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Better together?

Exploring parental experiences in youth soccer from an interpersonal approach

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by

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Affidavits following §7 section 2 No. 4 and 5 of the doctoral regulations from the German Sport University Cologne, February 20th 2013:

Hereby I declare:

The work presented in this thesis is the original work of the author except where acknowledged in the text. This material has not been submitted either in whole or in part for a degree at this or any other institution. Those parts or single sentences, which have been taken verbatim from other sources, are identified as citations.

I further declare that I complied with the actual “guidelines of qualified scientific work” of the German Sport University Cologne.

April, 22 2024 Valeria Eckardt

Date, Signature

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Abstract

Aiming for a nuanced understanding of parents' experiences in youth sport from an interpersonal approach, this dissertation sought to advance current knowledge on parental involvement, to examine the interplay and significance of persons and contexts through relationships and interactions, and to explore how parents can be(come) meaningful co-participants in youth sport.

To pursue these aims, two scoping reviews on parental involvement and interpersonal coping in (youth) sport as well as three empirical studies were conducted. Of those, one study developed a conceptual model on cooperation between parents, coaches, and administrators. Participants included parents, coaches, and administrators of U8 to U18 teams in German youth soccer academies as well as parents in amateur soccer.

Key findings of this dissertation are: (1) Parents have the potential to impact and be impacted by their child's youth sport participation (Study 1); (2) the occurrence and perception of competitive stressors, cognitive appraisals, and emotions seem consistent across parent and child demographics as well as youth soccer trajectories (Study 2, Study 3); (3) parents' stress perceptions are tightly linked to the quality of relationships and interactions with children and coaches highlighting the need for interpersonal coping research (Study 5); and (4) cooperation between parents, coaches, and administrators is characterized through trial and error, power differences, and parents being passive agents (Study 4).

Collectively, this dissertation presents novel contributions on a theoretical and methodological level relevant to stress, interpersonal coping, and parent-coach relationships. Further, implications can be drawn to enhance parents' experiences in youth sport. Limitations of the findings are discussed together with outlining fruitful trajectories for future research.

Zusammenfassung

Ausgehend von einem interpersonellen Forschungsansatz, trägt diese Dissertation zu einem differenzierteren Verständnis der Erfahrungen von Eltern im Nachwuchssport bei. Die Dissertation verfolgt die Ziele, den aktuellen Forschungsstand zu elterlicher Beteiligung im Nachwuchssport zu erweitern, das Zusammenspiel und die Bedeutung von Personen und Kontexten durch Beziehungen und Interaktionen zu untersuchen und zu erforschen, wie Eltern sinnvoll als Akteure im Nachwuchssport beteiligt werden können.

Dazu wurden zwei Übersichtsarbeiten zu elterlicher Beteiligung und interpersonellem Coping im (Nachwuchs-)Sport sowie drei empirische Studien durchgeführt. Zudem wurde ein theoretisches Modell über die Zusammenarbeit zwischen Eltern, Trainer:innen und pädagogischen Leitungen entwickelt. Für das Dissertationsvorhaben wurden Eltern, Trainer:innen und pädagogische Leitungen von U8- bis U18-Mannschaften in deutschen Fußball-Leistungszentren sowie Eltern im Breitensport Fußball rekrutiert.

Zentrale Ergebnisse sind: (1) Eltern können die Beteiligung ihres Kindes im Nachwuchssport beeinflussen und gleichermaßen von dieser beeinflusst werden (Studie 1); (2) das Auftreten und die Wahrnehmung von wettkampfbezogenen Stressoren, kognitiven Bewertungen und Emotionen scheinen unabhängig von demografischen Charakteristika der Eltern und Kinder zu sein (Studie 2, Studie 3); (3) die Stresswahrnehmung der Eltern wird durch die Beziehungen und Interaktionen mit Kindern und Trainer:innen beeinflusst, was den Bedarf an Forschung zu interpersonellem Coping unterstreicht (Studie 5); und (4) die Zusammenarbeit zwischen Eltern, Trainer:innen und pädagogischen Leitungen zeichnet sich durch Trial-and-Error, Machtunterschiede, und Passivität der Eltern aus.

Zusammengefasst leistet diese Dissertation wertvolle Beiträge auf theoretischer und methodischer Ebene in den Forschungsfeldern Stress, interpersonellem Coping und der Eltern-Trainer:innen-Beziehung. Weiterhin werden relevante Implikationen zur Unterstützung von Eltern in der Praxis gegeben. Abschließend werden Limitationen der Ergebnisse diskutiert sowie Implikationen für zukünftige Forschungsprojekte aufgezeigt.

List of included publications

This dissertation is a compilation of five scientific manuscripts in peer-reviewed journals in English or German language. Of those, four have been published and one is currently under review. The corresponding journal quartiles range from Q1 ($n = 3$) to Q2 and Q4 ($n = 1$ each). I am the first and corresponding author of four manuscripts.

STUDY 1 | A history of parent involvement in organized youth sport: A scoping review

Travis E. Dorsch, Emily Wright, **Valeria C. Eckardt**, Sam Elliott, Sam N.

Thrower, & Camilla J. Knight

Published 2021 in *Sport, Exercise, and Performance Psychology*

STUDY 2 | Parents' competitive stressors in professional German youth soccer academies:

A mixed method study

Valeria C. Eckardt, Travis E. Dorsch, & Babett H. Lobinger

Published 2022 in *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*

STUDY 3 | "Meine Tochter wurde ausgewechselt und ich fühlte mich selbst aus dem Spiel

genommen" – Wahrgenommene Stressoren von Eltern im Breitensport Fußball

Valeria C. Eckardt, Lara Linz, & Babett H. Lobinger

Published 2023 in *Zeitschrift für Sportpsychologie*

STUDY 4 | "We are on the outside but it's okay": A grounded theory of cooperation between

parents, coaches, and administrators in professional youth soccer academies

Valeria C. Eckardt, & Travis E. Dorsch

Under review in *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*

STUDY 5 | A scoping review on interpersonal coping in sports

Valeria C. Eckardt, & Katherine A. Tamminen

Published 2023 in *International Review of Sport and Exercise Psychology*

[Advance online publication]

Preface

If you think back to your childhood, who was the person that first introduced you to sports? In a room full of people, the majority will answer that question with either one of their parents. Or their siblings. Or their friends. Social relationships are the catalysts of sport participation and enjoyment. They motivate, frustrate, inspire, facilitate, or hinder the outcomes we desire for our children, our athletes, or ourselves in sports. They are powerful and yet often lie idle.

Alluding to the common notion that research is “me-search”, my journey into sports started on a tennis court in a small German village at the age of four years. It was my father who first introduced me to tennis. At the time, he was serving as the youth director of the club, and I remember countless sessions of him feeding me balls or playing him in intense family matches. He would drive me to practice or competitions, cheer at the sideline (and sometimes get frustrated), take me into his arms after a lost match, provide feedback, or discuss my experiences. My father reflected every characteristic that youth sport research would propose for a positive parent: He was a supporter, a role model, and an interpreter of experiences for me. And yet, I didn’t make it. Assuming that – of course – I was outstandingly talented in tennis, there must have been other factors relevant for my success. Indeed, scientific articles provide a plethora of factors associated with talent development. In retrospect, the crucial point of my tennis career, however, was that my parents were no longer able to drive me to practice when I had progressed into a talent selection group. Both were working full-time, my grandparents were either occupied or had no driving license, and the bus would have taken almost two hours one-way. My parents had to withdraw me from that training group – a decision they made for *them*, not me. It was *them* who would have needed support, not me. Too often we fail to recognize these multidirectional effects within our lives. In pursuing this dissertation, I aimed to both honor and delineate the intricacies of being a competitive sport parent – for them *and* for me, for *us*. So, let the parental experience take the center stage.

1. Introduction

“For the rest of my life, I will never forget what you have done for me.

*If I can become even half as skilled a father as you were as
parents to me, I would consider myself happy. Thank you.”*

– Dirk Nowitzki, former professional basketball player,
in his Hall of Fame induction speech (2023)

The family is recognized as the most crucial context for children’s development (Olszewski-Kubilius, 2018). Maintaining a positive parent-child relationship and communication patterns can impact a multitude of socio-emotional and behavioral factors in childhood (e.g., Amato & Fowler, 2002; Eisenberg et al., 2005) as well as foster the adoption of healthy lifestyles (Rodrigo et al., 2004).

In the context of talent development, parental support has been identified as a crucial factor across various performance domains including education, sports, literature, or arts (e.g., Kiewra, 2019; Witte et al., 2015). In particular, parents adopt practices and roles which allow to arrange and facilitate beneficial conditions to nurture talent (Leff & Hoyle, 1995; Luo & Kiewra, 2021; Stein et al., 1999). As alluded to in the opening quote by former professional basketball player Dirk Nowitzki, parents fulfill specific roles in the context of youth sport. For Nowitzki, it was the unconditional parental support he received throughout his career that in his view provided the foundation for his success (Eschenbach, 2023). Scientifically speaking, Fredricks and Eccles (2004, 2005) have conceptualized parental roles as providers, role models, and interpreters. As providers, parents express their support on a tangible, informational, and emotional level (Fredricks & Eccles, 2004). For example, parents play a pivotal role in children’s sport entry and socialization through providing an opportunity for sport engagement (e.g., Howard & Madrigal, 1990), paying club fees or equipment, and taking care of transportation (e.g., Baxter-Jones & Maffulli, 2003; Hoefer et al., 2001). Further, the provision of support is crucial in fostering adaptive sport-specific outcomes in children such as enjoyment

and motivation (Brustad, 1988; Power & Woolger, 1994; Sánchez-Miguel et al., 2013), autonomy (Gagné et al., 2003), physical competence and self-esteem (Atkins et al., 2013), general life skills (Mossman & Cronin, 2019) or coping skills (Tamminen et al., 2016; Teques et al., 2018). Recently, parents' emotional support (e.g., motivating, praising, comforting) has been identified as the most salient type of support for children (Lobinger et al., 2021).

In committing to support their children's athletic career, parents often alter and adapt their behavior to let sport become a focal point of family life (Trussell, 2009). As such, parents report having to hold back on personal time and needs including social activities (Bean et al., 2019), self-care (Johansen & Green, 2019), or their vocational aspirations (Kirk et al., 1997). These adaptations combined with the temporal, financial, and emotional investments parents place into youth sport can cause the experience of a range of stressors, negative emotional reactions, and even burnout (Dorsch et al., 2009; Harwood & Knight, 2009a, b; Wiersma & Fifer, 2008). In particular, attending competitions of their children has been identified as emotionally demanding for parents in youth sport (Harwood & Knight, 2009b). At competitions parents are placed in a dynamic environment which often requires direct feedback and the need to engage in a variety of supportive behaviors. In addition, competitions allow to observe and evaluate parents' behavior publicly which has led to the development of codes of conducts, "silent Saturdays", or the "Fair play Liga" (Lobinger et al., 2019). As Harwood and Knight (2009a) conclude, parents are expected to provide adequate support for their children but often find themselves unable to cope with the emotional demands they face related to competitions.

It is well-documented that parents who are unable to cope with stress or high negative emotional experiences show difficulties in attending to children's needs (e.g., Dix, 1991), and are more likely to engage in maladaptive parenting (Niehaus et al., 2019). In the context of youth sport, parental stress is associated with negative parent actions involving punitive behaviors, derogatory comments, or conditional love towards their children (Bois et al., 2009). If parents remain unable to cope with the stress related to youth sport, it can result in detrimental

consequences for both parents and children (see Sutcliffe et al., 2021 for an overview), and a diminished enjoyment regarding the provision of support (Knight et al., 2009). In sum, parenting and supporting talented children in youth sport reflect intricate experiences for parents which warrant further investigation. Reinforcing the notion of Holt and Knight (2014), it is timely to enhance our understanding of the complex challenges parents face in youth sport given the increasing demands. Pursuing this line of research allows to view parents as co-participants in a meaningful life domain of their children and to generate novel findings on the effects associated with parental involvement. Enhancing knowledge on a theoretical level can contribute to tailoring evidence-based education to the needs of parents, to raise awareness for parents' contributions and strains, and to optimize parental involvement which will ultimately improve the family experience in youth sport.

Considering that evidence on the effects of youth sport on parents remains limited to date, this dissertation aims to further delineate the experiences parents encounter as co-participants of youth soccer in Germany. The context of youth soccer academies provides the unique opportunity to study patterns of social interactions and interdependencies within a dynamic environment. As such, the influence of persons (i.e., children, coaches, administrators) and contexts (i.e., competitions, professional youth soccer academies, amateur soccer) on parental stress and cooperation is examined with a focus on social relationships and interactions. Derived from a literature review on parent involvement in youth sport (Study 1), competitive stressors and emotions of parents in youth soccer academies (Study 2) and amateur youth soccer (Study 3) are investigated through mixed-method and qualitative study designs. Building on these findings, Study 4 develops a grounded theory of successful cooperation between parents, coaches, and administrators in professional youth soccer academies. Aiming to move the field forward, a scoping review (Study 5) highlights interpersonal coping in the context of parent-child and family relationships as a fruitful area for future research.

2. Theoretical background

2.1 Family systems theory

Within this dissertation, family systems theory is not introduced as a theory which has informed specific hypotheses or predictions. Rather, it is utilized to describe my positionality and worldview as a researcher, psychologist, and member of various social systems in my lived reality. As such, family systems theory has informed and guided the conceptualization, implementation, and interpretation of this dissertation. In the following, *circular causality*, *feedback loops*, and *roles* will first be outlined as core assumptions underlying family systems theory. Second, an integrated model of the youth sport system (Dorsch et al., 2022) will be introduced which reflects a systems theory approach to the study of youth sport.

2.1.1 Core assumptions

Family systems theory evolved as a viable approach to explaining interactions between family members, especially dysfunctional ones (Smith & Hamon, 2021), in light of the repercussions of World War II. At the time, it was proposed that experiences within a family involve certain repetitive patterns of interactions which might lie at the bottom of dysfunctionality, rather than individual flaws. As such, the family should be understood as a “superpersonality” (Burgess, 1972) which is shaped through the complex, reciprocal, and dynamic interactions of its respective members. Behavior is, thus, not viewed on an intrapersonal but interpersonal level, meaning it becomes part of an ongoing and interactive system which encounters recurring events (Smith & Hamon, 2021). The cognitive, emotional, behavioral, or social processes in response to these events only become meaningful and adaptive within the context or environment in which they occur.

For interactions to be at the core of family systems theory, the conceptualization of behavior had to move away from a linear stimulus-response relationship to that of a *circular causality*. Circular causality assumes that behavior within a system occurs in a context of mutual,

reciprocal influence (Kelledy & Lyons, 2019; Smith & Hamon, 2021). This means that the origin and cause of a certain behavior cannot necessarily be narrowed down and that individuals within a system each affect their behavior and, hence, become interdependent. Whether or not a certain behavior is accepted within a system is determined via *feedback loops*. Members of the system can either enact positive or negative feedback regarding the display of a certain behavior (Smith & Hamon, 2021). Positive feedback can be rewarded both for behavior that is within the boundaries and rules of a system as well as for behavior which promotes change, for example, replacing dysfunctional behavior with a functional counterpart as a result of therapy (Smith & Hamon, 2021). In the latter case, family systems theory posits that the balance within the system will temporarily be disrupted. If a member displays a behavior which is considered outside the set boundaries and rules, other members can take measures to counteract this deviation. Negative feedback, thus, prevents changes in behavior and promotes homeostasis within the system (Smith & Hamon, 2021).

Interactions within a system and the implementation of feedback loops shape the *roles* members of the system take on. Through communicating and interacting with each other, system members develop a shared meaning, understanding, and expectation about the roles at stake (e.g., parental roles). These roles then reflect recurring behavioral patterns which serve to fulfill distinct functions within the system (Galvin et al., 2012). Performing within the expected roles will contribute to maintaining homeostasis within the system; any refusal or deviation from particular roles, however, will be opposed with negative feedback.

2.1.2 Integrated model of the youth sport system

Drawing from the tenets of family systems theory, a recently offered integrated model of the youth sport system theorizes the interconnectedness of persons and contexts in sports (Dorsch et al., 2022). It proposes a *family subsystem* (i.e., athletes, parents, siblings), a *team subsystem* (i.e., athletes, peers, coaches), and an *environmental subsystem* (i.e., organizations, communities, societies) to interact reciprocally. As such, the youth sport system is composed of

various persons and contexts which are interdependent and act within mutual influence of each other.

