CONDITIONS OF CHILDREN'S TALENT DEVELOPMENT IN SPORT

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PEER AND GROUP INFLUENCES IN YOUTH SPORT

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INTRODUCTION

Sport is a social context that provides rich opportunities for interpersonal interaction. Children are often drawn to sport for social reasons, including a desire for affiliation, social recognition, or wanting to be with friends (Allen, 2003). While sport fosters both social interactions and relationships with parents, coaches, and peers, it is the bond with peers that may have the most significant influence on children's motivation to participate in sport and, consequently, their personal and athletic development. Peers can also contribute to the quality of a youth's sport experiences through their companionship and support (Smith, 1999). Of equal importance, it is through their peer experiences that children can (a) explore the physical and social world; (b) acquire a wide range of behaviors, skills, attitudes, and experiences; (c) develop cognitive, social, and emotional functioning; (d) develop an ability to understand other's thoughts, emotions, and intentions; (e) develop a personal identity; and (f) develop moral values and attitudes (see Azmitia, Lippman, & Ittel, 1999; Gunnar, Senior, & Hartup, 1984; Hartup & Laursen, 1999; Kindermann, 2003; Light & Glachan, 1985; Rubin, Bukowski, & Parker, 2006).

Despite the consistent evidence that relations with peers are important for youth development, the overwhelming majority of research on social influence in a sport context focuses upon the role and social influence of coaches and parents in facilitating youth's physical and psychosocial outcomes (Smith, 2007). Far less research has focused on youth personal and athletic talent development through peer interactions and relationships in sport (Holt, Black,

Tamminen, Fox, & Mandigo, 2008). This is unfortunate, given the increasing recognition of peers in models of athlete development. In one of the earlier models of expertise development, Bloom (1985) examined experts in disciplines such as mathematics, art, science, and sport. Bloom utilized qualitative, retrospective interviews to describe the life story of these talented individuals. From these interviews, Bloom inferred that there were several significant persons who help shape the talent development process. Bloom believed that around the ages of 10–14, peers become more involved in the individual's talent areas, both as friends and competitors, and encourage the individuals to master relevant skills. More recently, models by Wylleman and Lavallee (2004) and Bailey and Morley (2006) proposed that talent development needs to be viewed as a multidimensional construct that stems from the emergence of a wide range of abilities, including interpersonal skills. As such, youth's ability to positively interact with peers may help to foster the development of sport expertise.
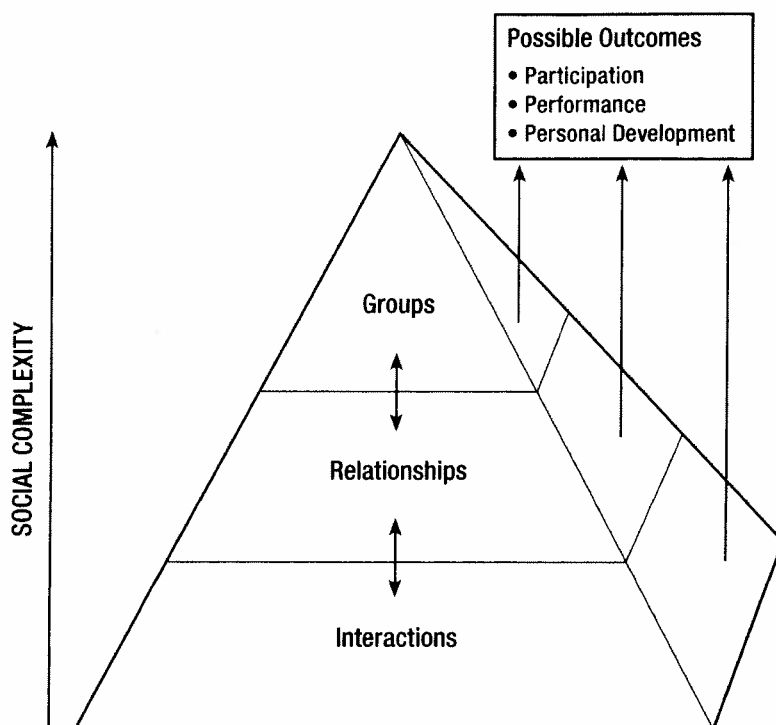
Although the association between peers and talent development in sport is not yet clearly understood, peers have been shown to play a key role in the development of expertise in other areas. For example, research within the education literature has established a significant link between peer experiences and youth's academic achievement (Wentzel & Caldwell, 1997). This line of research has consistently demonstrated that a relationship exists between high levels of peer acceptance and successful academic performance (e.g., Berghout-Austin & Draper, 1984; Wentzel, 1991). Friendships and group membership have also been related to academic achievement (e.g., Berndt & Keefe, 1995). Given these findings, it would be informative to determine if sport-based peer interactions can similarly facilitate athletic achievement.

Thus, the objectives of this chapter are to (a) provide an orientation for a guiding conceptual framework to better understand the multiple interrelated levels of social organization that underpin peer experiences; (b) explore the influence of peers on children's motivation to participate in sport, their athletic experiences, and their talent development; (c) delve deeper into the theory and empirical evidence within three levels of social complexity (interactions, relationship, groups) among peers in sport; and (d) highlight important avenues of future research.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Rubin, Bukowski, and Parker (1998, 2006) proposed that youth's experiences with peers can be conceptualized on three different levels of social complexity: interactions, relationships, and groups. This conceptualization was based upon earlier work by Hinde (1987) in child and social psychology. Figure 10.1 represents a conceptual framework of youth's experiences in sport based upon the previous work of Rubin et al. (1998, 2006) and Hinde (1987). Within this framework, the simplest level of complexity of peer experiences involves *interactions*. Interactions stem from the behavior of two individuals in a social exchange of some duration. The term interaction is typically reserved for dyadic behaviors that require interdependence between the two participants (Rubin et al., 2006). A comprehensive description of interactions requires understanding not only the content of what the individuals are doing, but also the qualities of the interaction (Hinde, 1976a). These interaction qualities emerge as a result of the combination of the participants' behaviors, and thus have properties that are not present in the behaviors alone (Hinde, 1976b). Positive peer interactions have been shown to be an

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Possible Outcomes
- Participation
- Performance
- Personal Development

SOCIAL COMPLEXITY

Groups

Relationships

Interactions

Note: Framework adapted from Rubin et al.'s (1998, 2006) and Hinde's (1987) previous work/conceptualizations of youth's experiences with peers.

