

Coach perceptions of the social environment in recreational youth sport

SARAH LAWRASON*, MATTHEW VIERIMAA**, and LUC J. MARTIN***

(*) *School of Health and Exercise Sciences, University of British Columbia Okanagan, Kelowna, BC, Canada*

(**) *School of Kinesiology, Acadia University, Wolfville, NS, Canada*

(***) *School of Kinesiology & Health Studies, Queen's University, Kingston, ON, Canada*

Coaches play an important role in fostering a positive social environment in youth sport. Research has explored the social environment from the perspective of athletes engaged in interdependent sport, but less is known about coaches' perceptions, especially for sport types that differ along the continuum of task interdependence. The purpose of this study was to explore coaches' perceptions of the social environment in integrated and contrient recreational sports. Seven gymnastics and seven ice hockey coaches participated in semi-structured interviews, and transcripts were analyzed thematically. All coaches perceived a positive social environment to consist of supportive teammates, which encouraged athletes' sport commitment. Interestingly, coaches had not received any formal education on facilitating athlete relationships within a team. Additionally, whereas gymnastics coaches described the development of a caring climate, ice hockey coaches focused on performance—both with intentions of improving athlete experiences. Future directions and implications for coach education are offered.

KEY WORDS: Contrient sport, Integrated sport, Group dynamics, Qualitative research.

Sport is a context where participating youth can obtain a range of physical (e.g., improved fitness), psychological (e.g., reduced risk of depression), and social (e.g., quality relationships) benefits (e.g., Eime, Young, Harvey, Charity, & Payne, 2013; Piercy et al., 2018). Unfortunately, despite the accumulating evidence supporting the merits of sport participation, current societal trends indicate fewer children and youth are maintaining involvement

Correspondence to: Sara Lawrence, School of Health and Exercise Sciences, University of British Columbia, Okanagan, 1147 Research Road, V1V 1V7, Kelowna, BC, Canada (e-mail: sarah.lawrason@alumni.ubc.ca)

(e.g., Balish, McClaren, Rainham, & Blanchard, 2014). Further, researchers emphasize that participatory benefits from youth sport are not automatic, and that quality social dynamics (e.g., coach-athlete relationships, peer interactions) are prerequisites to facilitating positive youth development (e.g., Côté, Turnnidge, & Evans, 2014). Despite the numerous social agents involved in youth sport (e.g., athletes, parents, coaches, administrators), coaches are particularly central with regards to shaping sport experiences. Indeed, effective coaches are those that consistently apply their “professional, interpersonal, and intrapersonal knowledge to improve athletes’ competence, confidence, connection, and character in specific coaching contexts” (Côté & Gilbert, 2009, p. 316). Gleaned from this definition is a coach’s ability to use interpersonal knowledge (i.e., managing relationships) to positively impact desirable athlete outcomes.

Given the role of quality relationships in facilitating positive youth sport experiences, there has been a large body of literature investigating how coaches influence social dynamics among teams. Specifically, research has informed our understanding of the coach-athlete relationship (e.g., Jowett, 2007), peer relationships (e.g., Weiss & Smith, 2002), and certain elements of the broader social environment (i.e., the varying interpersonal relationships that develop once members become established as a group; Carron & Eys, 2012). For instance, athletes of coaches who use positive reinforcement, social support, and democratic behaviours typically see their teams as more cohesive (Westre & Weiss, 1991). Further, coaches’ autonomy supportive behaviours can foster team identity in athletes by fulfilling basic psychological needs (Coatsworth & Conroy, 2009). In fact, coaches play a key role in turning a collection of athletes into a united group by forming positive relationships with athletes (Jowett, 2007).

There have been specific strategies employed by coaches that outline *how* they influence group-level outcomes. For instance, youth soccer and American football coaches who use a games-based approach by building a supportive social and moral environment improve athletes’ sense of teamwork and team cohesion (Atkinson & Harvey, 2017; Harvey, 2009). In addition, researchers have described a range of ways that coaches can use life skills strategies, either implicitly (i.e., focusing on developing sport skills without conscious effort placed on life skills transfer) or explicitly (i.e., intentionally targeting life skills development by drawing connections from sport to everyday life; Bean, Kramers, Forneris, & Camiré, 2018). However, whereas ample research highlights the importance of coaches in fostering dyadic and group-level outcomes (e.g., Eys et al., 2013), many of these studies have used similar methodologies and perspectives. Specifically,

researchers have noted the tendency to include self-report questionnaires when attempting to investigate complex group level constructs (e.g., Eys & Brawley, 2018). Thus, it is important to explore the perspectives and current practices from coaches themselves in relation to how they improve and manage the social environment. Such efforts could shed light on the multidimensional components of quality social dynamics, which is significant given that understanding coaches' interpersonal behaviours with their athletes is an essential facet of coaching effectiveness (Côté & Gilbert, 2009; Turnnidge & Côté, 2018).

Understanding how coaches influence the social environment within their teams is particularly critical as it has been highlighted as a salient component of the athlete experience, regardless of sport type (e.g., for interdependent or independent sport; Evans, Eys, & Bruner, 2012). However, despite the need to consider social processes across all sport, effective coaching is nevertheless context specific (Côté & Gilbert, 2009), likely requiring different approaches across varying types. In an attempt to more clearly delineate sport types, Evans and colleagues (2012) extended the traditional sport dichotomy of team versus individual, and proposed a typology based on the interdependence required by teammates to engage in their sport. Across six potential types, the authors introduce sports where athletes (a) train together but do not have a collective team outcome (i.e., independent), (b) train together and compete against one another without an identified group outcome (i.e., contrient), (c) compete in different classes/levels and contribute to both individual and team outcomes (i.e., cooperative), (d) compete against each other and have individual and group outcomes (i.e., collective), (e) compete together but do not always need to interact during the task (i.e., segregated), and (f) work together toward an objective and overt group outcome (i.e., integrated). Based on the proposed typology, a question that remains is not only how coaches manage the social environment, but also how efforts might differ between sports that lie on divergent ends of the interdependence continuum?

Preliminary investigations with athletes suggest that perceptions of the social environment (e.g., groupness, friendship with teammates, collectivism) feature prominently in determining the athlete experience for cooperative, contrient, and independent sport (Evans, Eys, & Wolf, 2013). Indeed, athletes that ranged from traditionally considered "individual" sports spoke to the necessity of having coaches who implement strategies to balance individual needs while also creating an inclusive social environment (Evans et al., 2013). As several examples, they described efforts to improve communication, emphasize values, promote team outcomes, and use socially directed

team building. Considering that the athletes described coaches as critical social agents in this process, and that recent literature advocates for coaches to use behaviours that influence the team environment—rather than simply dyadic relationships (e.g., Turnnidge & Côté, 2018)—further exploring perceptions and strategies from the coach's standpoint would be useful. In addition, although previous research has investigated athlete perspectives of coaching behaviours from the independent end of the continuum (Evans et al., 2013), further exploration of coaches' perceptions of the social environment at both ends of the interdependence continuum (i.e., contrient and integrated) is warranted.