The model situates the athlete at the center being surrounded by four other social agents, namely parents, siblings, peers, and coaches (see Figure 2.1.1a). These persons are visualized as *gears* alluding to how the subsystems and their interactions can influence athletes' experiences, behaviors, and outcomes in youth sport (Dorsch et al., 2022). In addition, the model includes *descriptive characteristics* such as “goals for child” within the parent gear or “enhancing life skills” within the coach gear which reflect iterative processes that occur between the persons and subsystems. These processes are conceptualized as *proximal factors* (see Bronfenbrenner, 2005) having the potential to influence athletes' experiences. They are dependent upon and shaped among others by sociodemographic characteristics (e.g., age, gender), ability levels (e.g., specializing stage athletes), or psychological factors (e.g., goals, attitudes) of the respective individual. *Distal factors* are represented in the model through entities of the environmental subsystem, for example, organizational cultures, community

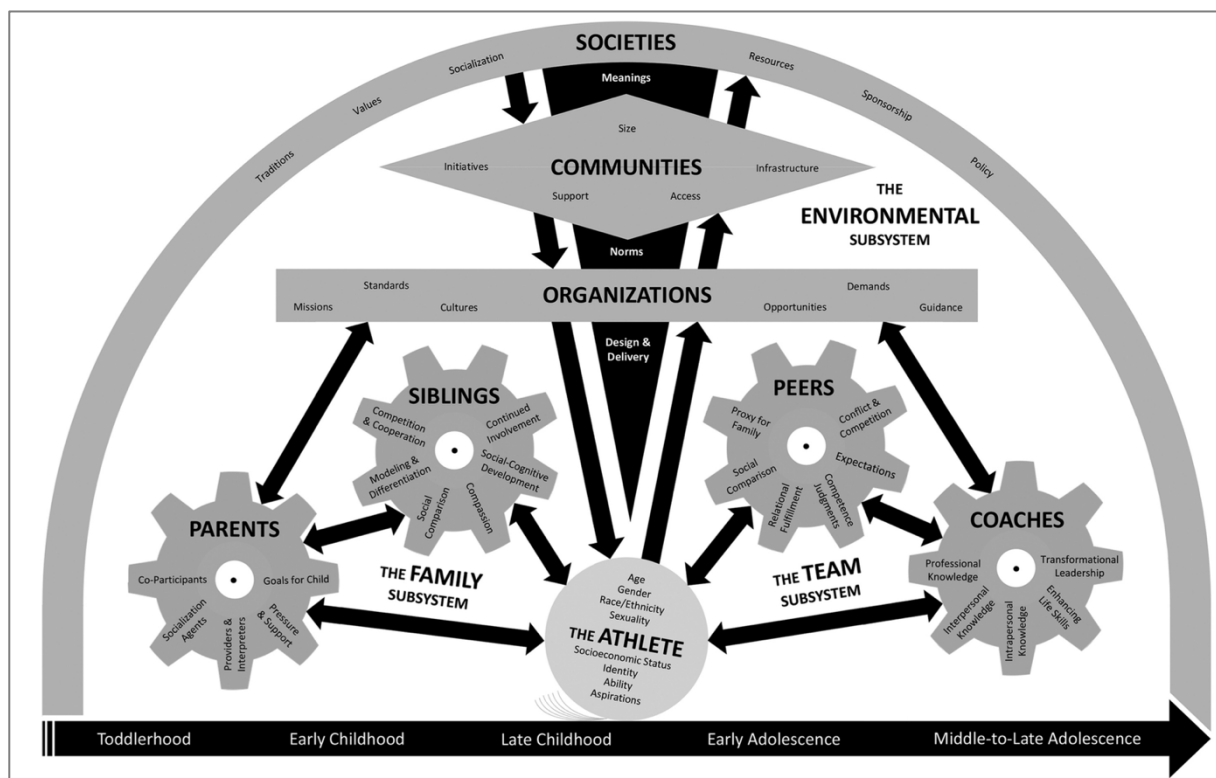


Figure 2.1.1a. Integrated model of the youth sport system (Dorsch et al., 2022, p. 7). Permission to reprint was obtained from the original author.

infrastructure, or societal values which shape behavior, experiences, and outcomes. Importantly, the intricate multidirectional effects within the model should be considered across the developmental stages of an athlete (i.e., toddlerhood to middle-to-late adolescence represented by the bottom arrow) given the natural evolvement of relationships, interactions, sources of information, roles, or involvement of social agents throughout an athletic career (Côté, 1999; Côté & Vierimaa, 2014; Wylleman & Lavalée, 2004).

Utilizing this integrated understanding of the youth sport system allows to examine intersections between persons and contexts, as the case in this dissertation focusing on parental experiences in youth soccer. In particular, the model is unique in recognizing parents as “co-participants” in youth sport (Dorsch et al., 2022, p. 3), and highlighting how they can influence *and/or* be influenced by other social agents across various contexts. For the purpose of this dissertation, the heuristic model of the youth sport system has been adapted to visualize the research objective for Study 4 (see Figure 2.1.1b). As such, Study 4 aimed to provide a theoretical foundation on cooperation as a social process between parents, coaches, and youth soccer academies using constructivist grounded theory methodology (Charmaz, 2006, 2014; for details see section 4.4). The respective *subsystems* of interest are blue-colored, namely parents (i.e., family subsystem), coaches (i.e., team subsystem), and the youth soccer academy as an organization (i.e., environmental subsystem). Elements of the model displayed in gray color symbolize proximal social agents (i.e., athlete, siblings, peers), distal entities (i.e., communities, societies) as well as interdependent processes (i.e., arrows) which are not the main research focus of this dissertation but are assumed to have an underlying influence on a theoretical level. In line with the original model (see Figure 2.1.1a), social agents are conceptualized as *gears* with interconnected arrows to account for the occurring multidirectional and interdependent feedback loops. Within the gears, *proximal factors* specific to Study 4 and a constructivist grounded theory methodology (Charmaz, 2006, 2014) have been derived theoretically and comprise patterns of cognition, emotion, and behavior related to cooperation as well as the

meaning parents and coaches attribute to this process. *Distal factors* are displayed on the organizational level (i.e., youth soccer academy) and are assumed to shape the proximal factors as well as experiences and outcomes of parents and coaches. To account for the dynamic nature of relationships, interactions, and roles throughout an athletic career, the bottom arrow reflects the inclusion of participants across all teams of a youth soccer academy (i.e., U8 to U18).

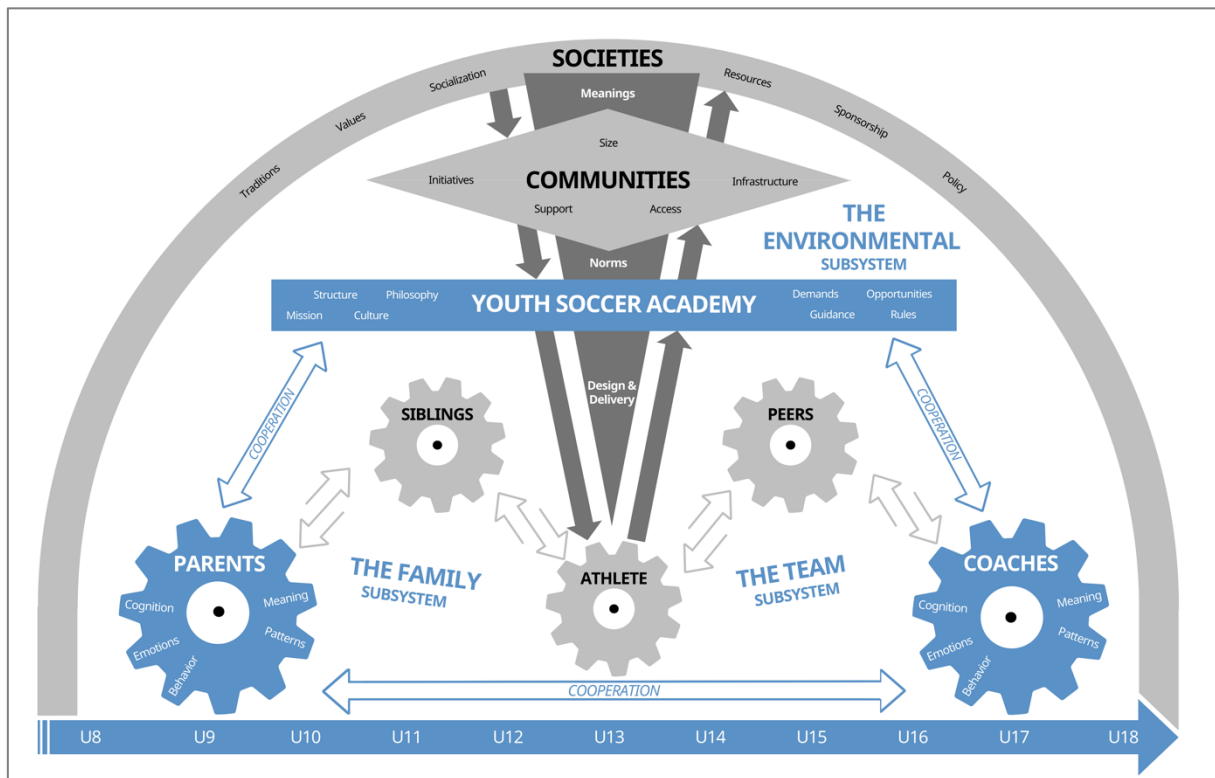


Figure 2.1.1b. Integrated model of the youth sport system - adapted (Dorsch et al., 2022, p. 7). Permission to adapt and reprint was obtained from the original author.

2.2 Transactional model of stress and coping

The concept of stress is approached and operationalized from a psychological perspective in this dissertation. It is acknowledged that stress is not merely stimulus- or response-based but is characterized through the stimulus-response relationship. By that, stress does not reflect one variable per se but an overarching concept including various components. To examine the respective components and account for multiple levels of analysis, it is essential to adopt a systematic theoretical model. The transactional model of stress and coping (see Figure 2.2.1) as proposed by Lazarus and Folkman (1984) reflects the core of this dissertation. Drawing from the tenets of this model, the terms *stress*, *stressor*, and *cognitive appraisal* will be defined. Based

on the specification within the cognitive-motivational-relational theory by Lazarus (CMRT; 1991, 1999) the relationship between *cognitive appraisal* and *emotions* will be introduced.

2.2.1 Stress

Psychological stress according to Lazarus and Folkman (1984, p. 19) reflects “a particular relationship between the person and the environment that is appraised by the person as taxing or exceeding his or her resources and endangering his or her well-being”. Inherent in this definition is the understanding that a potentially harmful external stimulus alone is not sufficient for stress to occur but individual differences in vulnerability to this stimulus need to be accounted for as well. With this transactional approach to stress, Lazarus and Folkman (1984) place an emphasis on the relation between an individual and its environment as well as the context in which stress occurs. In viewing individual differences as antecedents, a person will experience stress under certain conditions: (1) aiming to avoid aversive outcomes, and (2) aiming to achieve outcomes relevant to one’s own goal commitments, values, or expectations (Lazarus, 1999). This is essential for the model’s utility given previous models originating in biology (see e.g., Selye, 1980) have defined stress as stimuli who produce stressful behavior, i.e., the stimulus is contingent upon and defined by the response. Within the transactional model of stress and coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), it is the subjective meaning of a person about a stimulus that is crucial to the occurrence of a stress response. Hence, how a person construes (i.e., appraises) a stimulus shapes the response.

2.2.2 Stressors and cognitive appraisal

In Lazarus’ understanding, a *stressor* is an environmental stimulus which has the potential to evoke stress reactions and the need to cope (Lazarus, 1999). Taxonomies of stressors have been developed based on the formal dimension of the stressor (i.e., acute vs. chronic), the required magnitude of adaptations, the evoked emotional valence, or the respective patterns of the stress response. Lazarus and Cohen (1977) introduced three types of stressors which are stimulus-related: major changes affecting a large number of persons (e.g., an earthquake), major

changes affecting one or a few persons (e.g., death of a relative), and daily hassles (e.g., doing homework with children). Within this dissertation, the focus is on daily hassles which capture stress arising from the roles we take in our everyday lives (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Although not as severe in their magnitude compared to major life events, these recurring instances of stress have been associated with significant impairments for health (Day et al., 2005; Graf et al., 2017).

In essence, any stimulus could arouse a stress reaction; whether or not a stimulus will become a stressor depends on the cognitive appraisal of that stimulus. *Cognitive appraisals* are evaluative, continuous processes which allow a categorization of stimuli regarding their significance for health and well-being (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). The transactional model of stress and coping proposes two interdependent forms of appraisal: primary appraisal and secondary appraisal (see Figure 2.2.1).

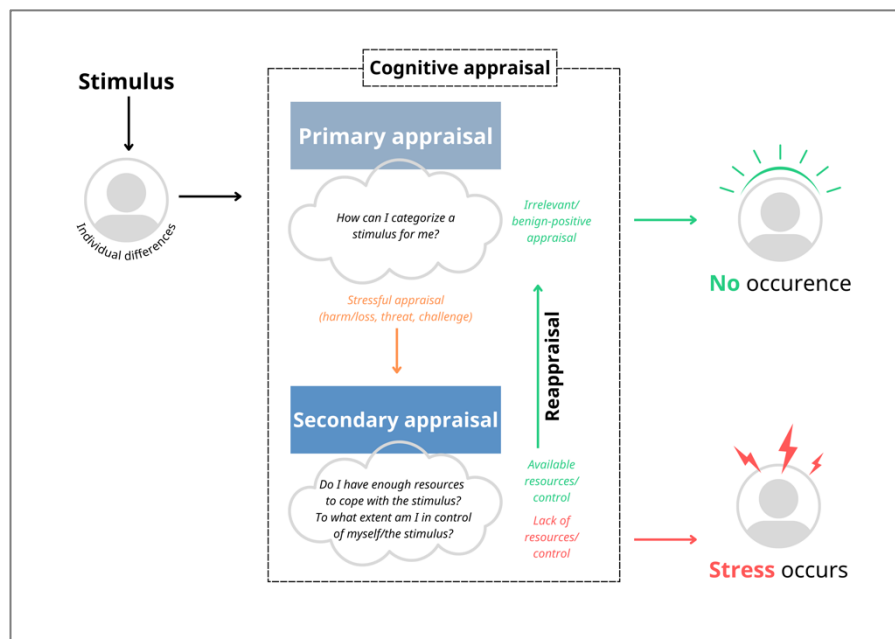


Figure 2.2.1. Transactional model of stress and coping (Developed based on Lazarus and Folkman, 1984 and Lazarus, 1999)

The primary appraisals assesses whether the stimulus is of adaptational importance, meaning whether the stimulus is relevant to one's own goal commitments, values, intentions, or expectations (Lazarus, 1999). It can further be distinguished in irrelevant (i.e., no implication for well-being), benign-positive (i.e., enhancing well-being), and stressful appraisals

(i.e., damaging/endangering well-being). For irrelevant and benign-positive appraisals, the model predicts that a person will not experience stress given the stimulus either does not impinge their, e.g., values, or it is associated with a positive outcome (see top green arrow in Figure 2.2.1). If a stimulus is categorized as stressful it has either already damaged a person's well-being (i.e., harm/loss appraisal), has the potential to do so in the future (i.e., threat appraisal), or mobilizes resources (i.e., challenge appraisal). According to the model, stressful appraisals can occur simultaneously, can be related, and are not necessarily mutually exclusive (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). For example, a child's soccer game can be appraised as both a threat and a challenge by parents depending on their goal commitments, values, intentions, or expectations. In case parents intend their child to excel in soccer and rely on a professional career in the future, they might appraise the game predominantly as a threat. Whereas parents who focus on enjoyment and skill mastery for their child, might adopt a challenge appraisal. All three instances of stressful appraisals (i.e., harm/loss, threat, challenge) require adaptations from a person and, thus, warrant a secondary appraisal as depicted by the orange-colored arrow in Figure 2.2.1.

Secondary appraisals allow to evaluate what could be done to adapt to or deal with a given stimulus (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Lazarus, 1999). As such, they assess which coping options are available, the likelihood that a respective coping option will be successful (i.e., outcome expectancy), and the likelihood that a person can effectively implement a respective coping option (i.e., efficacy expectancy). By that, the model takes into account how much control a person perceives to have over themselves, the implementation of a coping option as well as the consequences for the person-environment relationship at stake. If a person concludes that their behavior will not lead to a desired outcome and/or that the person is not able to successfully execute the behavior, the model predicts an occurrence of stress (see lower red arrow in Figure 2.2.1). In case the secondary appraisal, however, comes to a favorable evaluation of expected personal resources and the outcome, the person might engage in a *reappraisal* of the stimulus

based on new information (see middle green arrow in Figure 2.2.1). To conclude, the complex interplay of primary and secondary appraisals reflects the essence of a transactional approach to stress by acknowledging the subjective meaning of an individual in determining which stimuli will become stressors.

