Deakin, 2011; Weinberg et. al., 2000). Research has found that athletes find the enjoyment motive in sport through mastery climate, positive interactions amongst teammates, receiving support from teammates and coaches, and coach acknowledgement of satisfaction with the player’s performance (MacDonald et. al., 2011; Scanlan, Carpenter, Lobel, & Simons, 1993). Interestingly, the top two reasons for sport participation in younger youth were intrinsic, to have fun and enhance skill, with extrinsic motives for participation being top reasons for older youth (Weinberg et. al., 2000). As athletes age from younger youth, 6-13, to older youth, 13-18, reasons for participation seem to transition from intrinsic (e.g., enjoyment) to extrinsic (e.g., performance pressure)(Wall & Côté, 2007; Weinberg et. al., 2000). Younger athletes intrinsic reasons for sport participation may be linked to their
cognitive development, since older adolescent athletes have new experiences and increased cognitive capabilities to base their reasons for participation, such as personal status compared to fellow peers and wanting to show superiority versus just having fun. Motives for participation also appear to be shifting due to the increasing trend of starting athletes at as early of an age as possible so they have more time to specialize in their sport of choice in hopes of increasing their likelihood of being successful and competitive.

**Deliberate practice and deliberate play.** A common belief is the more one practices at any given skill, the better they will be. This ideology is one that spans many contexts and has become the gold standard for seeking improvement and success. Those who strive to be experts in any field partake in an abundance of deliberate practice, “a highly structured activity, the explicit goal of which is to improve performance (Wall & Côté, 2007, p. 78).” Within sport this phenomenon is typically seen in youth athletes who specialize in one sport at a young age, early specialization (Côté, Lidor, & Hackfort, 2009; Wall & Côté, 2007). Early specialization is particularly seen in sports where peak performance occurs at an earlier age, such as gymnastics and figure skating (Strachan, Côté, & Deakin, J., 2009). Research originally suggested that those who participate in deliberate practice through early specialization would increase their expertise by having more deliberate practice than others who start at a later age (Wall & Côté, 2007). Studies in this area have also found youth athletes who spend more time in organized activities, such as sport, report higher rates of, “developmental experience relating to initiative, identity formation, emotional regulation, and positive interpersonal and social relationships (Strachan, Côté, & Deakin, J., 2009, p. 81).” Research findings have now
shifted from there original focus to consider that early sport specialization may not be the best way for athletes to reach elite success in their sport, as it may lead to more negative outcomes (e.g., injury, less enjoyment) (Côté, Lidor, & Hackfort, 2009; Strachan, Côté, & Deakin, 2009; Wall & Côté, 2007). Another framework that has come out of this same line of research, combating early specialization, is deliberate play. Deliberate play encourages youth development in activities that are intrinsically motivating, such as basic fundamental skill development, and is designed to foster sport enjoyment (Côté, Lidor, & Hackfort, 2009; Strachan, Côté, & Deakin, J., 2009; Wall & Côté, 2007). This method hopes for athletes to sample different sports and activities during their sampling years, ages 6-12, have the opportunity to make the choice to specialize from 13-15 years-of-age, and invest from 16+ (Côté, Lidor, & Hackfort, 2009; Wall & Côté, 2007). This ties in with research that suggests children not begin participating in organized team sports until the age of six due to physical, psychological, and cognitive development; and youth athletes cannot distinguish the importance of effort and ability, innately apart of deliberate practice, as they relate to performance outcomes until 12 years-of-age (Merkel, 2013; Smoll, Cumming, & Smith, 2011). These research findings take into consideration where youth are in their cognitive development and how this interacts within the context of sport. With individuals supporting on both sides of deliberate practice and play, it is important to consider the relationship and impact each of the different contexts may have on youth development. Especially since current research findings are not necessarily known by the general public, such as: adult sport performance is not necessarily predicted by childhood sport performance, more intensity in the participation within these activities led to increased risk taking, and breadth and intensity of youth activities is better for
development (Côté, Lidor, & Hackfort, 2009; Strachan, Côté, & Deakin, 2009). This relationship is not only seen with sport participation, but also with sport cessation.