The purpose of this study was to explore general perceptions that coaches had in relation to the social environment for their teams in recreational youth sport. Specifically, coaches from contrient and integrated sport types were queried about (a) the degree to which they felt the social environment would impact the youth sport experience, (b) their current experiences with improving or managing the social environment within their teams, and (c) any previous coach training or workshops where they obtained useful information or guidance about the topic.

Methods

QUALITATIVE APPROACH

A postpositivist approach guided this study, assuming a critical realist ontology and modified objectivist epistemology (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Critical realism asserts that there is a reality with regard to social experiences, but that this reality can never be accurately verified due to its complexity (Roberts, 2014). A critical realist approach encourages the use of emic viewpoints to help to determine meanings and purposes that participants attribute to their experiences (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). It is important to highlight that all authors have an extensive understanding of the literature pertaining to group dynamics in sport, combined with elite level participation as athletes in the sports selected for examination. This intimate understanding of theory in concert with the familiarity of sport experiences enabled the researchers to engage with participant perspectives and experiences. The researchers are aware of their positionality, and their biases, experiences, and emotions are considered important when identifying themes and describing their meaning in the results (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

PARTICIPANTS

A purposeful criterion sampling approach (Patton, 2015) informed participant recruitment. To partake in this study, participants had to be head coaches of ice hockey (i.e., inte-

grated) or gymnastics (i.e., contrient) youth sport teams (i.e., coaching athletes between the ages of 12-17 years), whereby high frequency and duration of interaction with athletes was expected. The participants also had to coach athletes aligning with the recreational years of sport participation according to the Developmental Model of Sports Participation (DMSP; Côté, Baker, & Abernethy, 2007). Ultimately, 14 head coaches from recreational ice hockey ($n = 7$) and gymnastics ($n = 7$) took part in the study.

Ice hockey coaches. Male recreational ice hockey coaches ($M_{age} = 47.5$; $SD = 6.0$) had an average of 9.6 years ($SD = 5.2$) of coaching experience and were leading teams in House League programs for both male ($n = 4$) and female ($n = 3$) athletes aged 12-17 years. According to Hockey Canada, House League programs are recreational, inexpensive, require low time commitment, and are inclusive and egalitarian offerings (Hockey Canada, n.d.). The coaches from this study were involved with teams that fit within the 'recreational' competitive level as proposed by Robertson, Hague, Evans, and Martin (2019). Coaches emphasized that this league was oriented toward skill acquisition, yet a main focus was enjoyment and continued engagement with the sport. Teams were involved in two one-hour practice sessions every week, competed against other teams biweekly, and were enrolled in one tournament during the season.

Gymnastics coaches. The recreational artistic gymnastics coaches ($M_{age} = 27.3$; $SD = 5.1$) were all female and had an average of 11.7 years ($SD = 4.6$) of coaching experience with female athletes aged 12-17 years. According to coaches and based on the first author's past experiences as a gymnast, the objectives of the recreational and interclub programs were to develop a range of gymnastics skills and to provide the opportunity for fun competition and continued involvement at the gym. Gymnasts trained together for three to eight hours per week and were given the option to participate in two to three competitions per season. Gymnasts did not participate in a selection process, travelled regionally for competitions only if they decided to participate, and the sampling of other sports was encouraged among the clubs. Thus, the competitive level of teams in the present study also fell within the 'recreational' category (Robertson et al., 2019).

PROCEDURES

Following ethical approval from the General Research Ethics Board at the third author's institution, coaches were contacted using publicly available information and through existing personal and sport-related contacts. Those who agreed to participate were asked to complete a coach information sheet for demographics and coaching experience, and interviews were scheduled to take place over the phone ($n = 12$) or in-person ($n = 2$). The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim, and the first author maintained a reflective journal throughout the duration of the interview process. The interviews ranged in length from 21 to 55 minutes ($M = 42.7$, $SD = 10.52$) and the transcription process resulted in 204 pages of single-spaced text.

Semi-structured interview guides. The interview guides were informed by group dynamics (e.g., Carron & Eys, 2012) and coaching effectiveness (e.g., Côté & Gilbert, 2009) literature, and were developed to progress from introductory questions (to establish rapport and

allow the participant feel comfortable with the interview process), to transition questions (to explore general coaching objectives and experiences), key questions (to investigate relevant concepts or experiences), and closing questions (to provide opportunities to consolidate information and encourage closing remarks; e.g., Patton, 2015). In terms of key questions, coaches were asked about their knowledge derived from previous training (e.g., “What was the purpose of previous coaching courses and what type of content was delivered?”), their perceptions of the social environment’s importance for athlete experiences (e.g., “How important is the social environment; why or why not?”), and their ability to influence the environment (e.g., “Do you think your actions influence the environment in your team/club?”). Finally, coaches were asked about strategies utilized to influence their team’s environment (e.g., “What strategies have you used in the past to try and influence the social environment in your team?”). The interview guides are available as an online resource or upon request by the first author. The interviewer probed participants at times to develop a greater understanding of coaches’ perceptions (Patton, 2015). For example, with gymnastics coaches, the researcher inquired about the role of the superordinate gymnastics club structure in facilitating the social environment. Ice hockey coaches were probed about the role of tournaments and interacting with other hockey teams or parents/guardians in facilitating the social environment.

DATA ANALYSIS AND METHODOLOGICAL RIGOR

Reflexive thematic analysis was conducted to develop and report themes (patterns of shared meaning underpinned by a core concept, as opposed to domain summaries) within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2019; Braun, Clarke, & Weate, 2016). In this type of analysis, the researcher is reflexive and engages thoughtfully with the data to generate themes, becoming a critical feature of knowledge production (Braun & Clarke, 2019). First, hockey and gymnastics coaches’ interviews were re-read and coded separately, taking notes on the transcripts and creating semantic themes. Next, the interviews across all coaches were analyzed collectively, adding notes and themes together. These preliminary themes were concept mapped according to the research questions, and analyzed according to similarities, differences, and contextual considerations between coaches. The themes were refined, named, and given descriptions during the writing of the document. While the themes were originally developed using a semantic approach, the first author later engaged with the data using a latent focus, which involved uncovering the meanings that underpinned participants’ explicit statements (e.g., reflecting on personal experiences in sport and aiming to understand the ‘big picture’ message; Braun et al., 2016). Coding was conducted deductively to generate a framework of general themes and subthemes (Braun et al., 2016). This type of analysis is commonly used in psychological research and is beneficial for its flexibility and compatibility with various paradigms, allowing for theoretical freedom (Braun et al., 2016). Using a critical realist ontology, thematic analysis investigates the non-falsified beliefs, attitudes, and values of coaches according to their context (i.e., sport), and the authors experiences in both sports facilitated the latent coding process.