2.2.3 Cognitive appraisal and emotions

The way we appraise a stimulus further determines how we react emotionally (Lazarus, 1991). In Lazarus' understanding, an emotion is defined as "an organized psychophysiological reaction to ongoing [social or interpersonal; *note of the author*] relationships with the environment" (Lazarus, 2000, p. 230). Further, emotions involve processes on a cognitive, motivational, and relational level which determine its occurrence and continuation (Lazarus, 2000). In particular, emotions as an outcome of cognitive appraisal reflect whether or not and to what extent our goals and expectations have come to be realized (Lazarus, 1991). This is described as the relational meaning of a given person-environment relationship which captures the implications for subjective well-being (Lazarus, 1991). The CMRT (Lazarus, 1991, 1999) assumes that each emotion has a specific pattern of cognitive appraisal facilitating adaptation which results in specific tendencies for behavior. As such, emotions are understood as a dynamic process which can appear in repetitive patterns based on familiarity with a certain stimulus (Lazarus, 1991, 2000).

Similar to the transactional model of stress and coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), the CMRT (Lazarus, 1991, 1999) proposes a primary appraisal and a secondary appraisal to be relevant for the occurrence of emotions. Within the primary appraisal, a person assesses whether their relationship with the environment (1) is important to their goals and well-being (i.e., goal relevance), (2) facilitates or hinders the achievement of a goal (i.e., goal congruence), and (3) how specific goals relate to matters of self-identity, moral values, or social relationships (i.e., ego involvement). The secondary appraisal relevant for emotions is concerned with (1) a judgement on who/what might be responsible for harm/loss, threat, or challenge*, (2) individual

coping options, and (3) future expectations regarding what adaptations the appraised person-environmental relationship will require. Although the CMRT assumes certain appraisal patterns as underlying mechanisms to emotions, it refrains from proposing detailed links. Instead, Lazarus (1991, Table 3.4, p. 122) introduced core relational themes as a synthesis of appraisal components. It would be beyond the scope of this dissertation to explicate all core relational themes. In line with the objectives of this dissertation, the role of cognitive appraisal for the generation of negative emotions will be discussed. As such, negative emotions are assumed to be generated as a result of the following primary and secondary appraisals:

- (1) A person-environment relationship is relevant to individual goals and well-being.
- (2) A person-environment relationship thwarts individual goals and well-being.
- (3) Self-identity, moral values, or social relationships are at an (existential) risk.
- (4) Blame is taken for an appraised harm/loss, threat, or challenge.
- (5) Individual coping options are appraised as ineffective.
- (6) Future expectations are appraised as negative.

To conclude, Lazarus introduced the transactional model of stress and coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) and the CMRT (Lazarus, 1991, 1999) as separate theories. While there may be overlap and connections between the concepts within these two theories (specifically regarding the process of cognitive appraisal), there is no established framework or theory to date that explicitly combines both.

*In his cognitive-motivational-relational theory, Lazarus introduced a fourth type of appraisal termed benefit. He draws upon a benefit appraisal to explain the generation of positive emotions. Given this dissertation is focused on the occurrence of stress and negative emotions, benefit appraisals are not further considered.

2.3 State of the art and research gaps

Parents have long been the “hidden participants” in youth sport (Dorsch, 2017, p. 106): They are of high importance but often remain neglected in research. Within the last ten years, academic interest in the topic of sport parents has increased considerably as evidenced by Figure 2.3.1. This surge of publications allowed a diversification of research topics and methodologies moving away from the dichotomous idea that parental behavior is either “good” (i.e., supportive) or “bad” (i.e., pressuring). Rather, behavior was conceptualized on a continuum and studies explored what constituted parental support and pressure through considering individual

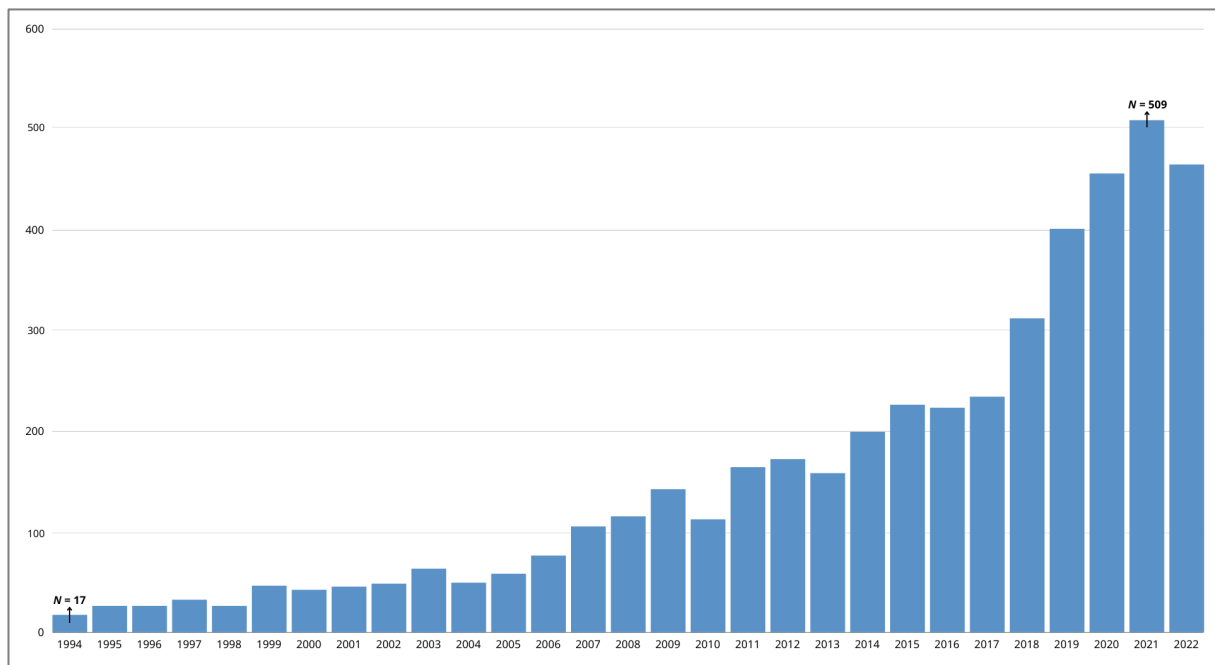


Figure 2.3.1. Amount of publications per year between 1994 and 2022 retrieved for the topic search in Web of Science "parent*" AND "sport" (June, 22 2023)

and environmental factors influencing behavior. As such, it has been recognized that parents not only impact their children but are themselves affected through their co-participation in youth sport (see Study 1, section 4.1). Drawing from this idea of a *reverse socialization*, a line of research established among others which aimed to understand whether and how the experience of stress distinctively affects parents and children in youth sport. In the following, evidence on parents' competitive stressors relevant for the conceptualization of this dissertation will be summarized. A systematic and more detailed overview of the respective studies ($n = 7$)

and their progressions in complexity (e.g., diversification of participants, integration of stress components) can be found in Table 2.3.1.

Two seminal qualitative studies (Harwood & Knight, 2009a, b) initiated a line of inquiry on parental stressors in youth sport. The results of an open-ended survey with competitive tennis parents first shed light on seven core themes regarding the experience of parental stressors: competition, coaches, finance, time, siblings, organization-related, and developmental (Harwood & Knight, 2009a). Reinforcing the idea that parents encounter specific demands associated with their children's developmental stage in sport (i.e., sampling, specializing, investment stage; Côté, 1999), these core themes were further explored utilizing semi-structured interviews (Harwood & Knight, 2009b). As a result, three general dimensions of parental stressors – organizational, competitive, and developmental stressors – were identified. Organizational stressors relate to logistics, personal investments of parents (e.g., time, role conflicts), and stress associated with the sport system, governing body, or organization which parents and their children operate in. Competitive stressors are defined as demands associated with a child's psychological readiness, physical ability, attitude or behavior, the preparation for competition, attending competitions as well as the behavior of opponents or other parents. Lastly, developmental stressors capture stressors in relation to children's development in and through sport including the selection of an adequate coach, the setup of training load, the management of sport-school conflicts, or uncertainty regarding children's future in tennis. When comparing the stressor dimensions across the developmental stages, several key differences became apparent. For example, organizational and developmental stressors appeared more prominent to parents of children who had already progressed further within the youth sport system (i.e., specializing and investment stage). Competitive stressors, however, were evident across all stages of children's youth sport development and thus reflect an ongoing demand for parents.

Table 2.3.1

List of publications targeting competitive stressors of parents in sport until 2020

No.	Year	Author(s)	Title	Methodology	Method	Sample	Sport, Level	Theory, Concept(s)
1	2009a	Harwood & Knight	Understanding parental stressors: An investigation of British tennis parents	QUAL	Open-ended survey	Parents N = 132	Tennis	CMRT (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984)
							Competitive	Stressors
2	2009b	Harwood & Knight	Stress in youth sport: A developmental investigation of tennis parents	QUAL	Semi-structured interviews	Parents N = 22	Tennis	Not explicitly mentioned
							Competitive	Stressors
3	2010	Harwood, Drew, & Knight	Parental stressors in professional youth football academies: a qualitative investigation of specializing stage parents	QUAL	Focus groups	Parents of male athletes N = 41	Football	Not explicitly mentioned
							Professional academies	Stressors
4	2016	Burgess, Knight, & Mellalieu	Parental stress and coping in elite youth gymnastics: An interpretive phenomenological analysis	QUAL	Semi-structured interviews	Parents N = 7	Gymnastics	CMRT (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), Transactional stress theory (Lazarus, 1999)
							Not specified	Coping

5	2017	Hayward, Knight, & Mellalieu	A longitudinal examination of stressors, appraisals, and coping in youth swimming	QUAL	Semi-structured interviews, daily diaries	Triads of mothers, female athletes, and female coaches N = 12	Swimming	CMRT (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), Transactional stress theory (Lazarus, 1999)
							Competitive	Stressors, coping
6	2019	Harwood, Thrower, Slater, Didymus, & Frearson	Advancing our understanding of psychological stress and coping among parents in organized youth sport	MM	Online survey with open-ended answer boxes and psychometric instruments	Parents N = 135	Tennis	CMRT (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), Transactional stress theory (Lazarus, 1999)
							Competitive, amateur	Stressors, appraisal, coping
7	2019	Lienhart, Nicaise, Knight, & Guillet-Descas	Understanding parent stressors and coping experiences in elite sports contexts	QUAL	Stage 1: Online survey with open-ended answer boxes Stage 2: Semi-structured interviews	Parents N = 1315 n _{stage1} = 1299 n _{stage2} = 16	34 different sports (team and individual)	CMRT (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), Transactional stress theory (Lazarus, 1999)
							Semi- and competitive elite, elite training centers	Stressors, coping

*Note. QUAL = Qualitative methodology, MM = Mixed-method methodology, CMRT = Cognitive-motivational-relational theory.

These initial insights have been obtained within competitive tennis as an individual sport context. Aiming to complement these findings with insights from organized team sport, Harwood et al. (2010) investigated parental stressors in professional soccer academies in the UK with a particular focus on the specializing stage of development. Four dimensions of parental stressors were derived from a content analysis of which competitive stressors reflected one. In particular, parents reported how attending games elicited stress as well as children's post-game emotional reactions, injuries, or tactical decisions of the coach.

Recently, attempts have been made to capture parents' stress experiences as suggested by Lazarus and Folkman (1984), namely as a process including several variables (e.g., cognitive appraisal, emotions) along with coping efforts. As such, studies identified specific cognitive appraisals, emotions, and implemented coping strategies associated with the experience of organizational, competitive, and developmental stressors parents face in gymnastics (Burgess et al., 2016), tennis (Harwood et al., 2019), or multi-sports (Lienhart et al., 2019). Overall, an occurrence of competitive stressors was mostly appraised as a threat or as a challenge by parents (Harwood et al., 2019). Further, parents reported the highest levels of perceived anxiety and anger for competitive stressors as compared to organizational or developmental stressors (Harwood et al., 2019). Aiming to manage competitive stressors, parents employed a range of coping strategies including avoidance, behavioral adaptations, or social support (Lienhart et al., 2019) as well as normalizing experiences, escape, distraction, willingness to learn, sharing parental responsibilities, or emotional release (Burgess et al., 2016). Internal regulation strategies such as cognitive reappraisal, support seeking, or emotion regulation, however, are found to be most effective in dealing with competitive stressors (Harwood et al., 2019).

The above-mentioned studies conceptualized stress as an intrapersonal experience warranting a single-case individual-level analysis. Recent findings, however, suggest that parental stress in youth sport is a mutually shared experience among parents and children (Hayward et al., 2017). Through engaging parent-child-coach triads in swimming, insights on

the interrelated nature of stress, cognitive appraisal, and coping strategies became evident. For example, performance expectations, and outcomes reflected a shared competitive stressor for parents, children and coaches which had to be dealt with through engaging in conversations. However, participants disclosed how managing this shared stressor could be impeded through the complexity of interpersonal relationships (i.e., coach not reaching out to a parent because she perceived her coaching abilities to be questioned).

Taken together, these studies provide key insights on the complex, dynamic, and recursive nature of parental stress in youth sport. The reported organizational, competitive, and developmental stressors highlight the wide range of demands parents face in supporting their children's athletic careers and corroborate the notion of viewing parents as co-participants.

Despite the valuable contributions, several limitations and research gaps on a theoretical and methodological level became apparent when summarizing the existing evidence. First, most of the here presented studies focused on one or few components of psychological stress (i.e., stressors, cognitive appraisal, emotions, coping) as conceptualized by Lazarus and Folkman (1984) and are largely lacking a comprehensible theoretical integration of these. Second, the majority of studies has utilized a qualitative approach gaining a rich and nuanced understanding of parental experiences. However, employing a mixed-method methodology allows to investigate and integrate several components of stress (see Harwood et al., 2019) and is, thus, recommended to capture stress as a process. As such, it has to be acknowledged that none of the above referenced studies has assessed parents' secondary appraisal which appears imperative to provide a complete understanding of the cognitive processes involved in the experience of stress. In doing so, the implementation of psychometric instruments should be favored (e.g., Harwood et al., 2019) to bolster conceptual clarity and allow for a comparability of results. Third, in line with theoretical assumptions (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), the summarized evidence indicates that parental stress is affected by individual characteristics such as children's developmental stage (see Harwood & Knight, 2009a, b). Reinforcing this notion,

future studies should consider how individual differences of parents including their age, gender, level of experience, childhood participation in sport, or previous stress experiences influence their cognitive appraisal, emotions, and coping strategies.

To conclude, this dissertation aims to build upon and extend the here summarized evidence on parents' experiences in youth sport while considering its limitations and research gaps to move the field forward. To meet that objective, the included studies of this dissertation consider (1) a theoretical integration of stress components through mixed-method methodology, (2) an assessment of parents' primary appraisal and secondary appraisal, (3) the implementation of sound psychometric instruments, and (4) an examination of individual differences in the way youth sport parents appraise and respond to stress. The following chapter will further explicate how these theoretical and methodological decisions have been guided by philosophical positions, theoretical models, and empirical evidence.

3. Dissertation project

This dissertation is situated at the intersection of sport psychology and family psychology. The following chapter serves to specify the research objectives to consequently derive theoretical and methodological choices regarding the design and execution of this dissertation. Further, it will be illustrated how findings were delivered and tailored to key stakeholders in youth sport including parents, coaches, youth soccer academies, and governing bodies.

3.1 Research objectives

Aiming for an advanced understanding of parents' experiences in youth sport, this dissertation employed exploratory (Study 1, Study 5), exploratory and descriptive (Study 2, Study 3), and theory-building research objectives (Study 4; Kothari, 2004; for specific research objectives please see the corresponding section of the respective study). Overall, this dissertation was guided by three central questions of theoretical and practical relevance:

1. What do we know about parental involvement in youth sport?
2. How do persons, contexts as well as relationships and interactions influence parental experiences and outcomes?
3. How can parents be meaningful co-participants within the interrelated system of youth sport?

3.2 Ontology and epistemology

In the following, I will explicate my positionality as a researcher and associated philosophical underpinnings of this dissertation to foster transparency and methodological integrity. The statements regarding ontology (i.e., nature of reality) and epistemology (i.e., generation of knowledge) are particularly relevant but not limited to Study 2 and 3 (mixed-method and qualitative study designs; see section 4.2 and section 4.3), and Study 4 (qualitative study design; see section 4.4).