Figure 10.1. Conceptual framework of youth's experiences with peers in sport.

important context for youth's social, cognitive, and emotional development (e.g., Hartup & Laursen, 1999; Kindermann, 2003).

Relationships represent a higher level of complexity of youth's experiences with peers (see Figure 10.1). Relationships are comprised of a succession of interactions between individuals who are known to each other (Rubin et al., 2006). According to Hinde (1995), relationships can be described across ten dimensions, such as the diversity of interactions within a relationship, the reciprocity of these interactions, and the individuals' commitment to the relationship. One dyadic relationship that is particularly salient for peer research in sport is friendship. Friendships are bidirectional relationships in which both parties share a sense of membership and belonging (Moran & Weiss, 2006). Previous research suggests that friendships in childhood can serve several important functions, such as providing support, affection, and instrumental and informational assistance (Newcomb & Bagwell, 1995).

Finally, relationships are further embedded in, and influenced by, a higher level of social complexity: *groups* (see Figure 10.1). Groups are a collection of interacting individuals who have some degree of reciprocal influence on each other (Rubin et al., 2006) and who interact

with each other on a regular basis (Wentzel & Caldwell, 1997). Furthermore, groups can be defined by the characteristics of their participants, their types of interactions, and their constituent relationships. However, peer groups are more than simple aggregates of their interactions and relationships (Chen, Chen, & Kaspar, 2001). Groups can possess specific properties, such as group norms, processes, and structure, that are not necessarily found in lower-order peer experiences (Holt et al., 2008). Since groups can shape the type and range of interactions and relationships that can occur within them, they can have a significant influence on peer experiences. The latter half of the chapter will pay particular attention to the significant influence of groups on peers.

PEER INTERACTIONS IN SPORT

Within the developmental psychology literature, there is growing support for the notion that real-time interactions can be viewed as the raw materials of development (e.g., Fogel, 1993; Thelen & Smith, 1994), which are of great importance to psychological well-being (Steenbeek & van Geert, 2006). In line with this contention, Granic (2005) proposed that an individual's day-to-day interactive experiences can play an integral role in facilitating their developmental outcomes. The significance of investigating the behavioral patterns that shape peer interactions is further underscored by the fact that youth's interaction patterns and acceptance by the peer group are related (Steenbeck & van Geert, 2006). Asher and Coie (1990), for instance, found that children whose social behaviors led to maladaptive interaction patterns were more likely to be rejected by their peer group. Previous research has also consistently demonstrated that prosocial interactive behaviors are positively linked with peer acceptance (e.g.,Wentzel & Caldwell, 1997). Furthermore, the social skills that youth acquire through their interaction with peers may foster their ability to develop and maintain dyadic relationships, such as friendships (Rubin, Chen, Coplan, Buskirk, & Wojslawowicz, 2005). Drawing upon these studies, it is evident that peer interactions may have an important influence on youth's peer experiences at both the relationship and group levels.

Although there are a limited number of studies investigating peer interactions in sport, evidence exists to suggest that peer interactions may help to shape youth's skill acquisition. For example, d'Arripe-Longueville, Gernigon, Huet, Winnykamen, and Cadopi (2002) qualitatively assessed the role of peers in learning a swimming skill. The two purposes of this study were to examine the use of peer-assisted learning methods and to explore the effects of dyad type (symmetrical vs. asymmetrical) and gender on peer interaction modes. Symmetrical pairs consisted of two novice peers with similar competence levels, whereas asymmetrical pairs consisted of a novice peer paired with a skilled peer. Results indicated that the peer interactions in this study consisted of four key behaviors: guidance-tutoring, imitation, co-operation, and parallel activity. The results also illustrated that tutoring and imitation were exhibited more in asymmetrical dyads, while co-operation and parallel activity were manifested more in symmetrical dyads. Further, boys tended to engage in individual behaviors (parallel activity), whereas girls more frequently exhibited socially oriented behaviors such as cooperation and guidance-tutoring. Regarding performance, boys in asymmetrical dyads performed significantly better than all other groups. Overall, these findings provide some valuable insight into

how the characteristics of one's peers may shape the content of peer interactions, and in doing so, may influence youth's skill development.

Peer interactions may also contribute to youth's motivation to participate in sport. Keegan, Harwood, Spray, and Lavallee (2009) conducted interviews with 40 youth sport participants in order to investigate the roles of coaches, parents, and peers in influencing athlete motivation. Results revealed that peers influenced participants' motivation through a wide range of behaviors, including competitive behaviors, collaborative behaviors, and evaluative communication. Participants also reported that behaviors that had a positive influence on motivation, such as patting one on the back, were perceived as acts of friendship. These results help to demonstrate the impact of peer behaviors on youth's sport motivation. In addition, they illustrate the interdependent nature of peer interactions and relationships.