The following describes the methodological rigor that was undertaken to ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the data. The guidelines advanced by Sparkes and Smith (2014) informed the process, with the first being the use of pilot interviews to practice probe questions and improve interviewer comfort with the process. Throughout data collection, the first author also engaged in reflective practice by maintaining a journal that was referred to

prior to subsequent interviews. Generally, journaling involved making notes of common examples used by participants, general ideas for potential themes, and alternate probe questions that could prove useful for future interviews. It was also an outlet used to make notes about potential links with relevant group dynamics principles in relation to participant responses. Debriefing with the research team occurred during the interview process and continued through to the analysis, with the main purpose revolving around maintaining meaningful coherence between the stated objectives, qualitative approach, and method of analysis. In addition, these discussions enabled the authors to discuss their positionalities (e.g., experiences as competitive ice hockey and gymnastics athletes, reflecting on personal interactions with their youth coaches and then also with their experiences as coaches), recognizing that their perspectives shaped their interpretation of the participant responses, and by extension, the current results. Lastly, all coaches were provided with their interview transcripts prior to data analysis in the hopes that they might add additional insight extending what was discussed during the interviews (e.g., Smith & McGannon, 2018). Nine participants responded to the researchers request, all of which indicated that they did not have any additional information to contribute.

Results

The three major themes uncovered revolved around (a) the nature of the social environment in youth sport (i.e., the *what*) and whether coaches had received any information or guidance to orient them during previous education, (b) any reasons they believed it to be important for young athlete sport experiences (i.e., the *why*), and (c) the strategies used—if any—by coaches for its development and maintenance within their teams (i.e., the *how*). For each theme, the results are organized according to the similarities, differences, and contextual considerations with respect to ice hockey and gymnastics coaches (see Table I for a summary). Quotes are identified by sport, participant number, and athlete gender, whereby the first participant who was a male ice hockey coach would be represented with H1M.

WHAT: PERCEPTIONS OF THE SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT

Coaches were first invited to discuss the general idea of the social environment between athletes/teammates, and subsequently offered insight on the nature of previous coach education programs, and whether these programs and related experiences shaped their perceptions.

Contextual similarities. The coaches believed that well-connected teams shared characteristics of supportiveness, regardless of positive or negative outcomes. Teams were thought to experience a connected social environment when athletes were able to respect each other and put aside differences

TABLE I
Key Themes Representing Coaches' Perceptions

Theme	Similarities	Differences	Considerations
<i>What:</i> Perceptions of the social environment	Athletes support each other Coach development programs lack information on facilitating social environment	Friendships develop outside of sport (hockey) vs. individual motivation and goal setting (gymnastics)	Volunteer coaches with different teams over time (hockey) vs. paid coaches with same groups over time (gymnastics)
<i>Why:</i> Importance of the social environment	Return to sport	Performance outcomes (hockey) vs. developing family-like relationships (gymnastics)	Building a true team atmosphere (hockey) vs. facilitating family-like relationships within group (gymnastics)
<i>How:</i> Managing the social environment	Social environment is somewhat athlete-dependent Barriers due to nature of recreational sport (e.g., time) and athletes' ages	Coach role pivotal for social environment (hockey) vs. coach as an accessory for social environment (gymnastics) Strategies used primarily away from facility (hockey) vs. strategies primarily used within facility (gymnastics)	Less ownership of facility but involved in dressing room space (hockey) vs. ownership of facility but not involved in dressing room space (gymnastics)

(e.g., physical ability, reasons for participation) for the pursuit of a greater, enjoyable team experience. A hockey coach said that a connected social environment occurs when athletes are “supportive of each other, the team doesn’t put too much credit on one player nor does the team blame one player or a couple players when things go bad. Keeping that supportive environment whether they win or lose together” (H1M). Similarly, a gymnastics coach recognized the value of athlete support even when gymnasts in the same group were competing against each other: “...now that they’re at the end of the year and they’re always cheering for each other which is great as a team, even at competition they’re always cheering for each other” (G10F). Collectively, athletes who supported one another were perceived as experiencing a more positive social environment.

All ice hockey and gymnastics coaches indicated that previous coach development programs did not provide information specifically oriented toward the social environment. Rather, coaches stated that education focused on developing coaches’ professional knowledge (i.e., skill and drill development). For example, one hockey coach said that courses included “a set of drills you can use to encourage better skating, better stick handling, etcetera

... here you can find many more drills than we can teach you in the course of one afternoon on the ice” (H1M). Rather than learning about the social environment in coach development programs, coaches recognized previous post-secondary education and experience as sources of knowledge. A gymnastics coach stated: “I feel like in my undergrad I had a course similar to that. On building relationships with others ... My school helps me with gym, and my gym had helped me with school. It’s all relatable” (G12F). Coaches also expressed the importance of informal learning experiences as possible avenues for future coach development on the social environment: “I’m always in my own little bubble of my own athletes and how I do things. Then I see other athletes and how other coaches do things and see what is good, what works, and what doesn’t” (G8F). Coaches believed that it was “...a problem” (G8F) and “...there could be more” (H1M) coach education programs that include information on fostering the social environment.

Contextual differences. Despite several similarities between ice hockey and gymnastics coaches’ perceptions of and educational experiences pertaining to the social environment, coaches discussed different characteristics that created a connected team. Hockey coaches explained that a positive social environment occurs when athletes develop friendships that transcend different subgroups, ultimately demonstrating cohesion both on and off the ice. For example, one coach indicated that his team experienced a positive social environment, citing that his athletes were “good friends outside of hockey and girls who have come and gone but have remained friends with this core group. And then there’s new girls who have just come on this year and they’re welcomed with open arms” (H7F). Interestingly, whereas hockey coaches often reverted to athlete relations, gymnastics coaches outlined athletes’ intrinsic motivation to participate in sport as a key factor for connecting to teammates. One coach explained:

I think it’s ... a mutual wanting to be there. I think if one person brings in a toxic attitude to the point where they don’t really want to do the conditioning, they’re just kind of there because they don’t want to be at home, something like that kind of ruins it ... Whether they’re the same level or not it doesn’t really matter but having that same kind of willingness to want to learn and take away as much as they can from the team whether it’s from friendships or what not but like wanting to be there, I think (G13F).