**Sport cessation.** Dropping out of youth sport tends to occur at an alarming rate. Higher rate of youth sport cessation is not only seen in athletes who specialize and deliberate practice at a younger age, but also for athletes who begin training in the off-seasons of their sport at a younger age (Wall & Côté, 2007). Research shows that athletes who specialize are likely to experience exhaustion, an element of burnout that may then lead to complete withdrawal from sport participation, or dropout (Strachan, Côté, & Deakin, J., 2009). Common reasons for ceasing sport participation include, “conflict of interests with other activities, too much of a time commitment, lack of fun, lack of playing time, excessive pressure, and sport competence issues (Wall & Côté, 2007, p. 79).” More specifically, elementary aged athletes primarily reported, “lack of enjoyment (p. 80),” as their reason for dropping out of sport and as athletes aged the following became more prevalent, “needing time for studying and jobs, the coach, injuries, and other sports taking too much time (Garn & Cothran, 2006; Wall & Côté, 2007, p. 80).” Many youth do not make the decision to initiate into deliberate practice or play, or drop out of sport, on his or her own; but rely on social agents to assist in, and sometimes dictate, making these decisions. Social agents (e.g., coaches, parents, peers) have an impact not only on the decisions youth make in their sport participation, but also the experiences they have and their development.

**Social agents.** When one considers the main social agents, in the context of sport, coaches, parents, and peers typically come to mind. Much of the research has focused on the coach, as they are seen as the main contributing agent within sport. The coach is
typically seen as an individual who possesses the skills that will need to be learned, naturally putting them in a role as a mentor to those they coach (Theokas, 2009). Instructors, at any capacity, have a great influence over how the learning environment is shaped and a child’s experience within that learning environment (Strean, 2009). Research on the impact of the coach-athlete relationship has found that a positive coach-athlete relationship is likely to increase continued sport participation and that coaches who are autonomy-supportive, creating a task-oriented climate, increased athlete’s intrinsic motivation and sport continuation (Gagné, Ryan, & Bargmann, 2003; Olympiou, Jowett, & Duda, 2008; Ullrich-French & Smith, 2009). However, a negative coach-athlete relationship can be quite devastating for the athlete. Unfortunately, in youth sports today, many of the adults who coach do not have any formal education in coaching or training child development; therefore many coaches do not understand the negative impact they can have on youth development through a child’s participation in sport (Petitpas, Cornelius, Raalte, & Jones, 2005). Although much of research has focused on the coaches’ role as a social agent in youth athletes’ lives, parents and peers are also important social agents due to their role of socializing youth into sport, the psychosocial development of young athletes, impact on the coach-athlete relationship, and their influence on motivation and climate (Petitpas et. al., 2005; Smoll, Cumming, & Smith, 2011; Ullrich-French & Smith, 2009). As the system and structure of sport becomes more complex, parent involvement has increased (Smoll, Cumming, & Smith, 2011). Sport at the youth level requires a great deal of commitment on behalf of the parent(s) for their child, whether that be financially or just time (Kanters, Bocarro, & Casper, 2008). Parents pay the sport organization fees, purchase the necessary equipment, and dedicate the time
to have the child at sport practices and games. Parental involvement in their child’s sport begins as neutral and becomes positive or negative dependent upon the parent’s involvement (Kanters, Bocarro, & Casper, 2008). What research has found is that parent’s are rarely completely in tune with how their child perceives their sport experience or how their child perceives their parent’s role in their experience (e.g., supporting or pressuring)(Kanters, Bocarro, & Casper, 2008). For example, although fun is the top reason youth participate in sport, many parents top reason for their children to participate in sport is to win (Merkel, 2013). Peers seem to be more in tune with their fellow peers, but much of the research has not examined the impact of peers within the context of sport. Research has found peers have the ability to have an influence on a fellow peer’s values and morals, as peers heavily consider their fellow peers opinions and input (Strachan, Côtê, & Deakin, J., 2009). For example, research suggests adults are congruent in their choice to take risks, where as youth and adolescents were incongruent in their choices when receiving input from peers (Steinberg, 2005). Coaches, parents, and peers not only have a significant impact on youths’ development, but also on their participation in sport. Each social agent has a unique influence on the environment and climate of sport, which has a direct relationship with youth development.