In general, a research philosophy reflects a set of beliefs which informs how a study is designed and executed (Creswell, 2013; Daly, 2007). Throughout the course of this dissertation, my view on the “truth” and my understanding of the role as a researcher progressed. Initially, I was convinced that there exists a “true” universal reality independent of subjective influence which can be apprehended through psychometric instruments, quantitative analyses, and generalizable results (i.e., nomothetic approach). In line with these assumptions, methodological considerations for Study 2 and 3 were guided by a post-positivistic position with a critical realist ontology and an objectivist epistemology (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Poucher et al., 2020; Tamminen & Poucher, 2020; for further details please see page 86 of Study 2 and page 129 of Study 3). Consistent with this research philosophy, data in Study 2 and Study 3 was collected through online questionnaires which limited interactions between the researchers and the participants. Further, in analyzing and interpreting the qualitative data with a qualitative content analysis (Mayring, 2014) and a frequency analysis, we sought to live up to a production of bias-free knowledge (Daly, 2007; Weed, 2009). Delving into various qualitative research methods over the course of this dissertation made me question my previous approach of making sense of the collected data and participants’ experiences. Rather than viewing researchers and participants as independent entities, I considered that knowledge is co-created through the transactions of researchers and participants. Hence, in Study 4 I opted to capture in-depth and rich insights of participants’ lived reality (i.e., ideographic approach), to capture their understanding and attributed meaning of relationships, interactions, and processes, and provide a platform for participants’ voices. Study 4 was thus theoretically situated in a pragmatist framework which regards “truth” as a practical outcome contributing to resolving problems and enhanced actions and interactions (Morgan, 2014; for further details please see page 166 of Study 4). Considering that knowledge is co-created through social interactions between participants as well as researchers and participants, we adopted a subjectivist and transactional epistemology (Poucher et al., 2020; Tamminen & Poucher, 2020). Consistent with

this research philosophy, data collection, analysis, and interpretation in Study 4 were informed by the guidelines of constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006, 2014).

To conclude, this dissertation reflects an integration of nomothetic and ideographic research approaches which allows to address and answer *how* and *why* certain patterns and individual variability of experiences occur for parents in youth sport.

3.3 Choice of theory

Considering the multitude of theories, frameworks, and models on stress, a brief rationale will be provided in the following as to why the transactional model of stress and coping by Lazarus and Folkman (1984) as well as the CMRT by Lazarus (1991, 1999) were chosen.

On a theoretical level, stress was approached from a psychological perspective in this dissertation which necessitated a distinction from other theories conceptualizing stress as a biological (e.g., general adaptation syndrome; Selye, 1980) or biopsychosocial phenomenon (e.g., biopsychosocial model of challenge and threat; Blascovich et al., 2001). Second, both the transactional model (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) and the CMRT (Lazarus, 1991, 1999) can be used to study stress in various contexts ranging from work-related stress to academic stress, health-related stress, or family stress, and are applicable to a diverse range of stressors including acute and chronic stressors, major life events, or daily hassles. Adhering to these theoretical conceptualizations thus allowed an examination of parents' competitive stressors in youth sport as recurring phenomena. Third, Lazarus (1999) views stress, emotions, and coping as a "conceptual unit" (p. 37) which can be separated for the purpose of analysis. Utilizing the transactional model of stress and coping (Lazarus, 1999) as well as the CMRT (Lazarus, 1991, 1999) provides high methodological utility by enabling researchers to examine processes (i.e., cognitive appraisals, emotions, coping) and their interrelations. Fourth, stress according to Lazarus and Folkman (1984) is viewed as an ongoing and dynamic process rather than a one-time event. As such, individuals continuously interact with their environment, appraising and reappraising stressors. In line with tenets of family systems theory (i.e., circular causality,

feedback loops), this perspective captures the complex and evolving nature of stress as assumed in the context of youth sport. Although the transactional model (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) reflects an intrapersonal theoretical approach to stress and coping, it allows to account for interpersonal influences through transactions within a social environment (i.e., persons, contexts, relationships, and interactions). Lastly, although competitive stressors are found to be evident across all stages of children's youth sport participation (Harwood & Knight, 2009b), parental stress appeared to be affected by individual characteristics (Harwood & Knight, 2009a, b). Utilizing Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) and Lazarus' (1991, 1999) works as a theoretical foundation hence allowed to consider individual differences in the way youth sport parents appraise and respond to stress.

3.4 Research program

In understanding the area of parenting in sport as an emerging research field within sport psychology (see section 2.3), this dissertation adopted overall exploratory, descriptive, and theory-building purposes and refrained from testing specific hypotheses. With respect to a research strategy, it was deemed adequate to first identify and comprehensively map the extant body of literature on parental involvement (Study 1) and interpersonal coping (Study 5) in (youth) sport to examine the scope of evidence and indicate trajectories for subsequent studies and future research. Further, this dissertation pursued an extension and specification of previous theoretical accounts on parental stress (Study 2, Study 3) through a transfer into youth soccer contexts (i.e., professional youth soccer academy, amateur soccer) and a theoretical integration of stress components as suggested by Lazarus and Folkman (1984; see section 3.5 for further details). Finally, the development of a conceptual model on cooperation between parents, coaches, and administrators (Study 4) was chosen to theorize novel findings on cooperation between parents, coaches, and administrators as a social phenomenon.

To meet the above-mentioned objectives of this dissertation's research program, the present dissertation was designed as a multi-stage project with experts in the areas of parental

involvement, youth soccer, coaching, and performance psychology. At the German Sport University Cologne, Prof. Dr. Dr. Markus Raab and Dr. Babett Lobinger served as the primary supervisors. Prof. Raab's expertise in human performance and theory development contributed to the overall design and strategic alignment of theories and concepts. Dr. Babett Lobinger enriched the dissertation project with her profound knowledge on parental roles in career transitions, youth soccer, and coaching. Prof. Dr. Travis Dorsch, founding director of the Families in Sport Lab at Utah State University, complemented the research team as an international project partner. Prof. Dorsch's research focuses on how athletes' behaviors, attitudes, experiences, and outcomes influence and are influenced by various persons and contexts in youth sport. Being interested in these multidirectional and reciprocal effects, Prof. Dorsch reflects a strong advocate of a systems approach to youth sport (see section 2.1.2). Further, Dr. Lobinger and Prof. Dorsch were involved in the analysis and interpretation of qualitative data through serving as critical friends.

Beyond the composition of the research team, youth soccer was chosen as the focal context of investigation within this dissertation's research program given it reflects the most popular sport in Germany (more than 1.7 million children involved; Deutscher Fußball-Bund e.V., 2023) as well as its professionalized structures for talent development organized within youth soccer academies. Youth soccer academies in Germany reflect an elite pathway for children and youth. There are currently 56 youth soccer academies which are affiliated with professional soccer clubs ranging from the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd division Bundesliga to regional division. Youth soccer academies are commonly structured in three performance domains and respective age groups: fundamental area (U8-U11 teams), development area (U12-U15 teams), and performance area (U16-U23 teams). Across these performance domains, children become familiarized with a broad range of movement-related demands as well as soccer-specific techniques and tactics. Children having an academy contract are either staying with their families or living in a boarding school or with a host family, depending on the distance from their hometown to the

youth soccer academy. To date, approximately 8,000 male players comprise the teams of the youth soccer academies. Taken together, youth soccer academies allow to investigate experiences, relationships, and interactions in line with the integrated model of the youth sport system (Dorsch et al., 2022), reflecting the interplay of a family subsystem (i.e., parents), a team subsystem (i.e., coaches, administrators), and an environmental subsystem (i.e., youth soccer academy as an organization). Given that competitive stressors have been identified as an ongoing demand for parents (Harwood & Knight, 2009b), we decided to sample parents across all stages of children's and youth's development (U8-U18 teams). Families with soccer players above 18 years of age were excluded given a gradually decreasing psychosocial influence of parents, as suggested by the developmental model of career transitions (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004).

The Deutsche Fußball Liga GmbH (DFL, *German Soccer League*; translated by the author) is responsible for the management, coordination, and certification of the youth soccer academies. In 2020, the DFL instituted the taskforce “Zukunft Profifußball” (*Future professional soccer*, translated by the author) which advocates among others to strengthen the involvement, support, and education of families within youth soccer (Deutsche Fußball Liga GmbH, 2021). The present dissertation hence aimed to provide evidence-based implications on parental experiences (Study 1, Study 2, Study 3) and cooperation between parents, coaches, and youth soccer academies (Study 4) to inform community outreach and policies. Niklas Wilk-Marten (manager youth academies, DFL) and Rainer Fehl (parent management coordinator, Bayer 04 Leverkusen Fußball GmbH) served as applied cooperation partners supporting the recruitment of parents and transfer of findings for the respective research projects (see section 3.6).

3.5 Study designs

The studies within this dissertation reflect diverse methodological approaches to conducting research projects including scoping reviews (Study 1, Study 5), mixed-method designs (Study

2, Study 3), and a qualitative design developing a conceptual model (Study 4). In general, a research design serves to coherently connect theoretical assumptions, research methodologies, and methods of data collection and analysis (Bryman, 2012; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Both methodologies and methods used should be appropriate to answer the respective research question (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Detailed information on methodological coherence can be found within the method sections of each included study; this chapter rather serves to delineate overall methodological choices and the interconnectedness of the included studies. Figure 3.5.1 illustrates how the included studies are related to and informed by each other, particularly, how Study 1 guided theoretical and methodological choices of the subsequent studies.

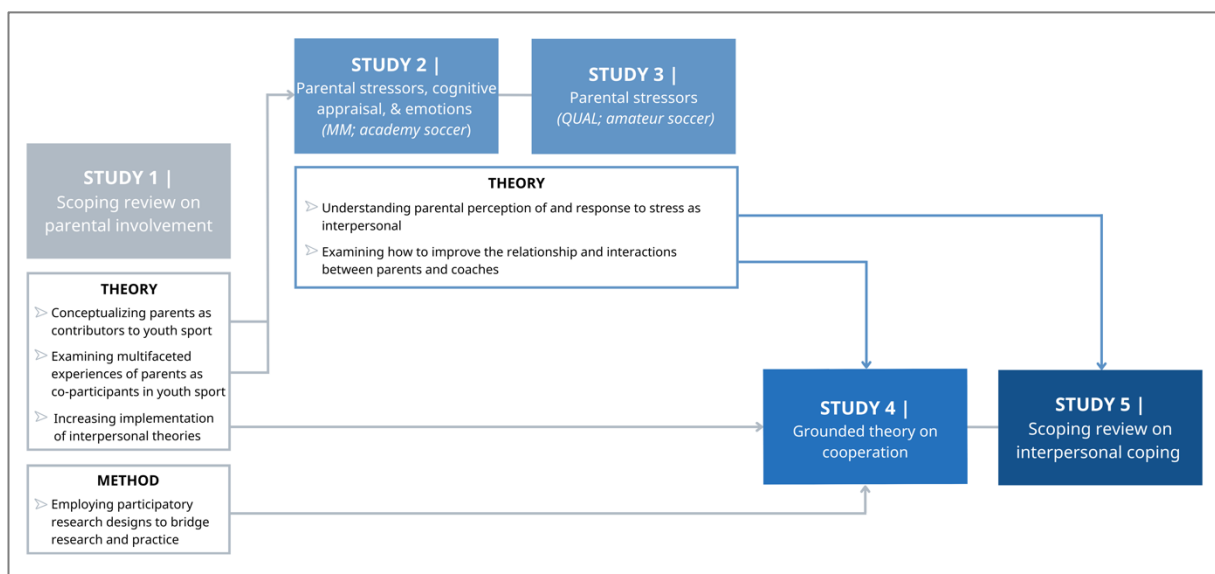


Figure 3.5.1. Interrelations between included studies

Note. Only those implications relevant to the design and execution of the here included studies are shown. Given shared theoretical underpinnings (i.e., stressors), implications of Study 2 and Study 3 are integrated. Color gradations (i.e., light to dark) reflect the temporal order of study conceptualization within this dissertation (i.e., early to recent).

QUAL = Qualitative methodology, MM = Mixed-method methodology

Before conducting an empirical study, a scoping review (Study 1) was deemed adequate to identify key concepts and research topics in the area of parental involvement in youth sport. As such, a more detailed examination of the multifaceted experiences that parents face as co-participants within the complex youth sport system was identified as a fruitful trajectory for future research. This implication informed the design and execution of Study 2 and Study 3, in particular, because parents' perceived stress and (inadequate) coping abilities might contribute to parental misconduct and pressuring behaviors (Teques et al., 2018; Wiersma & Fifer, 2008).

Data for Study 2 and 3 were collected in a convergent parallel mixed-method design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018), were analyzed in a separate and integrated manner, and results were prepared for publication according to the youth sport context (i.e., youth soccer academy vs. amateur soccer). Doing so allowed for a consideration of organizational and community-level influences on parents' experiences (Dorsch et al., 2022). Further, a mixed-method methodology was adopted to meet Lazarus' (1999, p. 37) understanding of stress as a "conceptual unit" which can be separated for the purpose of analysis (i.e., combining qualitative data on stressors and quantitative assessments on cognitive appraisal and emotions).

A shared finding of Study 2 and Study 3 is that coaches' lack of communication and transparency was perceived as stressful for parents. This warranted a further investigation of social processes and interactions between parents and coaches. In particular, Study 4 aimed to develop a grounded theory of effective cooperation between parents and organizational stakeholders. In line with the integrated model of the youth sport system (Dorsch et al., 2022), youth soccer academies appeared well suited for this purpose as they reflect an organization with interrelated subsystems. Further, Study 1 suggested an increased use of interpersonal approaches which informed a multi-group data collection and triangulation of data. As recommended in Study 1, designing the project in cooperation with the DFL and opting for a qualitative approach allowed to study and interpret the lived experiences and meaning parents and youth soccer academy staff attribute to cooperating with each other in their natural environment (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Grounded theory as both a methodology and method appeared suitable for this objective given it is recommended when previous knowledge on the topic is limited (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Holt & Tamminen, 2010).

The implications on parents' stressors, cognitive appraisals, and emotions derived from Study 2 and Study 3 guided the design and execution of the last article included in this dissertation as well. To account for a holistic understanding of stress as a process (Lazarus, 1999) and to complement extant findings, it appeared crucial for this dissertation to consider

parents' coping strategies in more depth. Identifying stress as an interpersonal phenomenon for parents (see Study 2, see Study 3) necessitated an interpersonal conceptualization of coping strategies as well (see Study 1). An initial literature search yielding two publications (Johnson et al., 2020; Neely et al., 2017) revealed that knowledge on the topic of parents' interpersonal coping was in its infancy. Before conducting an empirical study, it was thus decided to comprehensively map evidence on interpersonal coping in sports on a general level. Pursuing this objective with a scoping review (Study 5) allowed for the development of a theory-based conceptualization of interpersonal coping (see page 224 of Study 5) which can be used in the future to coherently design and execute research inquiries.

3.6 Transfer of findings

Disseminating research findings to expert and non-expert audiences reflects an integral part of my understanding as an academic. On an applied level, the present dissertation thus aimed to enhance parental experiences, relationships, and interactions to generate a societal impact within and beyond youth soccer. As such, results of this dissertation were utilized to inform policy changes on parent management in German youth soccer academies. Through cooperating with and advising Niklas Wilk-Marten (manager youth academies, DFL), a new position was instituted within youth soccer academies which is responsible for conceptualizing cooperation with parents, for addressing parental needs and concerns, and for delivering parent education (see Appendix V of the licensing regulation; Deutsche Fußball Liga GmbH, 2022). Together with the Deutsche Fußball-Bund e.V. (DFB) and the DFL, Dr. Babett Lobinger and I recently contributed to a handbook for parents in youth soccer academies (Deutscher Fußball-Bund e.V. & Deutsche Fußball Liga GmbH, in press; see example pages in section 2 of the Appendix), sharing evidence-based implications and a comprehensive account of research findings to support families of gifted players. Further, I developed evidence-based resources for parents (Figure 3.6.1a) and coaches (Figure 3.6.1b) in German and English language which are publicly available and utilizable across youth sport settings.