Gymnastics coaches also believed that athletes needed to pursue their own goals while also perceiving their team environment as important. As an example, a gymnastics coach described that athletes “[must] be driven, ... a team player, ... want to do better for themselves and for the team” (G11F).

Thus, while hockey coaches viewed athlete friendships in non-sport contexts as positive for the social environment, gymnastics coaches placed more weight on the motivation for athlete participation and the support directed toward the pursuit of individual goals.

Contextual considerations. There are important contextual considerations to note with regards to coaches' general perceptions of the social environment. All ice hockey coaches were volunteers who were involved either out of interest or to coach their children. Conversely, the gymnastics coaches were full-time paid staff at a club. While gymnastics coaches spoke about their current recreational groups, these coaches were also more involved in the superordinate club environment, and thus were perhaps more invested because of their pay and the likelihood that they would be with the same group in subsequent years. Hockey coaches, on the other hand, did not often have the same team of athletes and discussed the social environment almost exclusively with respect to the current sport season. They did not discuss how their teams may evolve their social environment or performance in the future, unlike gymnastics coaches.

WHY: IMPORTANCE OF THE SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT

In addition to describing their general perceptions of the social environment, the coaches discussed the significance of facilitating connected teams/groups by describing several outcomes they deemed to be directly impacted by athlete and teammate connections.

Contextual similarities. Both hockey and gymnastics coaches recognized that the social environment was important for athletes returning to sport the following year. One hockey coach put himself in an athlete's shoes:

If I don't feel connected to other people in that room, then I'm not going to want to go to that conversation ... if I see other people that are connected, that the other youngsters are talking to each other, and as a team member on that team, I'm not part of that, then I'm not going to feel a part of that team. I may just not want to even go (H3M).

Similarly, gymnastics coaches thought that having a connected team was often the reason for recreational athletes' participation, as opposed to gymnastics' physical capabilities. This coach explained that "a lot of kids in that level come because of other kids. They come because their friends are there, they come for social reasons. You know they love gymnastics, but they come

to the sport for the social aspect” (G8F). Both hockey and gymnastics coaches perceived the social environment as integral to a positive recreational sport experience to ensure that athletes were maintaining their sport involvement into older adolescence.

Contextual differences. Although both types of sport coaches believed the social environment to be important for returning to sport, gymnastics and hockey coaches differed in relation to other salient outcomes. Hockey coaches continually linked the social environment with individual and team performance outcomes. For instance, one hockey coach described how his current team’s social environment resulted in improved overall performance: “For a team that was one of the worst teams in the league, I think we’re actually in like 3rd place” (H5F). In contrast, gymnastics coaches did not view the social environment as important for performance due to the individual nature of the sport. Instead, gymnastics coaches linked it with team outcomes associated with developing a family-like atmosphere. Several coaches used “family” when describing the social environment in gymnastics groups, and one coach elaborated on family-like support outcomes:

When you think of the age group that they start to feel self-conscious, they start to feel embarrassed ... when they try to learn something, and they are not successful the first or second time, they don’t want to do it anymore because they’re falling, and they don’t look good, and it’s embarrassing. So, when they have the social support of other kids encouraging them, ‘no it’s okay, look I can’t do it either, let’s learn it together’ (G9F).

Whereas hockey coaches believed the social environment was important for athlete performance outcomes, gymnastics coaches linked the social environment to developing family relationships, so athletes could feel comfortable making mistakes. As an example, one gymnastics coach explained that “having that family environment is extremely important as it creates that team structure, drive, and desire to want to do better for everybody around you and yourself” (G11F).

Contextual considerations. Whereas both ice hockey and gymnastics coaches viewed the social environment as important, contextual considerations must be discussed. Hockey coaches perceived the social environment as important for building a true team atmosphere. These coaches often discussed how the social environment influenced their implementation of a collective vision to achieve team-related objectives. For example, hockey coaches believed that having a connected team would “encourage people to push a little harder” (H6F) as well as “teach each other, facilitate each other,

understand what the positive steps are in terms of playing in the end, that sort of effective team communication” (H3M). Gymnastics coaches did not associate the social environment with becoming a team in the same sense as hockey coaches. Instead, gymnastics coaches focused on how a connected social environment facilitated family-like relationships, aiming at support, openness, and inclusivity within the group. They did not discuss superordinate team objectives and a coherent vision, but rather, highlighted the value of a caring climate. A common conceptualization of a connected gymnastics team is described below:

I know for instance, like even if you're having a good day or a bad day, you'll have those athletes or coaches there to support you ... even if it's just little like minuscule little thing, ... it makes you feel like on top of the world, 'cause this is the support system that we have at the gym. It's like a second family (G12F).

Coaches explicitly provided opportunities for athletes to provide feedback to one another. One example was when a fellow teammate struggled with a skill on the uneven bars:

She'd keep struggling with it [a back-hip circle] and one of her friends would go over and say the same thing with different words, and it would help ... [saying] oh I remember when I was learning back hip circles like I would struggle with this. And like kind of taking it upon themselves to help each other (G13F).

HOW: MANAGING THE SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT

In addition to discussing why coaches believed the social environment was important, coaches also offered insight on how they managed it within their teams or groups. Coaches discussed their belief in their ability to influence the social environment, in addition to any barriers that they might have experienced. Coaches also listed tangible strategies they used to create connected social environments or reduce the impact of conflicts within teams.

Contextual similarities. Both ice hockey and gymnastics coaches believed that creating a connected social environment was somewhat athlete dependent. One hockey coach described a team that had a negative social environment as athletes who “self-destructed” because “they started fighting amongst each other,” indicating that although coaches can “give direction [and] set a tone,” the athletes are “really important” (H1M). Likewise, when a gymnastics coach was asked about the extent to which a positive group experience was dependent on the athletes, she responded that they were

“extremely, extremely important” (G11F). Coaches believed they could create a structure and provide explicit opportunities for positive social interaction, but it depended on the implicit nature of their particular mix of athletes; if they valued each other and wanted to play an active role in the process.

Additionally, hockey and gymnastics coaches perceived similar barriers that impeded their ability to influence the social environment. These shared barriers were due to the nature of recreational sport (e.g., time) and athletes’ ages. For instance, one hockey coach described that the structure and selection of a hockey team was a barrier to his influence over the environment: “I think part of my concern ... to bunch players together, it doesn’t mean that they’re going to gel, it doesn’t mean that they’re going to get along, it doesn’t mean that they’re going to talk to each other” (H3M). A gymnastics coach also highlighted how recreational athletes do not spend much time together as a group when compared to more competitive athletes, limiting the coach’s potential influence: “...especially with the recreational program, you only get an hour and a half once a week to work with the kids ... that’s not enough time to build the ideal environment that you want so it’s definitely a factor” (G11F).