Holt and colleagues' (2008) investigation of female soccer players' perceptions of their peer experiences is another study that evaluated peer interactions in sport. They conducted in-depth interviews with 34 girls from two youth soccer teams. Results indicated that players' short-term interactions provided opportunities to integrate new team members into the existing team structure. The results also suggested that participants recognized the importance of integrating new members in relation to the team's success. In addition, Holt et al. (2008) found that through their soccer experience, the youth learned to interact with different types of peers (i.e., youth who were perceived to have different interests, personalities, etc). More specifically, since the youth did not choose their teammates, they had to learn to cooperate and get along with peers who weren't necessarily their friends.

Overall, these studies provide some initial insight into how peer interactions may influence youth's sport experiences. However, there is still a lack of studies investigating the behaviors that make up peer interactions in sport. For example, it is unclear how behaviors that are directly sport related, such as providing technical feedback or discussing team strategies, may contribute to youth's talent development. Further, studies that fully capture the complex and reciprocal nature of peer interactions are limited (Murphy-Mills, Bruner, Erickson, & Côté, 2011). There is thus a need to continue to explore the interactions that occur between peers within the sport environment.

PEER RELATIONSHIPS IN SPORT

As noted previously, the primary construct at the relationship level is friendship. Research on friendship within the developmental psychology literature proposed that three distinct aspects of friendship are important to youth's psychosocial outcomes: (a) whether or not a child has friends, (b) who these friends are, and (c) the quality of these friendships (Bukowski, Newcomb, & Hartup, 1996; Newcomb & Bagwell, 1995). Each of these characteristics of friendship can play a unique role in facilitating development. This is supported by the fact that friendships can promote the acquisition of interpersonal skills, enhance self-concept and self-esteem, and produce feelings of personal well-being (Gifford-Smith & Brownell, 2003). Furthermore, friendships can serve as an important source of emotional security and can act as a protective cushion against some of the stresses and challenges that youth experience (Criss, Pettit, Bates, Dodge, & Lapp, 2002). Based on these contentions, it is reasonable to suggest that peer

friendships may influence both youth's motivation to participate in sport and their expertise development.

Within the sport context, evidence exists to suggest that there is an important connection between sport participation and the development of friendship (e.g., Bigelow, Lewko, & Salhani, 1989; Weiss & Smith, 2002). In addition, studies have shown that a best friend's participation in sport can be a significant predictor of a youth's sport commitment and involvement (e.g., Wold & Anderssen, 1992). Patrick et al. (1999) examined the role of peer relationships in adolescents' continued involvement in the sports and the arts. They conducted semistructured interviews with 41 students in grades 9–12 and their parents in order to explore how the participants themselves viewed the association between peer experiences and activity participation. Of these 41 participants, 27 were involved in sport-related activities. Results suggested that adolescents perceived sport activities to be a particularly salient context in which to develop friendships. In fact, over half of the participants reported that their involvement in activities provided them with a significant opportunity to make friends and led to an increase in the number of friends they had. Furthermore, over one-third of the participants indicated that their activity involvement enhanced their social skills and improved their confidence in relating to peers.

In addition to reporting that participation in activities helped to extend the breadth of their social networks, adolescents also commented that their activity involvement helped to enhance the *quality* of the relationships within these networks (Patrick et al., 1999). This is supported by the fact that more than half of the adolescents described the friendships they formed in the activities as more intense and intimate than other friendships. Finally, the adolescents also reported that when they experienced positive activity-related friendships, their enjoyment of, and their commitment to, the activity was considerably enhanced. Based on these reports, Patrick and colleagues (1999) proposed that the benefits accrued through peer relationships were a significant factor influencing continued activity engagement. This is consistent with previous research that identifies the importance of social support with regard to participation in youth sport (Scanlan, Carpenter, Schmidt, Simons, & Keeler, 1993).

In an effort to further examine friendship in the sport context, Weiss and Smith (2002) explored age and gender differences in the quality of sport friendship and assessed the relationship between friendship quality and motivation-related variables. They distributed the Sport Friendship Quality Scale (SFQS; Weiss & Smith, 1999) to 191 tennis players ranging in age from 10 to 18 years. The participants also completed measures to assess their perceived tennis competence and perceived peer acceptance, as well as their tennis enjoyment and commitment. The results indicated that developmental and gender preferences for certain friendship qualities exist. This was supported by the finding that older athletes (14–18 years) rated loyalty, intimacy, things in common, and conflict higher than younger participants (10–13 years). Conversely, younger athletes rated companionship and pleasant play higher. Gender differences also emerged as girls rated self-esteem enhancement and supportiveness, loyalty and intimacy, and things in common higher than boys, who rated conflict resolution higher. The results revealed that the friendship qualities of companionship and pleasant play, conflict resolution, and things in common predicted higher tennis enjoyment and commitment. Furthermore, this research demonstrated that friendship quality is linked to athlete perceptions of enjoyment, competence, and sport commitment.

Finally, Ullrich-French and Smith (2006) investigated how youth's perceptions of their relationships with parents and peers predict motivational outcomes in youth sport. One hundred and eighty-six youth soccer players (10–14 years) completed surveys assessing friendship quality, parent-child relationship quality, peer acceptance, and motivational outcomes, including enjoyment, stress, perceived competence, and self-determined motivation. Findings indicated that friendship quality contributed to the prediction of enjoyment, perceived competence, and self-determined motivation. Based on these results, Ullrich-French and Smith (2006) posited that peers are important socializing agents for youth. This is in line with previous research that identified peers as key contributors to motivational outcomes in sport (e.g., Weiss & Smith, 2002).