Honoring meaningful community outreach, I delivered evidence-based educational seminars and workshops to managers and administrators of the 56 youth soccer academies in Germany as well as parents and coaches of Bayer 04 Leverkusen Fußball GmbH. Beyond informing key stakeholders in youth sport, findings of this dissertation were made available through workshops for fellow researchers and applied sport psychologists at national and international conferences as well as post-graduate training. Further, non-expert audiences were targeted through podcast episodes and a live-stream panel discussion. For a complete list of knowledge transfer activities please see Table A.1 of the Appendix.

a

Evidence-based resources for parents



a. Checklist for parents in youth sport
Invited contribution at the youth sport symposium of the Institut für Angewandte Trainingswissenschaft (Leipzig, 2022)
Versions available in English and German



b. Flyer on parental stress and coping
Evidence-based workshop at the Bayer 04 Leverkusen youth soccer academy (2022)



c. Onboarding resource for parents
Community outreach project with the Bayer 04 Leverkusen youth soccer academy (2022)



d. Handbook for parents in youth soccer academies
Cooperation with the German Football Association (DFB) and German Soccer League (DFL; 2023)

b

Evidence-based resources for coaches



a. Checklist for coaches in youth sport
Invited contribution at the youth sport symposium of the Institut für Angewandte Trainingswissenschaft (Leipzig, 2022)
Versions available in English and German



b. Flyer on parent-coach cooperation
Evidence-based workshop at the FEPSAC conference (Padova, 2022) and conference of the Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Sportpsychologie e.V. (asp; Stuttgart, 2023)
Versions available in English and German



c. Recorded workshop on parent-coach cooperation
Invited contribution to the Fußball Online Kongress (2021)

Figure 3.6.1. Evidence-based resources for parents (a) and coaches (b) informed by this dissertation

4. Included studies

Disclaimer

The here included manuscripts do not appear in their originally published format but have been adapted to the design of this dissertation. Information regarding conflicts of interests or funding, author credit statements as well as acknowledgements can be found in the original publications in the respective journals.

4.1 Study 1

Dorsch, T. E., Wright, E., **Eckardt, V. C.**, Elliott, S., Thrower, S. N., & Knight, C. J.

(2021). A history of parent involvement in organized youth sport: A scoping review.

Sport, Exercise, and Performance Psychology, 10(4), 536–557.

<https://doi.org/10.1037/spy0000266>

Abstract

A fundamental step in describing a research field is the review and synthesis of accumulated knowledge. Multiple qualitative reviews have been conducted over the last decade to provide a summary and commentary on the growing literature in the area of youth sport parenting. However, these reviews have focused on contemporary findings in the field, largely ignoring work in the area that began in the late 1960s. In light of this under-discussed history, there remains a need to highlight the historical foundations of the youth sport parenting literature, the transitions that shaped the trajectory of work, as well as the contemporary research that informs our current understanding. The purpose of this scoping review was to provide an historical analysis of the literature on parent involvement in organized youth sport. In conducting the analysis, we identified key concepts and trajectories that define the field's *foundational* (1968-1981), *transitional* (1982-1998), and *contemporary* (1999-2020) periods. Specifically, this review not only sought to define and summarize these periods of research, but also to use the synthesized knowledge to frame remaining gaps and potential future directions for the field.

4.2 Study 2

Eckardt, V. C., Dorsch, T. E., & Lobinger, B. H. (2022). Parents' competitive stressors in professional German youth soccer academies: A mixed-method study. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, 58:102089. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychsport.2021.102089>

Abstract

Objective: This study was designed to identify parents' competitive stressors in German elite youth soccer academies as well as their stressor-specific appraisals and emotions.

Design and method: 330 parents ($M_{age} = 46.0$, $SD = 6.2$ years) completed a mixed-method online survey to indicate stressors encountered at their child's competitions. Parental self-disclosed stressors were analyzed using qualitative content analysis (Mayring, 2014). Psychometric assessment of parents' primary and secondary appraisal (PASA; Gaab, 2009) and emotions (SEQ; Jones et al., 2005) were subsequently used to conduct a stressor-specific analysis.

Results and conclusion: Frequency analysis yielded 831 competitive stressors of which the majority (47%) pertained to the own child, followed by those concerning other soccer parents (18%) or the child's coach (15%). Univariate Analysis of Variance revealed coach-related stressors to be perceived significantly more as a challenge (primary appraisal) in contrast to situations with other soccer parents. Parents' competency beliefs (secondary appraisal) were highest for stressors involving other soccer parents. Multivariate Analysis of Variance showed a significant difference in parents' emotional experiences with coach-related stressors eliciting the highest anger scores. Parents' stress experiences were characterized by circular causality and interdependency, suggesting a relational approach to stress for future studies. Implications are discussed to further guide theoretical advancements in the field of parental stress as well as to shape interactions and relationships within academy youth soccer.

4.3 Study 3

Eckardt, V.C., Linz, L., & Lobinger, B. H. (2023). „Meine Tochter wurde ausgewechselt und ich fühlte mich selbst aus dem Spiel genommen“ – Wahrgenommene Stressoren von Eltern im Breitensport Fußball [“My daughter was substituted, and I felt like I was being taken out of the game”: Perceived parental stressors in amateur soccer]. *Zeitschrift für Sportpsychologie*, 30(3), 121-133. <https://doi.org/10.1026/1612-5010/a000403>

Zusammenfassung

Als Karrierebegleiter_innen und Unterstützer_innen sind Eltern zentral im Nachwuchssport eingebunden. Besonders ihr Erleben und Verhalten bei Wettkämpfen wird durch emotionale Belastungen beeinflusst. Bisherige Literatur untersucht zumeist die Erfahrungen von Eltern in leistungsorientierten Sport-Kontexten. Ziel dieser Studie war es daher, eine Übertragung der aus der Literatur etablierten wett- kampf-bezogenen Stressoren auf Eltern im Breitensport zu prüfen. Dazu wurden bisher unveröffentlichte qualitative Daten von 90 Elternteilen aus dem Breitensport Fußball analysiert und anschließend mit den Ergebnissen einer mixed-method Studie aus dem leistungsorientierten Fußball verglichen. Mittels Qualitativer Inhaltsanalyse wurden 11 wettkampfbezogene Stressbereiche von 90 Elternteilen identifiziert. Situationen mit dem eigenen Kind (32 %), anderen Eltern (17 %) sowie Trainer_innen (15 %) bildeten den Großteil der insgesamt 239 Stressoren ab. Im Vergleich zu Daten aus Fußball-Leistungszentren zeigt sich weitgehende Übereinstimmung der berichteten Stressoren, jedoch scheinen stressauslösende Situationen mit dem eigenen Kind weniger salient zu sein. Abschließend werden Handlungsempfehlungen für angewandt tätige Sportpsycholog_innen, Vereine und Trainer_innen gegeben

4.4 Study 4

Eckardt, V. C., & Dorsch, T.E. (2023). “We are on the outside but it’s okay”: A grounded theory of cooperation between parents, coaches, and administrators in professional youth soccer academies. Under review in *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*.

Abstract

Parents need to cooperate with professional organizations to support their children’s development and health. In sports, knowledge on how parents, coaches, and organizations can successfully coordinate their behavior and work together for a common cause is lacking. This study was designed to identify a conceptual model of cooperation as a social process between parents and organizational stakeholders in youth soccer academies.

Intensive interviews were conducted with parents ($n = 9$), coaches ($n = 11$), and administrators ($n = 14$) across 14 youth soccer academies in Germany. Data were analyzed using initial, focused, and theoretical coding following constructivist grounded theory methodology (Charmaz, 2006, 2014).

The grounded theory produced comprises several processes aimed at building and maintaining effective cooperation between parents, coaches, and administrators. Acknowledging parents as part of the academy, providing a thorough onboarding, and defining parental roles are essential for cooperation to evolve. Cooperation was viewed as a responsive, dynamic, and iterative process impacted by person and context factors. Findings are interpreted through a systems lens highlighting nuanced dependencies between cognitive, emotional, and behavioral patterns. The grounded theory provides implications for future research targeting the intersection of persons and contexts in youth sport. For practitioners, we propose an evidence-based program on developing cooperation.

4.5 Study 5

Eckardt, V. C., & Tamminen, K. A. (2023). A scoping review on interpersonal coping in sports. *International Review of Sport and Exercise Psychology*. Advance online publication: <https://doi.org/10.1080/1750984X.2023.2251137>

Abstract

Social relationships become crucial in times of stress and adversity. While research on interpersonal coping has acknowledged human interdependency and is gaining momentum in sport psychology, a lack of conceptual clarity and divergence in nomenclature is currently hindering the field to move forward. Thus, the aim of this scoping review was to map the current evidence on contextual characteristics, antecedents, strategies, and outcomes of interpersonal coping (i.e., communal coping, dyadic coping) in sports. Six databases were systematically searched utilizing the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) checklist. Eleven studies were included in the current review and subject to data extraction and quality assessment. Data were charted according to the PRISMA extension checklist for Scoping reviews (PRISMA-ScR). Findings show that communal coping has primarily served to investigate joint coping efforts of teams or families during significant events or transitions, while dyadic coping sheds light on stressor management between athletes, or athletes and their coaches. Further, most studies were theory-driven and employed a qualitative methodology with a cross-sectional study design. Multi-group sampling was largely neglected. We conclude by explicating research gaps based on the populations and topics studied as well as the methodologies used to propose fruitful avenues for future research.

5. Discussion and limitations

The aim of this dissertation was to explore parental experiences in youth soccer from an interpersonal approach aiming to address and answer *how* and *why* certain parental experiences occur. This was mirrored through the methodologies, theories, and methods used in the included studies. The following sections feature the novel contributions of this dissertation to the current state of research on a theoretical (section 5.1), methodological (section 5.2), and applied (section 5.3) level. Further, results will be reflected, discussed, and critically integrated among the included studies as well as with previous empirical findings. Along with its unique contributions, (de-)limitations of this dissertation will be acknowledged.

5.1 Theoretical contributions

On a theoretical level, this dissertation's main contributions include:

1. a comprehensive and nuanced historical analysis of research targeting parental involvement in youth sport (Study 1);
2. an extension and specification of evidence on parental stress through presenting a novel taxonomy of competitive stressors for parents in competitive and amateur youth soccer (Study 2, Study 3);
3. the development of a conceptual model on cooperation between parents, coaches, and administrators (Study 4);
4. the proposal of a thoroughly derived concept definition of interpersonal coping in sports (Study 5).

In the following, findings on stress and coping (section 5.1.1) and cooperation (section 5.1.2) will be discussed in more detail. To honor conceptual clarity, theoretical contributions of the included studies will be discussed separately.

5.1.1 Stress and coping

In theory, any environmental stimulus can have the potential to become a stressor (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Lazarus, 1999). Accounting for this notion, Study 2 (see section 4.2) and Study 3 (see section 4.3) first opted for a qualitative approach in asking parents to disclose situations related to their children's soccer games which they had perceived to be stressful. This compilation of situations allowed for an identification of competitive stressors which were meaningful to parents in youth soccer. Specifically, this dissertation presents a novel taxonomy comprising 11 competitive stressors which encompass unique aspects of soccer as a team sport as well as competitive and amateur contexts. On a theoretical level, the results allow to draw inferences regarding the type of stressors parents encounter, namely competitive ones (Arnold & Fletcher, 2021). As such, the most salient stressors for parents in youth soccer appear to relate to instances within an interpersonal context involving their own children, other soccer parents, and coaches. Findings are limited, however, in specifying certain stressor dimensions (e.g., frequency, intensity; see Arnold et al., 2010) and properties (e.g., novelty, predictability; see Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). For example, the focus of this dissertation was on daily hassles arising from parental roles in youth soccer which are recurring and characterized by a lower magnitude of severity compared to major life events (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). These dimensions and properties were, however, not empirically tested within this dissertation which would have allowed a more nuanced understanding of parental stressors. As such, dimensions and properties are assumed to be crucial in determining whether an encountered stressor becomes demanding for an individual or not (Arnold & Fletcher, 2021). Advances in psychometric assessments now allow an investigation of stressor dimensions (i.e., frequency, intensity) specifically tailored to parents in youth sport (Tamminen, Bonk, Eckardt et al., 2023) which reflects a promising avenue to continue this line of research (also see Study 1).

Although often wrongfully assumed, the mere presence of a stressor does not equate with it being demanding (Arnold & Fletcher, 2012). Beyond stressor types, dimensions, and properties,

it depends on how an individual construes an event and appraises their relationship with the environment (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). In line with processes in the transactional model of stress and coping (cf.), this dissertation extends previous findings by examining the subjective meaning parents attributed to stressors via both their primary and secondary appraisals. In contrast to other findings (Harwood et al., 2019), parents largely appraised the encountered stressors as a challenge instead of a threat (i.e., primary appraisal; see Study 2), reporting higher challenge appraisals for child-related and coach-related stressors as compared to those pertaining to other soccer parents. According to theory (cf.), challenge appraisals apply to stressors which bear a potential for growth or gain instead of anticipated harms and losses. This might be explained through parents interpreting and situating competitive stressors as a “necessary evil” of their children being selected to an elite soccer pathway which overall reflects a unique opportunity for development and long-term benefits. In addition, parents in Study 2 had on average been affiliated with a youth soccer academy for three years and attended four soccer games per month. Alluding to novelty as a stressor property (cf.), it seems plausible that parents had previously experienced the self-disclosed stressors which might have alleviated threat perception. Further, in contrast to types of child-related stressors outside of sport (e.g., child’s mental health, disability, chronic physical illness, or death; Roth et al., 2022), parenting in competitive youth soccer could be categorized as a minor stressor, suggesting less severity and threat compared to major stressors in clinically relevant domains.

This comparison raises the overarching question whether – and if at all – how competitive stressors in youth sport are unique to parents. Comparing the results on parents’ stressors to evidence from other sports (i.e., Burgess et al., 2016; Harwood & Knight, 2009a, b; Harwood et al., 2019; Hayward et al., 2017; Lienhart et al., 2019) reveals both parallels and nuanced distinctions which underlines the uniqueness and an appeal for tailored approaches. Beyond sports, to date no evidence exists on comparing stress experiences across parenting domains (e.g., school, sport, music, arts) and contexts (e.g., gifted children, child mental or physical

disability, child mental or chronic illness). Findings appear to accumulate on stress experienced during pregnancy and transitioning to parenthood (Roth et al., 2022) as well as a range of clinically relevant mental or (chronic) physical health conditions (Barroso et al., 2018; Cousino & Hazen, 2013; Enea & Rusu, 2020; Golfenshtein et al., 2016), leaving other areas of child-related stressors understudied. In general, parents of children with clinically relevant mental or physical conditions experience elevated levels of stress compared to parents of healthy children (e.g., Cousino & Hazen, 2013; Gabriel et al., 2005; Gabriel & Bodenmann, 2006; Putney et al., 2021). In these instances, higher stress is related to a higher perceived responsibility of parents for their children's treatment management (Cousino & Hazen, 2013). Hence, stress appears increased in families with children requiring high parental involvement, with intense care demands, and with interferences due to the condition on daily family life. Drawing from findings of Study 1 and sport psychology literature (e.g., Bean et al., 2019; Clarke & Harwood, 2014; Johansen & Green, 2019; Kirk et al., 1997; Newport et al., 2020; Trussell, 2009), parenting a child in (competitive) youth sport appears to impose similar demands on parents with respect to time investments and an increased sense of responsibility. Increased levels of stress and cognitive threat appraisals among sport parents might, however, be more prevalent for organizational stressors than competitive ones (see Harwood & Knight, 2009b), as these are typically occurring in a higher frequency (e.g., daily transport to practice, daily adjustment of family meals) and might elicit higher harm/loss anticipations (e.g., parental role conflicts, work-life balance, relationship to non-athletic sibling) which go beyond competitive stressors.