Interestingly, coaches perceived athletes’ ages to be a possible barrier to their ability to foster a positive social environment. Yet, whereas some coaches viewed younger athletes to represent a larger barrier (e.g., because more time is spent organizing athletes rather than interacting with them), other coaches perceived older athletes to be more difficult for cultivating a positive social environment (e.g., because of attitudes), regardless of the sport type. For example, a hockey coach detailed his concerns about influencing older teenagers as they have many commitments: “A lot of them have part-time jobs. So consistently getting to practice is not really [guaranteed]” (H7F). Clearly, the nature of recreational sport and athletes’ ages are viewed as implicit constraints that limit coaches’ abilities to develop a positive social environment. Overall, gymnastics and hockey coaches shared similar barriers to their influence due to the nature of recreational sport more generally.

Contextual differences. Hockey and gymnastics coaches differed in their perceptions of the extent of their influence on the social environment in sport. Although both perceived the social environment to be somewhat athlete dependent, hockey coaches described their role to be more important than gymnastics coaches. For example, a hockey coach said, “whoever takes up coaching, no matter what level, should be aware of their impact and influence. Never underestimate the power of your words and actions because the

minute you decide to coach, you'll have an implied influence over others" (H4M). A gymnastics coach also voiced her opinion on her coaching role:

I don't respond to [conflict] at all ... I would always shut down, so I don't do that with any of the kids. I kind of put the responsibility on them. I always tell them that I'm just their accessory, I am just 10% of their gymnastics and they are the 90%, like they got to put the work in. So, if they're not going to do it, then I can't do it for them, and I'm not going to harass them (G10F).

Gymnastics coaches viewed their coaching role as an "accessory" to the athletes' role in developing a connected social environment.

Hockey and gymnastics coaches also used different strategies to combat potential barriers to their influence. Although all coaches used strategies both at and away from their respective sport facilities, hockey coaches relied heavily on their influence away from the arena, whereas gymnastics coaches did not. At the arena, hockey coaches incorporated an implicit, general pedagogical approach whereby role modelling was valued as important to creating a friendly atmosphere that facilitated fair play. One hockey coach explained that he eliminated negative athlete behaviours derived by competence differences via role modelling:

I think with youth one of the biggest subgroups is who's the better hockey player and who isn't. If you're best player on the team, if you allow him to bang his stick on the ice when he doesn't score a goal, you'll have a whole team of stick-banging cranky kids. So, you've got to set that example early and again, don't tolerate that behaviour regardless of what player that is (H4M).

Additionally, although gymnastics coaches viewed their role as an accessory to establishing a positive social environment, they listed approaches within the gymnastics club that involved targeting team relationships. As one example, gymnastics coaches employed explicit pedagogical strategies compared to hockey coaches, by "putting the kids who work together, together" (G11F). Therefore, while both coaches used strategies at the facility to manage the social environment, hockey coaches relied implicitly on role modelling while gymnastics coaches explicitly created positive team structures to enhance the social environment.

Hockey coaches were more dependent on using strategies when their teams were away from the arena than at the arena, which was the opposite for gymnastics coaches. For instance, a hockey coach believed that tournaments could develop a connected social environment as it increased the amount of time a team spends together: "social time at a tournament can be a good opportunity. In the recreational leagues, outside of the ice times, there does-

n't seem to be a lot of opportunity around the team because people have other priorities" (H6F). While gymnastics coaches experienced fewer opportunities to bring their groups to outside activities, they managed to create "tournament-like" events within the gym. One coach described how she explicitly created team competitions within practice:

On beam I did a lot of, leading up to competition sort of thing, where each kid had to stick whatever their acro-series was. So back-walk-over, let's say, so we had to go over the 5 or 6 kids in their groups and everyone had to stick their back-walk-over. If not, we'd start from 1 and we had maybe 5 tries, and if that 5 tries didn't happen, then there was a consequence (G12F).

Ultimately, hockey coaches enjoyed spending time outside of hockey with their athletes to foster a connected social environment, while gymnastics coaches relied on practice time to do so.

Contextual considerations. The first and third authors' experiences in each sport informed some contextual considerations, including the use and ownership over the physical space of sport facilities and its influence on coaches' perceptions of managing the environment. As an invasion sport, hockey coaches were more involved in the dressing room space, offering more opportunity to develop a collaborative sense of team. Yet, they also shared ice time in community hockey arenas with other competing teams. Gymnastics coaches likely had more ownership over their physical practice space as they practiced in a privately-owned club and did not have to book gym times as every group is part of the same superordinate club. That said, they were less involved in changing room environments where cliques and conflicts could develop, perhaps because coaches felt they did not require the same sense of 'team' as it is an aesthetic sport that is individually evaluated. Overall, the physical space where recreational coaches are involved appears to provide an important context for understanding how different types of sport coaches manage the social environment.

Discussion

This study offers unique insight into coaches' perceptions of the social environment within integrated and contrient recreational youth sport settings. Using a qualitative methodology, it was possible to thematically compare and contrast the *what*, *why* and *how* of coaches' perceptions of the social environment. Importantly, coaches in both sports believed intrateam athlete support

to be critical. That said, coaches did not receive any formal education that addressed how to encourage or facilitate adaptive teammate interactions to create positive social environments. In addition, while both hockey and gymnastics coaches perceived the social environment to be an important factor for athletes returning to sport, hockey coaches focused primarily on performance outcomes whereas gymnastics coaches spoke about the role of developing family-like climates. Lastly, gymnastics and hockey coaches differed in their level of involvement in fostering a positive social environment. Specifically, whereas coaches disclosed similar barriers (e.g., related to the recreational nature of sport), they used different strategies to overcome these barriers.

Coaches viewed positive social environments as having athletes who supported each other, regardless of the type of sport. Interestingly, whereas hockey coaches believed it was important for athletes to develop friendships outside of practice, gymnastics coaches focused more specifically on relationship development within the immediate sport environment. Either way, youth athletes with high friendship quality (e.g., having a common goal, playing together, resolving conflict) positively predicts enjoyment (Weiss & Smith, 2002) and return to sport (Ulrich-French & Smith, 2009). Indeed, friendship and positive team dynamics are two major dimensions that are important to youth for experiencing 'fun' in sport (Vissek et al., 2015). Thus, there seems to be congruence between coach and athlete perceptions of enjoyment and support; however, future research would benefit from exploring how the motivation for interacting with peers within or outside of the sport context influences the social environment of a team.