GROUP PROCESSES IN SPORT

The previous two sections highlighted research and concepts pertaining to interactions and relationships among peers within the sport environment. Researchers suggested that the patterning of these interactions and relationships combine to produce the more complex entity of the group (Hinde, 1979; Rubin et al., 2006). Indeed, the definition of a group provided earlier in this chapter (i.e., interacting individuals who have reciprocal influence on one another) reflects this conception. However, in the sport environment, Carron and Eys (2012) provided a definition of a *sport team* (i.e., a specific type of group) that appears to reflect an even greater level of complexity:

> A collection of two or more individuals who possess a common identity, have common goals and objectives, share a common fate, exhibit structured patterns of interaction and modes of communication, hold common perceptions about group structure, are personally and instrumentally interdependent, reciprocate interpersonal attraction, and consider themselves to be a group. (p. 14)

Carron and Eys (2012) provided a comprehensive discussion about the derivation of this definition of a sport team (not to be reiterated in this chapter), which was based on the work of numerous group dynamics theorists. The definition does, however, underlie a set of concepts thought to be of importance in the study of sport teams that ultimately affects both individual and group outcomes. These concepts include the attributes of group members, the group's environment, group structure (e.g., status, roles), group cohesion, and other group processes (e.g., cooperation, cohesion, competition, goal setting). There is some overlap between these concepts and those highlighted as important to consider at the group level by Rubin et al. (2006) and Holt et al. (2008). For example, both teams of researchers identified *cohesion* as an important property to consider within groups. Furthermore, elements of group *structure* were also highlighted within these works; Rubin et al. (2006) briefly discussed the hierarchy or ordering of individuals within the group, while Holt and colleagues (2008) found the emergence of peer leaders and social hierarchy to be particularly relevant to female high school soccer teams.

Two issues pertaining to the links between group properties and the objectives of the present chapter and book (i.e., identifying conditions that underpin children's investment in sport and their talent development) need to be highlighted. First, is there evidence to suggest

that these group properties play a role in the degree to which individuals invest themselves in sport? Drawing from research with adult participants, it is reasonable to conclude that the answer to this question is an unqualified yes. For example, individuals who perceive their team as highly cohesive are more likely to attend and to be on time for practices and games (Carron, Widmeyer, & Brawley, 1988), in addition to expending more effort in the process (Prapavessis & Carron, 1997). Other researchers found evidence between group perceptions and both intended and actual future participation in sport. In the case of the former, Eys, Carron, Bray, and Beauchamp (2005) found that athletes who perceived greater ambiguity related to their role responsibilities (i.e., a structural component of a group) had lower intentions to return to their team the following season. With respect to actual participation, Spink, Wilson, and Odnokon's (2010) results supported their hypothesis that those athletes in their study (i.e., elite hockey players) returning to play their sport held stronger perceptions of group cohesion the previous year (compared to those who did not return).

Clearly, talent development requires ongoing participation and investment in the chosen activity, and, as the previous paragraph communicates, group concepts are related to continued and future participation. However, a second issue related to the subject under examination in the present chapter is whether the links between group properties and sport investment are specifically demonstrated with *younger* populations. Overall, there remains a dearth of sport literature relating to the group's properties. This seems to reflect the larger body of literature, as Rubin et al. (2006) noted:

> In spite of the importance of the group, there has been, until recently, little attention paid to the assessment of group phenomena.... This is surprising because researchers often cite experiences with peers with reference to the "peer group." [This] could be attributed to the complex conceptual and methodological issues related to the study of group structure and organization. (p. 579)

The remainder of this section focuses on five concepts that have received recent research attention with younger populations in the sport environment. These include cohesion, role perceptions, group norms, social identity, and interdependence. Each section will include a definition of the concept, discuss issues pertaining to its conceptualization, and briefly highlight relevant literature (see Table 10.1 for an overview of each concept).

Group Cohesion

Carron, Brawley, and Widmeyer (1998) defined cohesion as "a dynamic process which is reflected in the tendency for a group to stick together and remain united in the pursuit of instrumental objectives and/or for the satisfaction of member affective needs" (p. 213). A conceptualization of cohesion (Carron, Widmeyer, & Brawley, 1985) devised with adults as the target population highlighted four dimensions, including (a) individual attractions to the group-task (i.e., individuals' perceptions of personal involvement toward the group's task aspects), (b) individual attractions to the group-social (i.e., individuals' perceptions of personal involvement toward the group's social aspects), (c) group integration-task (i.e., individuals' perceptions of the level of unity possessed by the group around task aspects), and (d) group integration-social

Cohesion

Role Percep

Group Norms

Table 10.1. Summary of Group Processes in Youth Sport

	Definition	Conceptualization	General Findings
Cohesion	"Dynamic process which is reflected in the tendency for a group to stick together and remain united in the pursuit of instrumental objectives and /or for the satisfaction of member affective needs." (Carron et al., 1998, p. 213)	Two dimensions of cohesion (task and social) assessed in children and youth.	1. Youth athletes' perceptions of coach-initiated motivational climate associated with group cohesion. Specifically, task-oriented motivational climate was positively related to perceptions of both task and social cohesion, while perceptions of an ego-oriented motivational climate were negatively related to perceptions of task cohesion. 2. Youth participating on sport teams reporting greater overall personal and social development perceived task and social cohesion to be higher throughout the season. 3. Task cohesion was found to be positively related to psychological need satisfaction that, in turn, was related to athletes' perceptions of developmental experiences, such as increased opportunities for leadership, emotional regulation, and goal setting, as well as decreased social exclusion.
Role Perceptions	Expectations for behaviors for a position in a social context (Biddle & Thomas, 1966).	Athletes need to understand (a) the scope of their responsibilities, (b) the behaviors necessary to fulfill their responsibilities, (c) how they will be evaluated with respect to role performance, and (d) the consequences should they not fulfill their role responsibilities.	1. Negative links were found between perceptions of role ambiguity and role performance. 2. Perceptions of social cohesion mid season were predictive of changes in role ambiguity (i.e., ambiguity surrounding scope of responsibilities and role behaviors) between mid and late season.
Group Norms	"Standards for behavior expected of group members." (Carron et al., 2005, p. 171)	Different types of norms identified: productive, social support, attendance, social inclusion, performance, and moral (e.g., cheating, aggression) in different situations: (a) during competitions, (b) at practices, (c) in social situations, and (d) during the off-season.	1. Team norms (productive norms, role involvement, social support) predicted perceptions of social loafing. 2. Group cohesion significantly and positively related to performance norms. 3. Coach leadership style significantly related to collective team norms for cheating and aggression. Specifically, autocratic coach behavior positively linked to the team norms for cheating and aggression. 4. Coach-athlete behaviors predicted norms in practice and social settings.