The transactional model of stress and coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) further assumes challenge appraisals to mobilize coping strategies which necessitates a secondary appraisal. Parents' beliefs in their own abilities to manage encountered stressors (i.e., secondary appraisal) were significantly higher for stressors pertaining to other soccer parents as compared to child-related stressors. Given that parents shared sentiments about not being able to take actions at the sideline on behalf of or to support their children, their evaluation of coping options appeared

limited. Although it was beyond the scope of this dissertation to examine parental coping strategies, several implications on a theoretical level can be drawn. Insights on parental stressors provided by Study 2 and Study 3 highlight the interconnectedness of social agents (i.e., parents, children, coaches) in youth soccer. Interdependent and shared psychological experiences and outcomes in and beyond sport have previously been theorized (e.g., Dorsch et al., 2022; Smith & Hamon, 2021). Yet, stress and coping research to date predominantly relies on intrapersonal approaches. In the context of sport parents, several studies have identified coping strategies parents employ including detaching from their environment, emotion regulation, goal withdrawal, willingness to learn, sharing tasks, or providing/seeking social support (see Burgess et al., 2016; Harwood et al., 2019; Lienhart et al., 2019). These intrapersonal conceptualizations of coping, however, fail to consider on both a theoretical and a methodological level that individuals and their environment are intertwined, making stress and coping a co-created experience through relationships and interactions (Burkitt, 2014). Drawing from the findings of this dissertation (Study 1, Study 2, Study 3), interpersonal theories are warranted which inform the investigation of parental coping in sport. Study 5 (see section 4.5) continued this line of research and first introduced a concept definition of interpersonal coping aiming to bolster terminological coherence and promote future research trajectories. As such, interpersonal coping is defined as “intentional or conscious joint affective, cognitive, or behavioral efforts of two or more individuals towards managing a stressor” (see page 224). Further, communal coping (Lyons et al., 1998) and dyadic coping (Bodenmann, 1995) were identified as viable theoretical outlets depending on the focal population (more than two individuals vs. a dyad). To date, empirical evidence on interpersonal coping involving sport parents appears limited. Targeting sport parents’ experiences in swimming, Hayward and colleagues (2017) examined individual and shared stress and coping experiences of athletes, their mothers, and coaches and concluded that they were largely interdependent and should thus be considered simultaneously. However, interpersonal influences were interpreted within the

construct of social support which is conceptually different to interpersonal coping (see page 205). Further, communal coping (Lyons et al., 1998) was utilized to study the dynamic nature of the coping process in families following athletic deselection (Neely et al., 2017). While deselection was consistently appraised as a shared stressor, the responsibility of managing it was shared among family members and fluctuated over time. These initial insights emphasize that interpersonal approaches in studying stress and coping among parents and their athletic children appear fruitful and critical to advancements of the field. As suggested in Study 5, a focused account of research particularly in the context of youth sport is warranted to enhance our understanding of interpersonal coping and its effects within families.

The way in which individuals appraise a stressor and their resources for coping determines their emotional reaction (Lazarus, 1991, 1999). The transactional model of stress and coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) predicts challenge appraisals to be associated with the occurrence of positive emotions. Parents in Study 2, however, reported lower levels of excitement and happiness compared to anxiety, dejection, and anger which is contradictory to theoretical assumptions. Specifically, parents experienced anxiety as the most prevalent emotion (also see Harwood et al., 2019) which Lazarus (1999) views to be related to an uncertain threat in the context of self-identity, life, and death. While the latter two might be less pronounced in youth soccer, issues of self-identity appear intriguing. Empirical evidence (Dorsch et al., 2009, 2015; Holt et al., 2008) and parental self-reports in Study 2 suggest parents to be empathic with their children and to live vicariously through them which implies a high identification and connectedness of parents with their children (also see page 260 for linguistic markers of closeness). Although both has to be empirically determined and quantified, it might be viable to assume that the experience of anxiety could be linked to parents' increased identification and emotional coupling with their children.

Overall, Lazarus' work on stress and coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Lazarus, 1991, 1999) reflects theoretical conceptualizations highlighting individual differences. This was only

partially accounted for within this dissertation. A qualitative assessment and analysis of parental stressors follows an individual approach by allowing parents to disclose subjectively meaningful stressors (see Study 2 and Study 3). On a qualitative level, marginal differences in the content of parents' disclosed stressors were identified based on parents' or children's age and gender (Study 3). Quantitatively, parents' appraisal and emotions were not significantly influenced by demographic characteristics such as age, gender, academy experience, or soccer expertise (Study 2). In conclusion, this dissertation suggests stressors, cognitive appraisals, and emotions to be consistent across parents' youth soccer trajectories. However, those variables potentially underlying and contributing to individual differences might not have been fully accounted for. To be more theoretically sound, this dissertation should have assessed parental goals and expectations, as Lazarus (1999) views them as the most relevant individual differences in testing potential effects on stress, cognitive appraisal, and emotions. Within sport, parents are found to adopt several goals for their children's youth sport participation, and these tend to vary across the season (Dorsch et al., 2015) which denotes intricate effects. Delineating parental goals might thus be key to understanding *why* certain environmental stimuli become a stressor while others are not.

5.1.2 Cooperation

Throughout their child's life, parents have to build and maintain partnerships with professionals which parent-coach relationships are just one example of. Although having the potential to create an adaptive environment and act as facilitators for children's psychosocial outcomes and talent development (Jowett & Timson-Katchis, 2005; Martindale et al., 2005), parent-coach relationships are often characterized by a conflictual nature and a misalignment in behavior, expectations, and goals (Horne et al., 2022, 2023). As such, the way in which parents and coaches engage, are involved in children's youth sport participation, and communicate with one another can contribute to elevated levels of stress (Gould et al., 2016; Knight & Harwood, 2009; Scantling & Lackey, 2005; Study 2, Study 3). Study 4 (see section

4.4) thus advances current knowledge through providing a theoretical account on how parents, coaches, and academy administrators can effectively cooperate for the betterment of relationships and psychosocial or athletic outcomes. The produced grounded theory on cooperation reflects an interpretive theory (Charmaz, 2014), meaning it focuses on theorizing social interactions, patterns, processes, and the constructed meaning towards behaviors. As such, it does neither strive for, nor allow explanations of or predictions towards cooperation as evident in positivist theories (Abend, 2008; Charmaz, 2014). Rather, its strength is reflected in capturing the *how* and *why* of social phenomena and processes beyond a descriptive *what*. To evaluate the quality of the grounded theory, this dissertation relied on the criteria proposed by Charmaz (2006, 2014) which are detailed in section 4.4 (pages 167/168).

Family systems theory (Smith & Hamon, 2021) would attribute the core of dysfunctional interactions between parents and coaches to the occurrence and manifestation of recurring cognitive, emotional, and behavioral patterns on an interpersonal level. The unique methodological approach of this dissertation thus allowed to study these patterns of social interactions and their reciprocity within the interrelated and dynamic environment of youth soccer academies. On a cognitive level, acknowledging parents as an integral part of a youth soccer academy was a necessary condition for the process of cooperation to evolve (see Figure 4.4.1, page 174). Parents' membership in the youth soccer academy system appeared ambiguous such that it had to be determined first, whether or not, or to what extent, parents are eligible to be involved. The level and degree of parental involvement in child-related areas of life remains a timely question (Hornby, 2011; Killus & Paseka, 2021). Within educational psychology, several models of parental involvement have been derived which range from viewing parents as potentially harmful and their engagement as redundant (i.e., protective model; Swap, 1993) to recognizing parents as experts for their children and developing a professional partnership with shared responsibilities (i.e., partnership model; Hornby, 2011). Studies from the domain of sport management corroborate the partnership model in suggesting that parents and coaches

prefer a shared responsibility for athletic development (Horne et al., 2023). As such, sport psychology might benefit from the framework of home-based and school-based parental involvement (Epstein, 1987, 2001) which distinguishes partnership responsibilities in policy-relevant realms (i.e., home and school). For example, academies could assist parents in navigating their involvement through conceptualizing home-based involvement (e.g., conveying the academy philosophy to children, reinforcing exercise or nutrition habits) and academy-based involvement (e.g., transportation, parent-coach communication, volunteering at academy events) separately and in line with the academy's policy on cooperation. Across the interviews in Study 4, several preferences, policies, and varying levels and degrees of involving parents have been reported which were contingent upon person factors (e.g., coaching philosophy) and context factors (e.g., infrastructure). The here presented grounded theory does not suggest *the* optimal involvement for parents; it proposes that coaches' and sport organizations' awareness of and communication about parental roles and responsibilities at home and within the academy is a crucial factor in promoting effective cooperation.

A key finding of the grounded theory is that cooperation appeared to be guided by trial and error instead of evidence-based knowledge on a behavioral level. This is not surprising considering the novelty of this grounded theory and the fact that evolutions in related domains such as educational psychology appear to be predominantly practice-led (Hornby, 2011). A lack of knowledge and experience on how to cooperate has been identified as a barrier limiting effectiveness (Epstein, 1990). Extending previous evidence (e.g., Newport et al., 2020), parents disclosed that they were largely unfamiliar with structures, rules, and boundaries of a youth soccer academy, impeding them to navigate professional relationships and cooperation. Comparing the findings to established principles of effective cooperation between parents and professionals (i.e., trust, respect, competence, communication, commitment, equality, advocacy; Turnbull et al., 2015) reveals cooperation in youth soccer academies to be at risk on several aspects. For example, coaches shared that engaging or communicating with parents was

not part of their training when obtaining a coaching license (i.e., competence) which often resulted in a preference to limit interactions with parents (i.e., communication). Allowing parents and coaches to engage in regular interactions can facilitate the achievement of a shared meaning of the academy pathway and an alignment of expectations and goals (Deutsch, 2012; Horne et al., 2022, 2023). From a theoretical standpoint, this appears essential given the observed lack of communication and insufficient knowledge had the potential to disrupt the youth soccer academy system because it obstructed the development of feedback loops (Smith & Hamon, 2021). The enactment of positive or negative feedback about the display of a certain behavior (e.g., cheering at the sideline, scheduling of conversations) contains valuable implications of a system's hierarchy and boundaries as well as individual roles serving to maintain the system (cf). Limiting or avoiding these interactions resulted in cooperation to be less effective, misaligned, and prone to conflict. Further, cooperation requires a long-term commitment (Turnbull et al., 2015) which is difficult to achieve for coaches given part-time employment and athletes and their parents transitioning to a different team each year. The grounded theory thus highlights the social nature and contingencies of parents' and coaches' experiences and socialization into a cooperative youth sport environment which is often not theorized in the context of parenting in sport (Clarke & Harwood, 2014).

Aiming to stabilize the youth soccer academy as a system, several interpersonal and academy processes are offered which are hypothesized to facilitate cooperation between parents, coaches, and administrators (see Figure 4.4.1, page 174). Interpersonal processes appear to happen on a daily basis (e.g., relationship building) reflecting recurring, proximal interactions within the system; academy processes are understood as distal processes (see Dorsch et al., 2022). Combining both reflects a strength of the grounded theory which allows to coalesce different subsystems and account for their unique and combined effects through interrelations. The theorized interpersonal processes mirror the definition of cooperation by Deutsch (2012) such that relationship- and goal-oriented aspects appear highly salient. Overall, the assumption

that shared goals can promote cooperative behaviors is well-established (e.g., Hacker, 1998; Sherif et al., 1988). However, relationship-building and pursuing a shared goal were only mentioned by coaches and administrators which suggests underlying power differences relevant to the initiation of certain behaviors. Further, across the interviews, cooperation was mostly not perceived as a pleasurable – and thus an approachable – activity (see Deutsch, 2012); on the contrary, participants reported instances of negatively toned conversations or the experience of negative emotions including anxiety, anger, or frustration. These emotional patterns distinctly affected participants' motivation to pursue or withdraw from a certain behavior. For example, parents refrained from approaching coaches with their concerns and became passive agents because they were afraid of negative consequences for their child. From an evolutionary perspective of human survival, Fessler and Haley (2003) assume emotions to be a key determinant in driving cooperative relationships within a given context. Examining the role and effect of emotions in parent-coach cooperation thus seems a promising avenue for future research.

To conclude, the grounded theory advances our knowledge pertinent to building and maintaining cooperation as a social process based on the lived experience of parents, coaches, and administrators in youth soccer academies. In essence, cooperation was constructed as a multi-stage, multidirectional, and iterative process. Considering the organizational level reflects a significant strength of this dissertation and an advancement of previous evidence, as suggested in Study 1 (see section 4.1). However, it has to be acknowledged that the theorized interplay between person and context factors was informed by and is contingent on the lived reality of the interviewed key stakeholders as well as the respective conditions of the included youth soccer academies. As such, a youth soccer academy reflects a living system on its own following the principle of autopoiesis (Luhmann, 1982): It maintains and renews itself by creating and regulating its own conditions and boundaries. To advance this line of inquiry, I

thus encourage researchers to shed further light on the intricacies of social agents in the youth sport landscape by testing, extending, and/or modifying the here presented grounded theory.

5.2 Methodological contributions

This dissertation's strength is reflected in adopting a variety of methodologies to explore parental experiences in youth sport including scoping reviews, qualitative, and mixed-method study designs. This unique methodological combination allowed to integrate nomothetic and ideographic research approaches in addressing and answering *how* and *why* certain patterns and individual variability of experiences occur for parents in youth sport. Moving beyond a descriptive account of *what*, as recommended in Study 1, can thus be regarded a major contribution of this dissertation to the current literature.

Overall, the methodology chosen in this dissertation was guided by the respective research question (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Details on methodological choices can be found in section 3.5. In the following, I would like to discuss how the implemented methodologies have informed and might have limited findings. Specifically, this section will focus on the empirical work, namely Study 2 (see section 4.2), Study 3 (see section 4.3), and Study 4 (see section 4.4).

Participants included in the empirical manuscripts reflect a sample drawn from Western, educated, industrialized, rich, and democratic cultures (i.e., WEIRD; Jones, 2010). Zooming in across the studies shows that the majority of parents identified as White, was married, and held an academic or advanced degree. With Study 3 being an exception (i.e., amateur soccer, girls soccer), these parents represented families of boys participating in youth soccer, predominantly within talent development pathways in professional youth soccer academies. Access to and inclusion of an elite athletic sample can be regarded an exceptional strength of this dissertation which increases trustworthiness of findings. Even though the above-mentioned sociodemographic characteristics of families are representative of the elite youth sport landscape in Germany (Krüger, 2022), implications of the studies should be critically evaluated in light of contextual, societal, and cultural influences. As such, the context of youth soccer

academies is unique in its structure, management, and philosophy compared to England or the United States of America (see Eckardt et al., 2023). Further, soccer is the most popular sport in Germany (Deutscher Fußball-Bund e.V., 2023) and can offer professionalized structures for youth development compared to sports with less financial power. Alluding to societal influences, it further has to be considered that data were collected during the global COVID-19 pandemic which likely affected parents' experiences (also see Dorsch et al., 2021; Elliott et al., 2021, 2023). To move the field forward, Study 1 (see page 59 following) and Study 5 (see page 224 following) provide recommendations on diversifying samples for future work.

Methodologically, the included empirical studies adopted a single timepoint cross-sectional design which limits our understanding on the processual and dynamic nature of parents' experiences in their lived reality (also see section 5.2). Given the less abundant state of the art on parental stress (see Table 2.3.1), this dissertation pursued overarching objectives of exploring and identifying psychological and social phenomena and refrained from testing specific hypotheses and effects, or performing elaborate quantitative analyses. Study 2 and Study 3 thus identified parents' competitive stressors in youth soccer through qualitative self-reports which were complemented with quantitative assessments of cognitive appraisal and emotions (Study 2). Both studies demonstrate coherence of the research objectives, methodologies, and analyses; however, inferences about parental stress as an overarching latent construct need to be critically reflected on a methodological level. First, this dissertation can solely draw conclusions about the nature of environmental stimuli which parents perceived as having the potential to evoke a stress reaction or coping efforts (i.e., stressors; Lazarus, 1999). Second, the mixed-method design of Study 2 allowed an apprehension of stress through a unique combination and integration of variables (i.e., stressor descriptions, cognitive appraisal, emotions), yet on a theoretical level might have missed variables of significant validity. Third, it can only be assumed through theory and personal knowledge that competitive stressors reflect daily hassles of parents' lived reality; their features have not been empirically tested or

quantified. Ideally, studies would examine antecedents (e.g., individual characteristics), environmental stimuli (e.g., stressors), mediating processes (e.g., cognitive appraisal, coping), and responses/outcomes (e.g., emotions, physiological changes) of stress collectively to provide a rich understanding. However, this hardly appears feasible for both researchers and participants. At a minimum, it is recommended to disambiguate stimuli and responses (Wright et al., 2020). In retrospect, this dissertation might thus have benefitted on a methodological level from several considerations: (1) an assessment of parents' goals and expectations for their children's youth soccer participation as antecedent individual characteristics, (2) an assessment of intra- and interpersonal coping strategies and coping effectiveness as mediating processes, and (3) an operationalization and measurement of stressors as daily hassles through longitudinal and dynamic methods, for example ambulatory assessment.