Although coaches described the qualities that characterize a positive social environment, they did not receive any interpersonal skills training (e.g., managing relationships) in previous coach education programs. Instead, coaches indicated that such programs focused on developing professional skills (e.g., drills and practice development). These sentiments are consistent with the coaching literature, where a recent systematic review found that few coach development programs focused on enhancing coaches' interpersonal behaviours (Lefebvre, Evans, Turnnidge, Gainforth, & Côté, 2016). In response, emerging coach development programs have been grounded in behaviour change theory (Michie et al., 2011) and transformational leadership theory (Bass, 1998), meant to develop coaches' interpersonal skills (Turnnidge & Côté, 2017). Similar efforts are required to implement theory-informed programs to provide coaches with specialized education on managing social environments.

In addition, coach education programs may need to be tailored to the sport type to enhance context specificity. For instance, gymnastics coaches

focused on developing a team where everyone treats each other as “family.” This is akin to Fry and Gano-Overway’s (2010) notion of a caring climate—one where “individuals perceive a particular setting to be interpersonally inviting, safe, supportive, and able to provide the experience of being valued and respected” (p. 296). Coaches’ differing perceptions of creating a positive social environment may be due, in part, to the type of sport, as previous research has found that gymnasts (i.e., *contrient sport athletes*) were more likely to perceive a caring climate than a performance climate (Kipp & Weiss, 2013). One reason may be because ‘success’ is interpreted differently in aesthetic sports compared to invasion sports like ice hockey. Gymnasts rarely work together during tasks and are evaluated at the individual level, and thus, a performance climate may not be the focus. This may be because gymnastics coaches are often involved in the superordinate gymnastics club through extensive past participation as a competitive athlete, coaching other teams as a full-time paid staff member, and their involvement with the same group across consecutive years. Focusing on the longer-term trajectories of athletes places less immediate pressure on success—a key tenet of Positive Pedagogy that gymnastics coaches in this sample appear to have adopted (Light & Harvey, 2017). For these reasons, gymnastics coaches may identify meaningfully with the superordinate club in a different way to volunteer coaches from other sports (e.g., hockey) who are tasked with only managing one particular team.

The hockey coaches in the current study spoke more specifically to a task-oriented climate. Hockey is an invasion sport, whereby athletes must work together during practice and competitions, unlike aesthetic sports such as gymnastics. Importantly, coaches who develop a task-oriented climate may be fostering positive athlete outcomes. Coaches who believe in building a strong team vision and establishing a sport culture have been successful (Hodge, Henry, & Smith, 2014). For instance, this may lead to increased perceptions of similarity and social identity in a group (Kramer & Lewicki, 2010). To develop a team vision, Paradis and Martin (2012) have suggested that coaches may need to communicate with athlete leaders and conduct team goal setting. Additionally, when youth athletes perceive a task-involving motivational climate as created by coaches, they are more likely to experience positive team outcomes like task and social cohesion (Eys et al., 2013). Further research demonstrates that task-related behaviours can be taught to coaches through a motivational climate intervention, which positively influences youth athletes’ perceptions of task and social cohesion (McLaren, Eys, & Murray, 2015). Encouraging hockey coaches to focus on creating a task-oriented climate that emphasizes the development of a strong team vision,

culture, and enjoyable competition may be important for future coach development programs that discuss the social environment.

Although the perspectives of hockey and gymnastics coaches differed in relation to how they conceptualized a positive social environment, both believed in its importance for athletes continued involvement. Previous literature demonstrates that athletes have social motivations for participating in sport (e.g., Allen, 2003). In addition, athletes who experienced a caring climate within a particular team had positive associations with sport commitment (Fry & Gano-Overway, 2010). Indeed, developing “connections” (i.e., quality relationships with peers and coaches in the immediate sport environment) among athletes is a key element for effective coaching and contributing to positive youth development (Côté & Gilbert, 2009). Overall, there seems to be congruence between athletes’ perceptions of commitment to sport and coaches’ perceptions of the social environment. Greater research on understanding specific coaching behaviours that facilitate a caring climate may be warranted given its benefits for youth athletes.

Coaches experienced several barriers to facilitating a positive social environment. In particular, both hockey and gymnastics coaches viewed the recreational nature of sport to be a significant barrier (e.g., lack of time to foster relationships with/between athletes). Such perspectives have received support in the literature, as Vierimaa, Turnnidge, Bruner, and Côté (2017) found that recreational coaches had to purposefully optimize their interactions with athletes to effectively influence team relationships. As such, when recreational coaches are developing and executing their practices, they should be conscientiously engaged with athletes (rather than employing passive behaviours, such as using their phones) to maximize their ability to influence the social environment. Coach education programs may be beneficial to help coaches maximize their time with athletes by replacing their use of neutral and passive behaviours with effective interpersonal behaviours (e.g., asking athletes questions about their day outside of sport; Turnnidge & Côté, 2017).

In efforts to mitigate the described barriers, coaches used a variety of strategies that differed between sport type. As an example, hockey coaches sought to be heavily involved in facilitating a positive social environment through implicit approaches such as role modelling. Facilitating a positive climate through modelling behaviours lies on the implicit and reactive end of the life skills transfer continuum (Bean et al., 2018). From a transformational leadership perspective, role modelling or leading by example is one of the most important social influence mechanisms as it impacts followers’ moral identity, emotions, and action (Zhu, Avolio, Riggio, & Sosik, 2011). Not sur-

prisingly, research demonstrates that coaches use of role modelling behaviour predicts positive developmental experiences for athletes (Vella, Oades, & Crowe, 2013). On the other hand, gymnastics coaches believed it was the responsibility of the athletes to connect teams, and coaches could be harmful in this process. Although it may be important for coaches to consistently prioritize the development of a connected social environment throughout the season (Herbison, Vierimaa, Côté, & Martin, 2018), athletes sometimes prefer athlete-led efforts to manage the social environment as opposed to 'inauthentic,' 'heavy-handed,' or 'cliché' approaches led by coaches (Wagstaff, Martin, & Thelwell, 2017). Coaches may need to focus on developing fertile environments where positive social dynamics can develop and appoint athlete leaders who can manage internal conflicts.

However, when gymnastics coaches did intervene, they tended to use more explicit strategies than hockey coaches. For example, gymnastics coaches would often be involved in pairing athletes together or form overall group structure to develop teamwork. This is an example of coaches intentionally providing opportunities for athletes to practice life skills (i.e., working with different teammates; Bean et al., 2018). Indeed, researchers have advocated for coach-initiated group structuring in the past to develop collaboration among members (e.g., through task interdependence) and establish relationships (e.g., Donkers, Martin, & Evans, 2018). Furthermore, by increasing proximity among athletes, coaches may facilitate group processes such as cohesion (e.g., Paradis & Martin, 2012). Thus, while gymnastics coaches may not have been as consistently involved in manipulating the social environment, when coaches were involved, their strategies may have been quite effective.