Table 10.1. Summary of Group Processes in Youth Sport (continued)

Social Identity	"That part of an individual's self concept which derives from his/her knowledge of his/her membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership." (Tajfel, 1981, p. 255)	Three dimensions: (a) cognitive centrality (the importance of being a group member); (b) in-group affect (the positive feelings associated with group membership); (c) in-group ties (perceptions of similarity, bonding, and belongingness with other group members) (Cameron, 2004).	1. Youth on winning teams identified more strongly and emphasized team unity significantly more than players on teams with losing records. 2. Social identity was a predictor of increased prosocial behavior toward teammates.
Interdependence	Actions of one individual within a group have implications for the next member, and ultimately the group as a whole (Johnson, 2003).	Multidimensional (task and outcome).	1. Outcome interdependence was a significant predictor of developmental experiences in youth sport (including identity exploration, initiative, emotional regulation, positive relationships, teamwork and social skills, and adult network and social capital). 2. Interdependence of the youth sport setting predicted a young athlete's enjoyment and burnout.

(i.e., individuals' perceptions of the level of unity possessed by the group regarding social aspects).

In more recent studies, Eys and colleagues (Eys, Loughead, Bray, & Carron, 2009a; 2009b) found support for their contention that the multidimensional conceptual model of cohesion outlined in the previous paragraph may lack relevance for a younger age group. Citing a review by Rubin et al. (2006) that discussed developmental differences with respect to how individuals view their interrelationships with others (e.g., friendships, group membership), Eys et al. (2009a) proposed that youth may view their group in less complex terms. They found empirical evidence through the development of the Youth Sport Environment Questionnaire (YSEQ) to suggest that examining cohesion via task versus social dimensions (compared to the four dimensions previously outlined) was most appropriate. The YSEQ is a questionnaire designed to assess perceptions of cohesion from youth aged 13–17 years. A similar structure (i.e., two-dimensional structure; task vs. social cohesion) was supported by Martin, Carron, Eys, and Loughead (2012) in the development of their questionnaire designed for children 9–12 years of age.

Given that the development of these two inventories is quite recent, a comprehensive set of literature has yet to be developed regarding cohesion perceptions with younger groups. However, a few studies highlighted some interesting findings. For example, Jewitt, Eys, Loughead, and Bruner (2010) communicated links between youth athletes' perceptions of the coach-initiated motivational climate and cohesion. Specifically, a task-oriented motivational climate

was positively related to perceptions of both task and social cohesion, while perceptions of an ego-oriented motivational climate were negatively related to perceptions of task cohesion. Furthermore, Jewitt (2011) found that veteran (vs. first-year athletes) and team-sport athletes (vs. individual-sport athletes) had stronger perceptions of social cohesion, and recommended that particular attention be paid to the social environment in youth sport groups.

Finally, two recent studies examined cohesion as it relates specifically to developmental experiences. Bruner, Eys, and Côté (2011) found that those individuals participating on teams reporting greater overall personal and social development perceived task and social cohesion to be higher throughout the season. In a related fashion within a study by Taylor and Bruner (2012), task cohesion was found to be positively related to psychological need satisfaction, that in turn was related to athletes' perceptions of developmental experiences, such as increased opportunities for leadership, emotional regulation, and goal setting, and decreased social exclusion.

Role Perceptions

The concept of roles within groups falls under the general umbrella of group structure (Carron & Eys, 2012) and represents the expectations for behaviors for a position in a social context (Biddle & Thomas, 1966). Eys, Beauchamp, and Bray (2006) provided a comprehensive overview of literature devoted to understanding role involvement in sport. Their review shed light on the complexity of both the transmission and execution of role responsibilities. Furthermore, they noted a number of elements that are necessary to consider when examining roles. These include cognitive elements such as role ambiguity (i.e., a lack of clear information regarding one's role responsibilities), role acceptance (i.e., the degree to which an athlete agrees with his or her role responsibilities), role efficacy (i.e., the degree to which an athlete believes he or she can successfully execute interdependent role functions), and role conflict (i.e., the presence of incongruent or conflicting expectations for an individual), as well as affective (e.g., role satisfaction) and behavioral (i.e., role performance) elements.

Without question, role ambiguity has received the most research attention within the sport environment. In fact, initial support for Beauchamp and colleagues' conceptualization of role ambiguity (Beauchamp, Bray, Eys, & Carron, 2002) was based on responses from youth participants (mean age approximately 15 years). This conceptual model highlights the need for athletes to understand (a) the general scope of their responsibilities, (b) the behaviors necessary to fulfill their responsibilities, (c) how they will be evaluated with respect to role performance, and (d) the consequences should they not fulfill their role responsibilities. Within this same study, which has implications toward the development of talent, Beauchamp et al. (2002) found both direct and negative links between perceptions of role ambiguity and role performance.

A more recent longitudinal examination conducted by Bosselut, McLaren, Eys, and Heuzé (2012) with youth interdependent sport team athletes ties together the last two sections (i.e., role ambiguity and cohesion); they examined perceptions of these two group constructs at two time periods during a competitive season (mid- and late season). Their findings suggested that perceptions of social cohesion at midseason were predictive of changes in perceptions of two dimensions of role ambiguity (i.e., ambiguity surrounding scope of responsibilities and role behaviors) between mid- and late season.