**Environment and climate.** Although the sport domain is one that is predominately created by the coaches and athletes, other factors contribute to what the environment and climate is like as well. As a researcher so eloquently stated:

“It is not simply the responsibility of coaches and peers to create a positive environment for all young athletes, but more must be done to integrate family, school, and the broader community into building competent athletes and, more
importantly, positive and healthy citizens (Strachan, Côté, & Deakin, 2009, p. 90).”

Researchers have begun parsing apart this component of sport, particularly in the area of youth sport. Adolescent, high school athletes described motivational, mastery-oriented, (task-involving) team climate as being rewarded for hard work, receiving encouragement from coaches, and each player having a distinguished, important, role amongst their team (MacDonald et. al., 2011; Olympiou, Jowett, & Duda, 2008; Petitpas et. al., 2005; Walling, Duda, & Chi, 1993). Athletes who have experienced this climate reported less performance worry and reported more satisfaction with their sport experience (Walling, Duda, & Chi, 1993). This suggests greater sport experience is likely to lead to more positive take-away experiences from sport that may be transferable to other areas of an individual’s life. Athletes who described their team climate as performance-oriented (ego-involving) described their environment as one where teammates were constantly competing against one another to be the best, mistakes made by athletes were punished, and favoritism was shown to certain athletes (Walling, Duda, & Chi, 1993). On each side of the spectrum, these statistical findings speak to the importance and influence of the environment. To some, the youth sport environment is thought to be this microcosm for development and learning to occur (Smoll, Cumming, & Smith, 2011). In comparison, more professional oriented sport environments are primarily focused on production (e.g., winning), commercialization, and entertainment (Smoll, Cumming, & Smith, 2011). The youth sport environment is then tainted, and can have negative consequences for its participants, when social agents (e.g., coaches, officials, parents, family members, peers, etc.) wrongfully, or in a negligent fashion, impose a “professional” system into a “youth”
sport environment (Merkel, 2013; Smoll, Cumming, & Smith, 2011). When this occurs the youth sport environment becomes one that is not longer child-centered, but focused on the agent who have imposed the system (Merkel, 2013; Smoll, Cumming, & Smith, 2011). At this point there is no longer a fostering of the youth and a lack of awareness of sport’s impact on youth development. Due to the number of different sport programs, “… there are very few programs that teach life and sport skills in a systematic manner (p. 65),” since all have different primary and secondary focuses in place (Petitpas et. al., 2005). This issue also occurs due to the lack of structure and philosophy the current youth sport system. Therefore, “Youth sport programs that promote psychosocial development are those that use sport as a vehicle to provide experiences that promote self-discovery and teach participants life skills in an intentional and systematic manner (Petitpas et. al., 2005, p. 66).” As mentioned previously, this is a great ideal but not likely to be achieved with the current status of youth sport. Due to the training of coaches and impact of social agents, the context of youth sport has many obstacles to overcome in order to have the primary focus be on the psychosocial development of athletes. With the current condition of youth sport, research needs to analyze the relationship between participating in youth sport and the development of youth participants.

**MODEL PROVIDING ADVANCED ORGANIZATION**

Creating an understanding for the relational intersection of youth sport participation and identity is very complex, as many interactive variables must be taken into consideration. With all these moving pieces of consideration within this project, the following will further flush out how these components interact by briefly presenting a visual model to provide clarity to the collection of literature included in this literature
review.

Figure 1
*Youth Sport Participation and Identity Development Model*

CONCLUSION AND STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The context of youth sport is as distinctive as the population that participates in it. Statistics show the magnitude of individuals who participate in youth sport and how participation is impacted by ageing youth due to skill requirements and other elements that are a part of youth sport, which include social agents and climate. Current research within the context of youth sport has begun to explore many of its impacting factors, such as morals, identity, motives, sport cessation, social agents, and climate. Youth
development is not only due to innate processes, but also environmental factors. Each of these broad and diverse factors, whether a part of development or specific to the confines of sport, impact the developing youth who participate in this activity. Research shows that youth individuals, 6-18 years-of-age, are at a significant point in their development where change, growth, and maturity are occurring across multiple domains – from cognitive, to personality, identity, and morals. These domains are then impacted by the vary nature of sport itself, from the competitive atmosphere to the type of climate and environment that is cultivated by the system of youth sport and the agents involved.