Lastly, coaches employed strategies both at and away from their appropriate sport facilities. Hockey coaches were more likely to organize team building activities outside of the arena, whereas gymnastics coaches employed strategies within the gym environment. Hockey coaches engaged athletes in social team events (e.g., tournaments, team dinners) to spend more time together and further develop relationships, thus overcoming previously mentioned barriers. Gilbert, Gilbert, and Trudel (2001) support the use of team activities away from the arena as team gatherings can promote cohesion, a sense of affiliation, and a positive team atmosphere. However, others have cautioned that their use can actually heighten existing cliques within a team (e.g., Bloom, Loughhead, & Newin, 2008). Perhaps non-sport activities among recreational teams should be encouraged in future coach development programs to build a connected social environment, and coaches should intentionally plan activities to reduce intrateam conflicts.

LIMITATIONS

This study is not without its limitations. First, the recreational nature of both sport contexts meant that coaches generally had less contact with athletes. Thus, coaches may have been generalizing their perspectives from experiences with selective athletes, rather than the team as a whole. In addition, this study depicts the participants' perceptions of the social environment in a positive light, as coaches believed it to be important for their athletes to have fun and return to the sport. Therefore, a full range of coaches' behaviours and perceptions (e.g., negative) may not have been captured. Furthermore, the study included head hockey and gymnastics coaches with significant coaching experience, and the results may be different among coaches with less experience and at different levels of competition or from those in other coaching roles such as assistant coaches. Lastly, although this study offered unique comparisons between hockey and gymnastics coaches, their responses are not reflective of all coaches in these sports. Further investigations of the social environment with coaches across the sport typology continuum would be worthwhile.

Conclusion

This study offers valuable information on recreational coaches' perceptions of the social environment in both integrated (i.e., hockey) and contrient (i.e., gymnastics) youth sports. Regardless of the sport type, coaches believed the social environment consisted of supportive athletes and encouraged sport commitment but did not receive education on interpersonal or team skills. Hockey and gymnastics coaches faced similar barriers to facilitating a positive social environment due to the nature of recreational sport. Coaches differed in their perceptions of the overall social environment and strategies used to engage athletes both at and away from practice. These interviews offer a unique perspective on understanding the coach role in varying recreational youth sports. Recommendations for coach development programs are provided throughout. Future researchers and sport program providers should consider ways to remove barriers for coaches when influencing the social environment, such as offering a budget for team building activities away from the facility and more comprehensive coach education.

REFERENCES

- Allen, J.B. (2003). Social motivation in youth sport. *Journal of Sport & Exercise Psychology*, 25(1), 551-567.
- Atkinson, O., & Harvey, S. (2017). One youth soccer coach's maiden implementation of the tactical games model. *ÁGORA Para La Educación Física Y El Deporte*, 19, 135-137. doi:10.24197/aefd.2-3.2017.135-157
- Balish, S. M., McClaren, C., Rainham, D., & Blanchard, C. (2014). Correlates of youth sport attrition: A review and future directions. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, 15(4), 420-439. doi:10.1016/j.psychsport.2014.04.003
- Bass, B.M. (1998). *Transformational leadership*. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Bean, C., Kramers, S., Forneris, T., & Camiré, M. (2018). The implicit/explicit continuum of life skills development and transfer. *Quest*, 70(4), 456-470. doi:10.1080/00336297.2018.1451348
- Bloom, G. A., Loughhead, T. M., & Newin, J. (2008). Team building for youth sport. *Journal of Physical Education, Recreation & Dance*, 79(9), 44-47.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2019). Reflecting on reflexive thematic analysis. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*, 11(4), 589-597. doi:10.1080/2159676X.2019.1628806
- Braun, V., Clarke, V., & Weate, P. (2016). Using thematic analysis in sport and exercise research. In B. Smith & A. C. Sparkes (Eds.), *International handbook on qualitative research in sport and exercise* (pp. 191-218). London, UK: Routledge.
- Carron, A. V., & Eys, M. A. (2012). *Group dynamics in sport* (4th ed.). Morgantown, WV: Fitness Information Technology.
- Coatsworth, J. D., & Conroy, D. E. (2009). The effects of autonomy-supportive coaching, need satisfaction, and self-perceptions on initiative and identity in youth swimmers. *Developmental Psychology*, 45(2), 320-328. doi:/10.1037/a0014027
- Côté, J., Baker, J., & Abernethy, B. (2007). Practice and play in the development of sport expertise. In R. Eklund & G. Tenenbaum (Eds.), *Handbook of sport psychology*, (3rd ed., pp. 184-202). Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.
- Côté, J., & Gilbert, W. (2009). An integrative definition of coaching effectiveness and expertise. *International Journal of Sports Science & Coaching*, 4(3), 307-323. doi:10.1260/174795409789623892
- Côté, J., Turnnidge, J., & Evans, B. (2014). The dynamic process of development through sport. *Kinesiologia Slovenica*, 20(3), 14-26.
- Donkers, J. L., Martin, L. J., & Evans, M. B. (2018). Psychological collectivism in youth athletes on individual sport teams. *International Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, 16(3), 285-299. doi:10.1080/1612197X.2016.1218529
- Eime, R. M., Young, J. A., Harvey, J. T., Charity, M. J., & Payne, W. R. (2013). A systematic review of the psychological and social benefits of participation in sport for children and adolescents: Informing development of a conceptual model of health through sport. *International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity*, 10(98). doi:10.1186/1479-5868-10-98
- Evans, B., Eys, M., & Bruner, M. W. (2012). Seeing the "we" in "me" sports: The need to consider individual sport team environments. *Canadian Psychology*, 53(4), 301-308. doi:10.1037/a0030202
- Evans, B., Eys, M., & Wolf, S. (2013). Exploring the nature of interpersonal influence in elite individual sport teams. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*, 25(4), 448-462. doi:10.1080/10413200.2012.752769