Group Norms

Group norms comprise "the standards for behavior expected of group members" (Carron & Eys, 2012, p. 205). Norms are characterized as being descriptive, evaluative, unobtrusive, flexible, internalized, and stable in nature (Forsyth, 1983). In addition, norms outline what behavior in the group is considered acceptable (i.e., prescriptive norms) and unacceptable (i.e., proscriptive norms) (Munroe, Estabrooks, Dennis, & Carron, 1999), and they serve to both inform members about group standards and to integrate those members within the larger entity (Colman & Carron, 2001). In the domain of sport, Prapavessis and Carron (1997) undertook an investigation to examine what types of norms typically develop in sport teams. Athletes from elite cricket teams reported norms involving punctuality at practices and competitions, providing support for teammates, staying focused on the field, giving maximum effort during training, and adhering to dress code (Prapavessis & Carron, 1997). Building upon this work, Munroe and colleagues (1999) examined the group norms of 140 athletes (ages 14–25) from 18 different sports. Munroe and colleagues identified norms in four different sport situations: (a) during competitions, (b) at practices, (c) in social situations, and (d) during the off-season. Frequently reported team norms included giving effort (during competition), punctuality and attendance (practice), productivity (practice), respect (social situations), and training (off-season).

In a youth sport setting, two distinct lines of research in group norms have been undertaken. The first line of research focused on the relationship between group norms and performance. Høigaard, Säfvenbom, and Tønnessen (2006) examined the relationship between team norms (productive norms, role involvement, and social support norms), group cohesion (task cohesion and social cohesion), and perceived social loafing among Norwegian junior soccer players. Results revealed that the players' perceptions of the productive and social support norms, as well as attraction to their team's task (task cohesion), predicted perceptions of social loafing. Subsequent interaction analysis indicated that the combination of high social cohesion, low task cohesion, and low team norms was predictive of perceptions of social loafing (Høigaard et al., 2006). The findings from Høigaard et al. (2006) supported earlier research in Japan with 114 high school athletic teams, which found a significant relationship between group cohesion and performance norms (Kim & Sugiyama, 1992). However, Høigaard et al.'s (2006) research did not support previous research by Patterson, Carron, and Loughead (2005) with adult elite athletes that noted stronger social rather than task dimensions of cohesion and social norms to be better predictors of performance. The mixed findings and limited research investigating the interrelationships among group norms, group cohesion, and performance highlight the complexity of these relationships and the need for further investigations.

A second line of developmental research focused on collective norms and moral behavior in sport. Shields and Bredemeier (1995) proposed a model of moral action in which a sport team's collective norms influence behavior. Furthermore, they examined the influence of leadership and peers (operationalized as coach's leadership style and team cohesion, respectively) on two collective norms—cheating and aggression—in a sample of high school and college baseball and softball players. Results revealed significant relationships between coach leadership style variables and collective team norms, and between team cohesion and collective team norms. Specifically, autocratic coach behaviors were significantly and positively linked with the team norms for cheating and aggression. Shields and Bredemeier (1995) proposed that

this finding was not surprising given that autocratic behavior tends to reduce the independent, critical thinking skills of the athletes.

A second noteworthy finding was that task cohesion was positively related to expectations that peers would cheat and aggress, and that the coach would condone cheating. The authors suggested that perhaps higher task cohesion may shift the emphasis from fair play to victory, but caution the acceptance of this conclusion until subsequent research has been conducted. In addition to the noted findings, several potential modifiers (gender, level, starting status, team winning percentage) were examined in relation to the norms. Higher propensities for cheating and aggression were found among males, college athletes, winning team members, and nonstarters (Shields & Bredemeier, 1995). Collectively, the work of Bredemeier and Shields has highlighted the important role of the coach and peers in shaping team norms concerning moral behavior.

Given the consistent, growing evidence that norms exert a very powerful influence on individual behavior in a number of settings, including sport (e.g., Munroe et al., 1999), a number of questions emerge as to (a) how to develop appropriate norms in sport teams, and (b) once established, how to enhance conformity to team norms. It has been suggested that team interaction and reinforcement are two key prerequisites for the development of team norms (Carron et al., 2005; Colman & Carron, 2001; Vroom, 1969). In turn, stable group norms lead to increased group cohesion, group effectiveness, and ultimately performance (Mullen & Copper, 1994, Patterson et al., 2005; Prapavessis & Carron, 1997). In regard to the second question, Carron (1980) identified two classes of conditions that influence conformity to group norms: personal factors and situational factors. Examples of personal factors include higher personal status and the gender of the athletes. The literature has suggested that females are more compliant to norms than males (Eagly & Carli, 1981), and are more likely to embrace collective moral norms against tactics that lead to pain or injury (Duquin, 1984).

Of equal and perhaps greater influence on conformity to norms are the situational factors such as the size of the group, the clarity of the group norm, the cohesion of the group, and the leadership structure in place (Carron, 1980; Erickson, Bruner, & Côté, 2010; Shaw, 1981; Widmeyer, Brawley, & Carron, 1985). In a recent study, Erickson and colleagues (2010) explored the relationship between team norms and coach-athlete interactions using a novel state space observation technique (Lewis, Lamey, & Douglas, 1999). The dynamic systems approach delved into the underlying mechanisms shaping the norms on two competitive youth female synchronized swimming teams. Results revealed that specific coach-athlete behaviors predicted norms in practice and social settings. Specifically, practice attendance norms were predicted by the coach's corrective feedback, social attendance norms were predicted by nonsport-related coach-athlete discussion, and social interaction norms were predicted by sport-related coach-athlete discussion (Erickson et al., 2010). The findings of the study support the complexity of coach-athlete relationships and the need for more research to unlock how situational factors influence the development of team norms.