Youth sport reflects an interconnected, living social system which parents are co-participants in. To account for the interrelations between participants and contexts (Dorsch et al., 2022), this dissertation pursued an interpersonal approach on both a theoretical and a methodological level – as suggested by Study 1 and Study 5 – which can be seen as the main added value. Study 4 aimed to capture how parents, coaches, and administrators in youth soccer academies cooperate with one another. Sampling and interviewing multiple perspectives and triangulating the data allowed to identify interpersonal aspects of cooperation, specifically how recurring cognitive, emotional, and behavioral patterns underly circular causality, feedback loops, and roles as tenets of family systems theory (Carter et al., 2014; Smith & Hamon, 2021). A further methodological strength can be found in following a recent call to explore structures, boundaries, and social processes among various subsystems in youth sport (Dorsch et al., 2022). Revisiting the interview transcripts, it has to be acknowledged that it was often difficult to keep a coherent line of interviewing with and acquire in-depth knowledge from parents. Most parents disclosed that they had not explicitly thought about their expectations towards coaches or the academy, their own roles, or the process of cooperating with coaches and administrators. When

communicating, parents tended to circle around the experiences of their children and often used “we-language” which symbolizes a linguistic marker of closeness and interdependence (Chung & Pennebaker, 2007; Karan et al., 2019). In retrospect, it might thus have been useful to provide a more explicit instruction and rapport at the beginning of the parent interviews to highlight that the focus was on parents’ *own* experiences, attitudes, and attributed meanings instead of drawing from or interpreting their children’s accounts. In addition, letting parents reflect at the beginning of the interview what cooperation means to them and how this might translate to their cognitions, emotions, and behavior could have facilitated knowledge construction. For example, in certain experimental paradigms in clinical and health psychology, parents are provided with a list of topics relevant to the research study before engaging in a conversation to become familiarized with the study’s objective (e.g., Lau et al., 2019). Employing focus groups with several parents, a nominal group technique (MacPhail, 2001), or group concept mapping (Rising et al., 2019) instead of single interviews might have encouraged parents to connect, relate to, and sympathize with each other and generate ideas which is conducive to exploratory study aims (Bristol & Fern, 1996). Further, it became evident across the interviews that some parents appeared to relativize, trivialize, or even retract their statements in case they expressed a need of their own or criticisms towards academy staff. Although striving to create a safe and trustful environment during the online interviews, parents might have been hesitant or anxious to share critical instances of their lived experiences. The sampling strategy of approaching parents through coaches forwarding our study participation call might have added to parents’ reluctance. Reconsidering the procedure, an independent sampling of parents through E-mail newsletters, social media, flyer advertisements, or word of mouth might have been more favorable.

Lastly, an untapped potential of Study 4 can be seen in analyzing interrelations of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral patterns within one youth soccer academy. For the purpose of theorizing, findings were compared across participant groups and academies, rather than

zooming in and performing a micro-analysis. Considering the uniqueness of person and context factors, this might reveal a granular landscape of cooperation as a social process and exhibit subtle differences relevant to the delivery of findings.

5.3 Applied contributions

Parents' experiences in youth sport are not only essential to children's psychosocial outcomes, development, and success but critically contribute to parent and family correlates. A novel and likely most important implication of this dissertation on an applied level is that parents need the opportunity to reflect and gain an increased awareness on the effects of their children's youth sport participation on themselves (see reverse socialization; Snyder & Purdy, 1982). Complementing previous evidence (e.g., Newport et al., 2020), parents undergo an intricate and dynamic journey when their children enter a youth soccer academy. Study 4 (see section 4.4) highlighted that parents' involvement in the academy was perceived ambiguously – by parents as well as academy staff. Navigating the youth soccer academy and engaging in cooperation with coaches and administrators reflected a process of trial and error which likely decreased effectiveness (see Burgess et al., 2016). Further, parents' roles and responsibilities within the academy pathway appeared to be largely unclear. This is not surprising given that parents are understood as the “hidden participants” (Dorsch, 2017, p. 106) of youth sport in both research and application and tend to accept and normalize sport cultures (McMahon & Penney, 2015). This notion is further supported through parents being (or becoming?) somewhat passive agents in youth soccer academies: they based their satisfaction on their child's satisfaction, they accepted being excluded or resigned themselves, and they subordinated their needs and behavior to academy rules. From a management and economic perspective, placing parents in the background seems logical given that the youth soccer academy as an organization faces the pressure of staying competitive (Amis et al., 2004). Its assets might therefore be predominantly seen in players, and academy staff as approximates. Further, the decision to sign with an academy is contingent upon parents receiving an offer instead of parents purchasing a

youth sport program, as suggested from a consumer behavior lens (Horne & Teare, 2023; Horne et al., 2023; Murata & Côté, 2023). Few academies, however, have changed their strategic alignment and have begun to understand parents as proxies of their actions which will influence players and ultimately will have the potential to contribute to the success of the youth soccer academy. This dissertation does not want to make a case for organizational decision making. However, Study 4 showed that if academy managers perceived cooperation with parents as valuable to academy goals and profits, they were more likely to provide resources which is in line with previous findings (Amis et al., 2002, 2004; Washington & Patterson, 2011). As suggested in Study 1 (see section 4.1), this implies an extension of community outreach and delivery of findings to an organizational level. As such, I was invited to inform the managers of the 56 German youth soccer academies for the first time about parents' experiences in youth sport and deliver presentations and workshops on cooperation with parents to academy administrators at DFB/DFL conferences in 2022 and 2023 (see section 3.6 and Table A.1 in the Appendix). Drawing from the evidence on parents' competitive stressors and the conceptual model of cooperation presented this dissertation, a future task for policy makers and governing bodies should be the establishment of standards for family-academy partnerships or family-organization partnerships in youth sport more broadly, as common in educational settings (see National standards for family-school partnerships, Parent-Teacher Association, 2022; Qualitätsmerkmale für eine Erziehungs- und Bildungspartnerschaft in Deutschland, Vodafone Stiftung Deutschland, 2013).

Transferring to a youth soccer academy is a family decision. As a consequence, the question should be raised how youth soccer academies and youth sport in a broader sense can become a supportive, empowering, and safe environment for parents as co-participants. A multitude of evidence across psychology domains shows associations between high perceived parental stress and negative outcomes including diminished health and well-being, increased life stress, lower coping self-efficacy, or higher anxiety and depressive symptoms (Brown et al., 2020; Helgeson

et al., 2012; Tamminen, Bonk, Eckardt et al., 2023; Sutcliffe et al., 2021; Warttig et al., 2013). The findings of this dissertation thus call for a stronger consideration of parents' experiences, attitudes, behaviors, and outcomes in both competitive and amateur soccer. Recent evidence underlines that the design and delivery of youth sport programs should more carefully consider feedback from parents to improve relationships and outcomes (Murata & Côté, 2023). In particular, I propose that parents should be viewed and acknowledged as co-participants having the potential to drive, shape, impact or be impacted as well as catalyze or hinder youth sport on behalf of themselves and their children. It should thus be imperative for sport organizations, associations, and federations to establish evidence-based policies of cooperating with and supporting parents. As such, findings of this dissertation were integrated into the first edition of a handbook for parents in German youth soccer academies (Deutscher Fußball-Bund e.V. & Deutsche Fußball Liga GmbH, 2024). Further, sport psychologists should empower parents and strengthen their abilities to become active agents and develop a mutual network of support (see Burgess et al., 2016; Knight & Holt, 2013; Lienhart et al., 2019). To support that aim, findings of this dissertation informed the delivery of workshops for fellow researchers and applied sport psychologists at national and international conferences as well as post-graduate training (see section 3.6 and Table A.1 in the Appendix).

Overall, it appears promising in both research and practice to move away from intrapersonal approaches and to adopt a systemic lens in designing and delivering interventions to promote couple- or family-based as well as organizational strategies. Derived from the findings of this dissertation, these evidence-based programs should (1) be individually tailored to participants, avoiding a "one size fits all" solution; (2) consider the interplay of person and context factors; and (3) target interdependency, responsiveness, and social processes. Summarizing the unique potential of this dissertation to enhance the youth sport environment, Table 5.3.1 provides recommendations on action plans for parents, coaches, and organizations as well as areas of knowledge transfer relevant to applied sport psychologists and practitioners.

Table 5.3.1

Recommendations for evidence-based action plans and knowledge dissemination targeting parents, coaches, and organizations

Target group	Action plans	Potential areas for knowledge dissemination
Parents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reflecting own experiences Monitoring psychological and physiological resources Reflecting goals and expectations for youth sport participation Engaging in regular conversations with partner or other parents Providing feedback to coaches, staff, or organizations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stress, emotion-regulation, and coping Navigating a youth sport environment Parental roles and involvement Parent-coach relationships and communication Expectations towards coaches, staff, and organizations
Coaches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allowing opportunities for regular conversations Building relationships with parents Informing parents early on about scheduling Setting boundaries of parental involvement Communicating expectations to parents Meeting parents beyond sport (e.g., summer/Christmas party) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parental experiences in youth sport Parental roles and involvement Parent-coach relationships and communication Expectations towards parents Goal alignment Cooperating with parents (see Figures 4.5.1 and 4.5.2)
Organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organizing induction days or season launches Developing a blueprint for cooperation with parents Creating a point of contact for parents Establishing an onboarding for parents Supporting parents (e.g., transportation, homework supervision) Developing/sharing resources with parents (e.g., handbook, flyers) Keeping parents up to date (e.g., newsletters, website) Creating a personal connection (e.g., sharing club apparel) Educating staff, especially coaches Evaluating parent practices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parental experiences in youth sport Implementation of services for parents Cooperating with parents (see Figures 4.5.1 and 4.5.2)

Note. This table does not claim to be exhaustive; it is derived solely from the findings of this dissertation. Other areas (e.g., parental support, see Burke et al., 2021; nutrition; social media; child safeguarding) are deemed equally relevant and should thus be integrated in practice.

6. Future research directions

It is common practice in academia that research projects not only provide answers to existing questions but likely generate new ones. Aiming to draw from and extend the findings of this dissertation, I suggest several trajectories for future research (see Table 6.1) which I perceive to be relevant, promising, and personally interesting on a theoretical, methodological, and applied level. To move the field forward, I recommend considering the following premises:

1. An implementation of interpersonal approaches (e.g., multi-group sampling, interpersonal theories, dyadic data analysis) will allow to account for interdependencies and a co-creation of experiences and outcomes in the study of youth sport (cf. Study 4, Study 5).
2. A combined examination of person and context factors will provide a nuanced understanding of their effects on phenomena, processes, and outcome variables as well as the conditions in which they occur (see García Bengoechea & Johnson, 2001; cf. Study 2, Study 3, Study 4).
3. An assessment of the interplay between parents' and children's outcomes will enhance our knowledge on family health and functioning as well as children's development (cf. Study 1).
4. A rigorous transfer of research findings on an individual and organizational level will support families in meeting their demands as well as in navigating and improving their youth sport journey (cf. Study 2, Study 3, Study 4).

To conclude, the above-mentioned implications as well as some of the derived research trajectories in Table 6.1 likely require interdisciplinary research teams (e.g., sport psychology, sport management, family psychology, clinical psychology), a thorough implementation and testing of theory as well as elaborate study designs, multi-group data collection, and advanced multi-level data analysis techniques.

Table 6.1

Future research directions derived from this dissertation

	Theory	Research objective(s)	Methodology	Study design	Contribution
Research area: (Interpersonal) Stress and coping					
1	Transactional model of stress and coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984)	To assess the predictive validity of parents' goals in youth sport on cognitive appraisal, emotions, and stress	QUANT	Cross-sectional, psychometric questionnaires	<i>Theory:</i> Testing goals as individual variables underlying and predicting stress perceptions
2	Transactional model of stress and coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984)	To delineate fluctuations in perceived parental stress and assess their contributions to parent and child outcomes across the course of a season	QUANT	Longitudinal, ambulatory assessment, multi-level, multi-group data collection, psychometric questionnaires	<i>Theory:</i> Gaining insights on the natural occurrence of stress and how stress explains parent and child outcomes dynamically <i>Method:</i> Sharing the ambulatory assessment items and the study protocol in an open repository for other researchers <i>Application:</i> Identifying potentially vulnerable periods for development and health across a season for evidence-based support
3	Spillover-crossover model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2013)	To examine spill-over and cross-over effects of sport-related stress between family members	QUANT	Longitudinal, ambulatory assessment, multi-level, multi-group data collection, psychometric questionnaires	<i>Theory:</i> Gaining insights on the interpersonal nature of stress and dependencies of outcomes in a natural environment <i>Method:</i> Sharing the ambulatory assessment items and the study protocol in an open repository for other researchers <i>Application:</i> Identifying at-risk relationships and patterns within families to guide interventions

4	Systemic Transactional Model of Dyadic Coping (Bodenmann, 1995)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To identify dyadic coping strategies of parents in youth sport 2. To assess individual and combined effects of parents' dyadic coping on parent and child outcomes 	QUANT	Quasi-experimental, cross-sectional, multi-group data collection, psychometric questionnaires, observational data	<p><i>Theory:</i> Advancing knowledge on parents' use of interpersonal coping strategies</p> <p><i>Method:</i> Extending the paradigm to child-related stressors (Bodenmann, 2008)</p> <p><i>Application:</i> Deriving findings on parent/family health and functioning for interventions</p>
Research area: Cooperation between parents, coaches, and organizations					
5	Grounded theory of cooperation (Study 4)	To examine the effect of a pre-season onboarding for parents on the relationship, goal congruency, and communication between parents and coaches	MM	Pre-post design, multi-level, multi-group data collection, comparison, psychometric questionnaires, individual interviews	<p><i>Theory:</i> Testing and extending the grounded theory across youth sport</p> <p><i>Application:</i> Providing evidence-based implications for enhancing the coach-parent relationship and cooperation with parents</p>
6	National standards for family-school partnerships (Parent-Teacher Association, 2022); Qualitätsmerkmale für eine Erziehungs- und Bildungspartnerschaft (Vodafone Stiftung Deutschland, 2013)	To develop and evaluate standards for parent-organization partnerships in youth sport	MM	Co-production (Smith et al., 2023), multi-group data collection; potentially: focus groups, surveys	<p><i>Method:</i> Adopting a participatory approach to research with non-academic partners</p> <p><i>Application:</i> Providing evidence-based guidelines and quality criteria for the design and delivery of youth sport programs</p>
7		To explore parents' understanding of and attributed meaning towards being co-participants in youth sport	QUAL	Cross-sectional, focus groups	<p><i>Theory:</i> Understanding how parents view their roles, responsibilities, contributions to, and involvement in youth sport</p> <p><i>Application:</i> Providing evidence-based implications on supporting parents and</p>

restructuring youth sport programs to meet parents' needs and expectations

Research area: Parenting and family health

8	To explore how and to what extent parents and children co-create their youth sport experience	QUAL	Cross-sectional, individual, dyadic, and family interviews	<i>Theory:</i> Gaining insights on parents' identification with their children and interrelations between the social construction of experiences
9	To explore parenting experiences across child-related life domains in families with gifted children (e.g., school, sports, arts, music)	QUAL	Cross-sectional, dyadic interviews	<i>Theory:</i> Identifying parallels and differences in parenting across child-related life domains; gaining insights on what constitutes taking care and supporting a gifted child <i>Application:</i> Providing evidence-based implications for tailoring support programs to families with gifted children
10	To explore the phenomenon of child-related mental load in families with gifted children (e.g., school, sports, arts, music)	QUAL	Cross-sectional, individual and dyadic interviews	<i>Theory:</i> Advancing knowledge on how parents perceive and experience child-related mental load in the context of giftedness <i>Application:</i> Deriving evidence-based implications for equality in parenting and caregiving
11	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> To explore the necessary requirements enabling families to offer optimal support to a gifted child (e.g., school, sports, arts, music) To examine the contributions of these requirements to parent and child outcomes 	MM	Cross-sectional, individual and dyadic interviews, psychometric questionnaires	<i>Theory:</i> Identifying factors and processes relevant to family functioning and health in families with gifted children <i>Method:</i> Allowing a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon through combining methodologies <i>Application:</i> Deriving protective and risk factors relevant to educating and supporting families with gifted children

Note. QUANT = Quantitative methodology, QUAL = Qualitative methodology, MM = Mixed-method methodology.

7. Conclusion

This dissertation explored the experiences of parents in youth soccer as a joint function of their personal characteristics and contextual features. Adopting an interpersonal approach allowed to address and answer *how* and *why* certain parental experiences occur as well as to provide implications for enhancing them through targeting social relationships and interactions.