- Eys, M. A., & Brawley, L. R. (2018). Reflections on cohesion research with sport and exercise groups. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, 12(4), e12379. doi:10.1111/spc3.12379
- Eys, M. A., Jewitt, E., Evans, M. B., Wolf, S., Bruner, M. W., & Loughhead, T. M. (2013). Coach-initiated motivational climate and cohesion in youth sport. *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport*, 84(3), 373-383. doi:10.1080/02701367.2013.814909
- Fry, M. D., & Gano-Overway, L. A. (2010). Exploring the contribution of the caring climate to the youth sport experience. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*, 22(3), 294-304. doi:10.1080/10413201003776352
- Gilbert, W. D., Gilbert, J. N., & Trudel, P. (2001). Coaching strategies for youth sports: Part 1: Athlete behavior and athlete performance. *Journal of Physical Education, Recreation & Dance*, 72(4), 29-33.
- Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1994). Competing paradigms in qualitative research. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 105-117). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Harvey, S. (2009). A study of interscholastic soccer players perceptions of learning with game sense. *Asian Journal of Exercise & Sports Science*, 6(1), 1-10.
- Herbison, J. D., Vierimaa, M., Côté, J., & Martin, L. J. (2018). The dynamic nature of connection in relation to character in youth sport. *International Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology*. doi:10.1080/1612197X.2017.1423507
- Hockey Canada. (n.d.). Answers to questions asked by hockey parents. Retrieved from <https://hockeycanada.ca/en-ca/hockey-programs/parents/faq>
- Hodge, K., Henry, G., & Smith, W. (2014). A case study of excellence in elite sport: Motivational climate in a world champion team. *The Sport Psychologist*, 28(1), 60-74. doi:10.1123/tsp.2013-0037
- Jowett, S. (2007). Coach-athlete relationships ignite sense of groupness. In M. R. Beauchamp & M. A. Eys (Eds.), *Group dynamics in exercise and sport psychology* (pp. 63-75). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Kipp, L. E., & Weiss, M. R. (2013). Social influences, psychological need satisfaction, and well-being among female adolescent gymnasts. *Sport, Exercise, and Performance Psychology*, 2(1), 62-75. doi:10.1037/a0030236
- Kramer, R. M., & Lewicki, R. J. (2010). Repairing and enhancing trust: Approaches to reducing organizational trust deficits. *Academy of Management Annals*, 4(1), 245-277. doi:10.5465/19416520.2010.487403
- Lefebvre, J., Evans, M. B., Turnnidge, J., Gainforth, H. L., & Côté, J. (2016). Describing and classifying coach development programmes: A synthesis of empirical research and applied practice. *International Journal of Sports Science & Coaching*, 11(6), 887-899. doi:10.1177/1747954116676116
- Light, R. L., & Harvey, S. (2017). Positive Pedagogy for sport coaching. *Sport, Education and Society*, 22(2), 271-287. doi:10.1080/13573322.2015.1015977
- McLaren, C. D., Eys, M. A., & Murray, R. A. (2015). A coach-initiated motivational climate intervention and athletes' perceptions of group cohesion in youth sport. *Sport, Exercise, and Performance Psychology*, 4(2), 113-126. doi:10.1037/spy0000026
- Michie, S., van Stralen, M.M., & West, R. (2011). The behaviour change wheel: A new method for characterizing and designing behaviour change interventions. *Implementation Science*, 6(42), doi:10.1186/1748-5908-6-42
- Paradis, K. F., & Martin, L. J. (2012). Team building in sport: Linking theory and research

- to practical application. *Journal of Sport Psychology in Action*, 3 (3), 159-170. doi:10.1080/21520704.2011.653047
- Patton, M.Q. (2015). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods*. London, UK: Sage Publications.
- Piercy, K. L., Troiano, R. P., Ballard, R. M., Carlson, S. A., Fulton, J. E., Galuska, D. A., ... Olson, R. D. (2018). The physical activity guidelines for Americans. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 320(19), 2020-2028. doi:10.1001/jama.2018.14854
- Roberts, J. M. (2014). Critical realism, dialectics, and qualitative research methods. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*, 44(1), 1-23. doi:10.1111/jtsb.12056
- Robertson, M., Hague, C., Evans, M. B., & Martin, L. J. (2019). Do participant reporting practices in youth sport research adequately represent the diversity of sport contexts? *Psychology of Sport & Exercise*, 45, 101559. Advance online publication.
- Smith, B., & McGannon, K. R. (2018). Developing rigor in qualitative research: Problems and opportunities within sport and exercise psychology. *International Review of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, 11(1), 101-121. doi:10.1080/1750984X.2017.1317357
- Sparkes, A. C., & Smith, B. (2014). *Qualitative research methods in sport, exercise, and health: From process to product*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Strauss, A. L., & Corbin, J. (1990). *Basics of qualitative research: Grounded theory procedures and techniques*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Turnnidge, J., & Côté, J. (2017). Transformational coaching workshop: Applying a person-centered approach to coach development programs. *International Sport Coaching Journal*, 4(3), 314-325. doi:10.1123/iscj.2017-0046
- Turnnidge, J., & Côté, J. (2018). Applying transformational leadership theory to coaching research in youth sport: A systematic literature review. *International Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, 16(3), 327-342. doi:10.1080/1612197X.2016.1189948
- Ulrich-French, S., & Smith, A. L. (2009). Social and motivational predictors of continued youth sport participation. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, 10(1), 87-95. doi:10.1016/j.psychsport.2008.06.007
- Vella, S. A., Oades, L. G., & Crowe, T. P. (2013). The relationship between coach leadership, the coach-athlete relationship, team success, and the positive developmental experiences of adolescent soccer players. *Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy*, 18(5), 549-561. doi:10.1080/17408989.2012.726976
- Vierimaa, M., Turnnidge, J., Bruner, M., & Côté, J. (2017). Just for the fun of it: Coaches' perceptions of an exemplary community youth sport program. *Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy*, 22(6), 603-617. doi:10.1080/17408989.2017.1341473
- Visek, A. J., Achrafi, S. M., Mannix, H. M., McDonnell, K., Harris, B. S., & DiPietro, L. (2015). The fun integration theory: Toward sustaining children and adolescents sport participation. *Journal of Physical Activity and Health*, 12(3), 424-433. doi:10.1123/jpah.2013-0180
- Wagstaff, C. R. D., Martin, L. J., & Thelwell, R. C. (2017). Subgroups and cliques in sport: A longitudinal case study of a rugby union team. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, 30, 164-172. doi:10.1016/j.psychsport.2017.03.006
- Weiss, M. R., & Smith, A. L. (2002). Friendship quality in youth sport: Relationship to age, gender, and motivation variables. *Journal of Sport & Exercise Psychology*, 24(4), 420-437. doi:10.1123/jsep.24.4.420
- Westre, K. R., & Weiss, M. R. (1991). The relationship between perceived coaching behaviors and group cohesion in high school football teams. *The Sport Psychologist*, 5(1), 41-54. doi:10.1123/tsp.5.1.41

- Zhu, W., Avolio, B. J., Riggio, R. E., & Sosik, J. J. (2011). The effect of authentic transformational leadership on follower and group ethics. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 22(5), 801-817. doi:10.1016/j.leaqua.2011.07.004