Social Identity

One important, underdeveloped aspect of research in children and adolescent sport settings that may significantly contribute to participation and development in sport relates to the identities that youth form through their membership on sport teams—their team social identities. The identities youth form around membership in sport teams compose an important component of a youth's self-concept and are critical in the establishment of personal identity and moral values (Harris, 1998; McLellan & Pugh, 1999). Existing social psychological research on social identity is based upon Tajfel and Turner's (1979) Social Identity Theory (SIT). The central premise of SIT is that people define and evaluate themselves in terms of the groups to which they belong (Hogg & Abrams, 2001). Social identity has been defined as "that part of an individual's self concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership" (Tajfel, 1981, p. 255). As highlighted within this formal definition, social identity is conceptualized as having three key dimensions: (a) cognitive centrality (the importance of being a group member), (b) ingroup affect (the positive feelings associated with group membership), and (c) ingroup ties (perceptions of similarity, bonding, and belongingness with other group members; Cameron, 2004). Until recently, only minimal research has investigated the influence of team social identity in sport, especially with youth populations. The subsequent paragraphs will briefly summarize the extant literature in youth sport (Bruner & Côté, 2010; Hogg & Hains, 1996; Murrell & Gaertner, 1992; Zucchermaglio, 2005).

Murrell and Gaertner (1992) are credited as being among the first to examine social identity in sport. They examined the salience of common group or team identity on the performance within four high school football teams. Ninety-four high school football players (ranging from grades 9–12, median age of 16) completed a survey that measured strength of identification with the team as a whole, as offensive versus defensive units, or as individual players. Results indicated that players on winning teams (as determined by season win-loss record) emphasized team unity significantly more than players on teams with losing records.

Zucchermaglio (2005) undertook a qualitative, ethnographic approach to investigating the rhetorical manipulation of social identities arising in the discourses of a professional soccer team. Three interactions between team members were audio-recorded (e.g., after a victory, after a defeat, and in a pregame situation). Zucchermaglio coded the conversations paying particular attention to the pronouns used within the conversations (e.g., I, you.). Results revealed the way in which the outcome of the match influenced how team members referenced team membership and specific subgroups on the team. For example, after a loss, team members were more likely to distance themselves from the team and identify specific subgroups to account for the loss (e.g., forwards were responsible for the loss for not scoring goals), whereas post victory the group was considered as a whole and fewer differentiations were made regarding team membership (Zucchermaglio, 2005).

More recently, Bruner and Côté (2010) began a line of research to examine how team social identity (the identity that adolescents associate with being on a sport team) shapes social development. Results of an initial investigation involving 37 teams and over 400 high school athletes found team social identity to be a significant predictor of prosocial behavior towards teammates (Bruner & Côté, 2010). This line of research built upon previous group-dynamics

research with youth examining social identity and exercise adherence in school-based physical activity clubs (Bruner & Spink, 2008; 2009). Bruner and Spink endeavored to examine if perceptions of group membership among 122 male and female youth (13–17 years of age) participating in 10 rural physical activity clubs influenced exercise adherence. Results revealed that an adolescent's perception of social identity with the physical activity club were significantly associated with the adolescent's participation in the club as well as with his or her intention to return to the activity club in the future (Bruner & Spink, 2008; 2009). Collectively, the body of emerging research by Bruner and colleagues highlights the influential role that social identity can play on a youth's participation in activity and psychosocial development. Further research with youth exploring the relationship between social identity and sport involvement and development in regards to the three dimensions of social identity is strongly encouraged.

Interdependence

Another important group construct that has thus far received minimal attention in the group dynamics sport literature is interdependence. Interdependence is said to occur when the actions of one individual within a group have implications for another member, and ultimately for the group as a whole (Johnson, 2003; Johnson & Johnson, 1998). Based upon this definition, interdependence can be positive, negative, or absent. Positive interdependence is often characterized by individuals engaging in promotive interactions, such as offering another group member assistance or sharing information (Johnson, 2003). In contrast, negative interdependence is characterized by individuals obstructing or discouraging the efforts of others while focusing on being productive themselves.

Research in business and education has identified a number of benefits of positive interdependence, including increased individual accountability/responsibility, interaction, social skills, and reflection on group functioning (Johnson, 2003). In sport, limited research has evaluated the construct of interdependence. As one example, Jowett and colleagues examined interdependence in terms of the interactions of coaches and athletes, and its consequences on athletes' feelings, thoughts, and behaviors (Jowett, 2005; Jowett & Ntoumanis, 2004). However, athletes' interdependence in different sport contexts and potential developmental experiences associated with interdependence in a youth sport setting have only recently been explored (Bruner, Hall, & Côté, 2009; 2011).

A possible explanation for the lack of attention to interdependence in sport psychology research may be a common misconception regarding the complexity of the group construct. Interdependence in sport has often been perceived as a unidimensional, static construct focusing on one element—the structure of interactions among the participants in the setting (Rusbult & Van Lange, 2003). From a substantive perspective this suggestion is appealing, as it has been proposed that different types of sports (e.g., individual sports vs. team sports) involve differing degrees of dependence or reliance on another person to successfully execute one's task (Carron, 1988; Chelladurai & Saleh, 1978). Quite often, the interdependence of the sport has been classified based upon a dependency classification system (e.g., Chelladurai & Saleh, 1978). The system proposes that highly interdependent sports are team sports (e.g., basketball, volleyball, soccer, hockey), while athletes in sports that are primarily independent in nature are classified as individual sport athletes (e.g., swimming, gymnastics, golf, track and field). While

the type of sport captures the task dimension of interdependence, similar to other group constructs (e.g., cohesion), interdependence has been conceptualized as being multidimensional and dynamic in nature. Organizational psychologists have proposed that interdependence includes two key dimensions: task interdependence and outcome interdependence.