Youth participants’ experiences with the context of sport, including interactions with social agents, influence how they view their identity as a participant in sport, as well as their decision to partake and drop out of sport. With the many moving pieces and elements that impact an individual as they interact in youth sport, particularly at an age when vast growth and development is occurring, it is of the upmost importance that the relationship of sport participation and youth development is explored; particularly when research has shown the current status of the youth sport system and the age, and stage in development, at which youth are participating in sport. Unfortunately, an analysis of this relationship has yet to be examined, more specifically as it relates to interaction of youth identity development and sport. Much of the research within youth sport participation has, “… fail[ed] to address the possibility that students who mature at a faster rate physically or who have higher levels of motivation to succeed may select sport as a natural proving ground of their abilities (Petitpas et. al., 2005, p. 64).” All in all, there is a lack of research examining the relation between sport and individual personal development, particularly with youth (MacDonald et. al., 2011). Whether this
relationship is positive, negative, and/or neutral is completely unknown. The purpose of this study is to perform an analysis of the positive, neutral, or negative relationship of identity development with sport participation; specifically if sport participation enhances and fosters the development of identity that an individual already possesses prior to entering participation in sport or if sport creates and fosters specific identity that an individual does not possess prior to participation in sport. This analysis would provide valuable insight into an area of research that has yet to be explored and discovered within youth in hopes of providing awareness about the relationship of youth sport participation on the development of youth.
CHAPTER 3
PROPOSED STUDY

In order to perform an analysis of the positive, neutral, or negative relationship of identity development with sport participation, the following is the proposed study to be conducted. To examine this relationship, a mixed-method design will be the best fit. Research supports the notion that capturing both qualitative and quantitative can be beneficial, especially given that this study will be analyzing concepts that the preferred method of study is qualitative and/or qualitative (Morse & Niehaus, 2016). This study will also be longitudinal in nature, following athletes for a minimum of three years. Participants will include youth athletes, 6-18 years of age, ranging in their years of participation in sport(s). As this study is further conceptualized and articulated, more concrete guidelines will be established.

With being a mixed-methods design, both quantitative and qualitative measure will be gathered. Quantitative measures will include the Sport Participation and Identity Development Questionnaire (SPIDQ) Part I, II, and III, and the Athlete Identity Measurement Scale (AIMS). The AIMS will be utilized to measure how strongly athletes identify with their athletic identity. The SPIDQ Part I will be utilized to gain demographic information. The SPIDQ Part II will be utilized to measure the impact of sport on youth identity development prior to sport participation. The SPIDQ Part III will be utilized to measure the impact of sport on youth identity development presently. The SPIDQ I, II, and III is still in the begin phases of development; therefore, this study would serve a means to provide the validity of the measure. Qualitative, structured interviews will be conducted to gain further information and insight on quantitative
measures, as well as additional information about individual’s previous and current sport participation.

In hypothesizing the nature of the study, participants would first be interviewed to screen their eligibility and suitability for the study. All participants who made it past the screening processes would then complete the consent, as well as parents would complete consent for minors. Conceptualizing the different measures involved, participants would take the AIMS, SPIDQ Part I, SPIDQ Part II, and SPIDQ Part III upon entering the study. Upon taking the quantitative measures participants would be interviewed by researcher. As the study progressed, participants would systematically take the SPIDQ III and AIMS, followed by an interview, throughout the remainder of the study. Interviews would last roughly one hour, be transcribed, and openly coded as themes emerge.

Again, this is the proposed method of analyzing the positive, neutral, or negative relationship of identity development with sport participation; specifically if sport participation enhances and fosters the development of identity that an individual already possesses prior to entering participation in sport or if sport creates and fosters specific identity that an individual does not possess prior to participation in sport. This study would provide statistical validity for the SPIDQ I, II, and III, as well as provide insight into the relationship of youth sport participation on the development of youth.
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