Van der Vegt, Emans, and Van de Vliert (1998) operationalize task interdependence as the "interconnections between tasks whereby the performance of one individual depends on the performance of another individual" (p. 127). As highlighted earlier, this dimension aligns with predominant research in sport psychology examining the task dimension of interdependence operationalized as sport type and a number of outcomes (e.g., alcohol use, coping strategies for stress, moral character, moral reasoning, concern for others; see Bredemeier & Shields, 1986; Martens, Watson, & Beck, 2006; Vallerand, Deshaies, & Cuerrier, 1997; Yoo, 2001).

A second overlooked dimension is outcome interdependence. It has been suggested that interdependence should not only be viewed in terms of the immediate interactions and behaviors, but also as a consequence or future outcome of the interaction (Kelley, 1984; Kelley et al., 2002; Rusbult & Van Lange, 2003). In the organizational psychology literature, outcome interdependence has been operationalized as the extent to which "people believe that their personal benefits and costs depend on successful goal attainment by other team members" (Van der Vegt et al., 1998, p. 130). In a sport setting, the attainment of success for both individual and team sport athletes may be a function of the interdependence within the training and competition environments.

While the two distinct dimensions of interdependence have been highlighted in the organizational psychology literature for quite some time, only recently has research begun to examine the relationship between task and outcome interdependence and the developmental experiences provided by different sports. Bruner and colleagues (2011) examined the relationships between sport type, interdependence (task and outcome), and the developmental experiences and outcomes (enjoyment and burnout) of select male basketball players (n = 129) and middle-distance runners (n = 83) aged 14–17 years. First, with respect to development experiences, hierarchical multiple regression determined that basketball players reported higher rates of teamwork and social skills, adult networks and social capital, and negative experiences. Furthermore, outcome interdependence was a predictor of identity exploration, initiative, emotional regulation, positive relationships, teamwork and social skills, and adult networks and social capital experiences independent of sport type (Bruner et al., 2011). Conclusions from the study suggest that although different sports may provide different learning environments, the developmental experiences youth garner may be more strongly influenced by how the people involved interact toward achieving their goal(s) (outcome interdependence) than by the type of sport.

Second, as it pertains to developmental outcomes, Bruner and colleagues (2009) revealed that interdependence could significantly predict a young athlete's enjoyment and burnout after controlling for contextual and individual characteristics and sport type. Specifically, participants who perceived greater outcome interdependence—interdependence among the other athletes to attain their goals—reported more enjoyment and less burnout. The study findings offer initial support for interdependence being a more meaningful predictor than sport type for the developmental outcomes of enjoyment and burnout. The results also reinforce the

importance of fostering interdependence, regardless of the type of youth sport context, to promote positive youth development. Given the preliminary nature of this developmental group research in youth, further research is required.

SUMMARY OF PREVIOUS RESEARCH

Experiences with peers shape children's motivation to participate in sport, as well as their personal and athletic development. The conceptual framework introduced in the chapter (see Figure 10.1), based upon Rubin et al.'s (1998, 2006) and Hinde's (1987) previous work in child and social psychology, captures the three distinct levels of social complexity (interactions, relationships, and groups) in which peers can influence youth sport experiences and development. Although the literature on peers and on groups is closely related, the research in sport up until this point has not integrated the two areas of study. This chapter has attempted to address this important gap in the literature.

FUTURE RESEARCH

Upon reviewing the chapter, there are a number of avenues of future research on peer and group influences in youth sport. First, there is a need for more theoretically driven descriptive research, in order to both quantitatively and qualitatively gain a deeper understanding of the relationships between the peer and group constructs and developmental outcomes in sport. For example, how do the three dimensions of social identity (ingroup ties, ingroup affect, and cognitive centrality) relate to sport involvement? In addition, subsequent descriptive research may examine the relationships between peer and group constructs (e.g., cohesion, group norms) previously explored in exercise and/or health settings or with adult sport populations.

A second future direction would involve moving beyond descriptive research questions toward higher generations of research questions (see Carron, 1988; Carron & Brawley, 2008). This would entail examining potential moderators and mediators of the relationships. For example, peer interactions may influence prosocial behaviors in youth sport because team members perceive the norm of supporting teammates as a requirement of being on the team. To aid in addressing this future direction, more experimental research is urgently needed. Given the observed, well established powerful influence of groups to act as a change agent (Cartwright, 1951), children can be targeted on the team by coaches and practitioners to change their behaviors. For example, youth participants can develop expectations for behavior (group norms) and be targeted to change inappropriate behaviors (norms) toward performance and development through group-based interventions such as team building. However, there is a dearth of research systematically testing and evaluating theoretically driven interventions targeting youth in sport. Supplemental research should carefully construct and implement coach-oriented interventions to evaluate recommendations put forward by researchers. In one example, Shields and Bredemeier (1995) advocate a mastery-oriented climate and democratic leadership to foster moral development. Steps are necessary to systematically test these assertions.

A fourth and final recommendation for researchers to consider is the use of novel approaches to capture peer interactions and experiences in sport, such as the State Space Grid

analysis (Murphy-Mills et al., 2011). While traditional methodologies (e.g., surveys, interviews) are informative, innovative methodologies are encouraged to advance theories and shed new light on how peers and groups underpin children's investment in sport and their talent development.

CONCLUSION

Sport teams constitute peer groups that theorists have identified as the highest level of social complexity (Rubin et al., 2006) and as an important developmental context shaping and supporting the behavior of its members. The present chapter provided an overview of some of the key constructs and theoretical propositions shaping our understanding of peer and group influences in youth sport. It is our hope that this chapter will spark increased research interest in this important topic.

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