Based on a nuanced historical analysis on parenting in youth sport, I sought to delineate stress, interpersonal coping, and cooperation with coaches as phenomena parents face as co-participants of the youth sport system. On a theoretical level, this dissertation presents a novel taxonomy of competitive stressors for parents in competitive and amateur youth soccer. Findings suggest that the occurrence and perception of parental stress is shaped through social relationships and interactions. As such, a conceptualization of interpersonal coping is introduced as a viable theoretical outlet to advance knowledge and bolster conceptual clarity. Further, the produced grounded theory highlights that cooperation between parents, coaches, and administrators in youth soccer academies is a multidirectional and iterative social process contingent upon person and context factors. However, engaging with one another was largely driven by trial and error warranting evidence-based knowledge delivery.

A unique combination of research methodologies allowed to extend current knowledge on parenting in youth sport through offering and integrating in-depth descriptions of parents' lived reality and the identification of patterns and relationships on a cognitive, emotional, and behavioral level.

Through contributing to policy change, evidence-based education as well as the development of a parent handbook, this dissertation raised awareness on the intricacies of parenting in youth sport and provided significant implications to improve parents' experiences and outcomes. Situating myself at the intersection of sport psychology and family psychology, I strive to continue a meaningful line of research by giving parents a voice and facilitating family health.

8. References

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Appendix

1. Transfer of knowledge

Table A.1

List of knowledge transfer activities

	Year	Format	Title	Target group	Occasion
1	2023	Post-graduate training	Parental involvement in elite youth sport	Applied sport psychologists	Post-graduate training program of the Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Sportpsychologie e.V. (asp), online
2	2023	Workshop	Parents and coaches in youth sport: Evidence-based strategies for cooperation	Researchers, applied sport psychologists	55 th annual conference of the Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Sportpsychologie e.V. (asp), Stuttgart, Germany
3	2023	Educational seminar	How parents and coaches can team up in youth sport	Administrators of youth soccer academies	Annual conference of the DFB and DFL, Frankfurt, Germany
4	2023	Workshop	Taking the first steps to cooperating with parents	Administrators of youth soccer academies	Annual conference of the DFB and DFL, Frankfurt, Germany
5	2023	Workshop	Communicating and cooperating with parents in youth soccer	Coaches of youth soccer academies	Cooperation with Bayer 04 Leverkusen Fußball GmbH youth soccer academy
6	2023	Workshop	Preferences and expectations of children in youth soccer academies: How can parents best support their children?	Parents of youth soccer academies	Cooperation with Bayer 04 Leverkusen Fußball GmbH youth soccer academy

7	2022	Podcast episode	When little kickers dream – the long road to becoming a professional soccer player	Non-expert audience	Nachspiel, Deutschlandfunk Kultur
8	2022	Educational seminar	Parents' experiences in elite German youth soccer academies	Managers of youth soccer academies	Annual conference of the DFB and DFL, Leipzig, Germany
9	2022	Workshop	Acting on professional boundaries: How parents and coaches can team up in youth sport	Researchers, applied sport psychologists	16 th European Congress of Sport & Exercise Psychology, Padova, Italy
10	2022	Research symposium	A shared way to the top? On cooperation between parents and coaches in youth soccer academies	Researchers, applied sport psychologists	54 th annual conference of the Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Sportpsychologie e.V. (asp), Münster, Germany
11	2022	Workshop	Parental experiences on the sidelines	Parents of youth soccer academies	Cooperation with Bayer 04 Leverkusen Fußball GmbH youth soccer academy
12	2021	Podcast episode	Podium Cast #12 with Valeria Eckardt	Non-expert audience	Podium Cast (Season 1, Episode 12) by W. Tolentino Castro
13	2021	Panel discussion	Parents in Esports: From research to practice	Non-expert audience	Program series of the International Federation of Esports Coaches
14	2021	Educational seminar	Parents' experiences in elite German youth soccer academies	Administrators of youth soccer academies	Annual conference of the DFB and DFL, online
15	2021	Educational seminar	Parent management in elite German youth soccer academies	Administrators of youth soccer academies	Annual conference of the DFB and DFL, online
16	2021	Poster	A holistic approach to talent development in youth sport: Strategies for parent-coach cooperation	Coaches (professional and amateur)	Youth sport symposium of the Institut für Angewandte Trainingswissenschaft (IAT), Leipzig, Germany
17	2021	Workshop	Difficult parents or difficult coaches? Navigating cooperation in youth soccer	Coaches (professional and amateur)	Fußball Online Kongress, online

2. Example pages of parent handbook



**Deutsche
Sporthochschule Köln**
German Sport University Cologne

ROLLE DER ELTERN 12 | 13



Foto: Conny Kurth

TIPPS FÜR DIE PRAXIS

Eltern sein, wenn es darauf ankommt

Die Unterstützung der Eltern im Fußball hat viele Gesichter. Sie finanzieren Sportkleidung und Ausrüstung oder packen die Tasche fürs Training. Für Kinder kommt es besonders auf den Rückhalt und die emotionale Unterstützung ihrer Eltern an. Hier sind Sie besonders gefragt:

- » Schenken Sie Ihrem Kind ein offenes Ohr.
- » Versuchen Sie zu beobachten, anstatt direkt zu bewerten.
- » Seien Sie kein übertriebener Fan oder Sportreporter*in.
- » Ermutigen und motivieren Sie ihr Kind.
- » Trösten Sie Ihr Kind nach schwierigen Erfahrungen.

Wyllermann, P. & Lavallee, D. (2004). A developmental perspective on transitions faced by athletes. In M. Weiss (Ed.), Developmental sport and exercise psychology – A lifespan perspective (pp. 507–527). Morgantown: Fitness Information Technology.

Eltern sind Vorbilder

Kinder sind wahre Beobachtungskünstler*innen. Besonders in jungen Jahren orientieren sie sich an ihren Eltern und übernehmen Verhaltensweisen.

- » Unterstützen Sie ein Fairplay auf dem und abseits des Platzes.
- » Begegnen Sie anderen Kindern und deren Eltern, Schiedsrichter*innen oder Trainer*innen mit Respekt.
- » Zeigen Sie Ihre Emotionen am Spielfeldrand in einem angemessenen Ausmaß.
- » Fördern Sie einen gesunden Lebensstil in Ihrer Familie.

Fredericks, J. A., & Eccles, J. S. (2004). Parental influences on youth involvement in sports. In M. R. Weiss (Ed.), Developmental sport and exercise psychology: A lifespan perspective (pp. 145–164). Morgantown: Fitness Information Technology.

Lobinger B. H., Eckardt, V. C., & Lautenbach, F. (2021). Three perspectives on parental support in youth soccer: Children, parents, and coaches. International Journal of Sports Sciences & Coaching, 16(4), 886–899.

DIE AUTORINNEN:



Foto: Laura Grosse

VALERIA ECKARDT

ist Sportpsychologin und Systemische Beraterin. In ihrer Doktorarbeit an der Deutschen Sporthochschule Köln untersuchte sie die Stresserfahrungen von Eltern im LZ. Sie forscht u.a. zu Eltern-Trainer*innen-Beziehung sowie Elternmanagement und berät Athlet*innen, Familien und Vereine.





Foto: Laura Grosse

DR. BABETT LOBINGER

ist Psychologin und Sportwissenschaftlerin. Seit 25 Jahren forscht und lehrt sie an der Deutschen Sporthochschule Köln. Zu ihren Forschungsschwerpunkten zählen: Leistungspsychologie, Bewegungsfehler, Talententwicklung und Duale Karriere im Leistungssport.



FAKTEN-CHECK

Wie lange sollte ich mein Kind unterstützen?

Fußballkarrieren sind höchst individuell. Studien zeigen, dass besonders im Kindesalter die Unterstützung und Begleitung der Eltern in verschiedenen Bereichen notwendig ist (siehe Tipps für die Praxis). Mit Beginn der Pubertät lösen sich Teenager*innen immer mehr von ihren Eltern ab und orientieren sich an ihren Mitspieler*innen, Freund*innen oder Trainer*innen. Sie werden selbstständig – und das ist vollkommen normal und gut so. Das bedeutet nicht automatisch, dass Sie als Eltern außen vor sind, sondern dass Ihre Unterstützung nun vielleicht in anderen Bereichen oder in einem geringeren Ausmaß als vorher gefordert ist.

STRESS & STRESSBEWÄLTIGUNG IM FUSSBALL: WIE MAN MIT DEM EIGENEN STRESS UMGEHEN KANN

Kennen Sie das? Es ist wieder Wochenende. Sie sind mehrere Stunden zu einem Turnier gefahren. Die ganze Familie ist früh aufgestanden, Sie haben Snacks und die kleinen Geschwister im Gepäck, und Ihr Kind freut sich wahnsinnig auf das Spiel. Schließlich lief das letzte Training super. An der Spielstätte angekommen, verkünden die Trainer*innen die Aufstellung: Ihr Kind sitzt erst einmal auf der Bank. Sie beobachten, wie Ihrem Kind die Tränen in die Augen steigen und Sie fragen sich, wie so Sie das Ganze eigentlich noch machen. In solchen Momenten kann man schon einmal frustriert sein.

Fußball ist ein emotionaler Sport – für Kinder wie für Eltern.¹ Dass Sie als Eltern am Spielfeldrand mitfieberten und manchmal sogar mitleiden, spricht für Sie: Sie möchten nur das Beste für Ihr Kind. Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen mit Familien deuten darauf hin, dass Eltern nur dann ausreichend für ihre Kinder und deren Bedürfnisse da sein können, wenn sie ihre eigenen Emotionen im Griff haben.² Dazu ist es wichtig, dass Sie zunächst Ihre Auslöser für Stress am Spielfeldrand kennen. Wir haben dazu ein paar Tipps.

Foto: Getty Images



¹Eckardt, V. C., Dorsch, T. E., & Lobinger, B. H. (2021). Parents' Competitive Stressors in Professional German Youth Soccer Academies: A Mixed-Method Study. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychsport.2021.102099>

²Niehaus, C. E., Chaplin, T. M., Turpin, C. C., Gonçalves, S. F. (2019). Maternal emotional and physiological reactivity: Implications for parenting and the parent-child relationship. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 28(3), 872-883.

TIPPS FÜR DIE PRAXIS

EMOTIONALE UNTERSTÜTZUNG

- » Mit anderen Eltern oder Partner*in über das eigene Erleben austauschen
- » Absprachen mit dem Partner*in zur Unterstützung treffen (z.B. beruhigen)

FOKUS ÄNDERN

- » ... auf das Positive
- » ... auf den Fortschritt, nicht das Ergebnis
- » ... auf die Freude am Spiel, nicht den Erfolg
- » ... auf das Hinterfragen der eigenen Erwartungen und Ansprüche

VERHALTEN ANPASSEN

- » Sich nicht von den negativen Emotionen anderer anstecken lassen
- » Kurzzeitig vom Spielfeldrand weggehen
- » Partner*in zum Spieltag schicken

FAKTEN-CHECK

Sind Eltern am Spielfeldrand überhaupt gestresst?

Eine Umfrage unter 330 Eltern in Leistungszentren hat gezeigt: Eltern erleben vielfältige Situationen als stressauslösend. Allen voran belasten Eltern kritische Erfahrungen mit dem eigenen Kind (z.B. auf der Bank sitzen, ausgewechselt oder gefault werden). Besonders, da sie sich am Spielfeldrand häufig hilflos und mit ihren eigenen Emotionen überfordert fühlen. Ebenso empfanden die Eltern Situationen mit anderen Fußball-Eltern (z.B. schreien oder beleidigen am Spielfeldrand) und mit dem oder der Trainer*in ihres Kindes (z.B. fragwürdiges oder unfaires Verhalten) als schwierig. Dabei spielte es keine Rolle, wie alt das jeweilige Kind war, wie viel Erfahrung die Eltern bereits im Leistungszentrum hatten oder ob Mama oder Papa am Spielfeldrand standen.

Eckardt, V. C., Dorsch, T. E., & Lobinger, B. H. (2021). Parents' Competitive Stressors in Professional German Youth Soccer Academies: A Mixed-Method Study. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*. Advance online publication.

ASSIST

Nehmen Sie sich einen Moment Zeit und denken Sie an eine Situation zurück, die Sie am Spielfeldrand als stressig oder hoch emotional erlebt haben.

- » Ich gerate in Stress, wenn ...
- » Ich setze mich selbst unter Stress, indem ...
- » Wenn ich gestress/emotional bin, dann ...



Illustration: stock.adobe.com

Quelle: Kaluza, G. (2018). Stressbewältigung. Trainingsmanual zur psychologischen Gesundheitsförderung (4. Aufl.). Springer.

Der erste Schritt ist geschafft: Sie kennen Ihre Auslöser für Stress und Ihre Reaktionen darauf. Im nächsten Spiel können Sie nun Ihre Gedanken, Gefühle und Ihr Verhalten aufmerksam beobachten. Wenn es schwierig wird, probieren Sie gerne einmal den Notfallplan auf Seite 27 aus.

NOTFALLPLAN: DIE 4A-STRATEGIE

Quelle: Kaluza, G. (2018). Stressbewältigung. Trainingsmanual zur psychologischen Gesundheitsförderung (4. Aufl.). Springer.

ANNEHMEN

Die Spielsituation ist so wie sie gerade ist.

ABKÜHLEN

3-mal tief ein- und ausatmen und bei sich sein.

ANALYSIEREN

Kann ich an der Situation gerade etwas verändern?

AKTION/ ABLENKUNG

Ist es mir die Sache wert?

JA ► Aktion z.B. Unterstützung

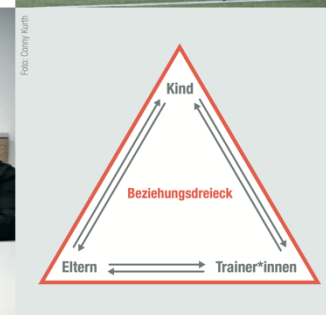
NEIN ► Ablenkung z.B. Weggehen

KOMMUNIKATION MIT TRAINER*INNEN: WIE EINE ERFOLGREICHE ZUSAMMENARBEIT GELINGEN KANN

Im Laufe des Lebens arbeiten Eltern mit verschiedenen anderen Berufsgruppen zusammen: Erzieher*innen, Lehrer*innen, Ärzt*innen oder Chorleiter*innen. Die Beziehung zwischen Eltern und Trainer*innen hat im Sport nicht immer einen guten Ruf. Es wird von fehlenden Kontaktmöglichkeiten, Missverständnissen, Konflikten bis hin zu Erpressungen berichtet.¹ Stress und Frustration sind die Folge. Manchen Trainer*innen wäre es am liebsten, wenn die Eltern gar nicht in Erscheinung treten würden. Eltern wiederum sehen Trainer*innen häufig als erste Ansprechperson und fühlen sich häufig nicht ausreichend beachtet. In der Praxis gerät jedoch manchmal in den Hintergrund, dass Trainer*innen vor allem für die sportliche Entwicklung der Nachwuchstalente zuständig sind. Und dies kann durchaus Herausforderungen mit sich bringen: Arbeitszeiten am Wochenende, Anstellungen auf 450-Euro-Basis oder die Betreuung von etwa 20 Kindern und Jugendlichen. Um ein optimales Umfeld für die Talententwicklung zu schaffen, sieht die Sportpsychologie Eltern, Kinder und Trainer*innen in einem Beziehungsdreieck.² Eltern benötigen beispielsweise das Fachwissen von Trainer*innen und Trainer*innen müssen sich darauf verlassen können, dass die Eltern ihre Kinder zum Training bringen und es unterstützen. Besonders unterschiedliche Anweisungen von Trainer*innen und Eltern führen dazu, dass Kinder in Loyalitätskonflikte kommen. Somit profitieren sie davon, wenn ihre Eltern und Trainer*innen eine gute Beziehung zueinander haben und zusammenarbeiten. Die Zutaten dafür sind eine offene, transparente Kommunikation und gegenseitige Wertschätzung.³ Sie fragen sich, wie das gelingen kann? Behalten Sie das gemeinsame Ziel vor Augen: Eine bestmögliche Entwicklung Ihres Kindes.

„Ich habe nie größeren Druck verspürt als mit sechs Jahren, wenn mein Vater am Spielfeldrand stand.“

THIERRY HENRY
(EX-FUSSBALLPROFI)



Kenne ich meine Position?

Nehmen Sie sich einen Moment Zeit und überprüfen Sie, ob Ihnen Ihre Rolle als Elternteil klar ist. Die folgende Checkliste hilft Ihnen dabei.

- | | Ja | Nein |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Ich kenne die Erwartungen der Trainer*innen an mich. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. Ich weiß, wie ich mich als Elternteil verhalten soll. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. Ich weiß, welche Ziele der/die Trainer*in für mein Kind hat. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. Ich weiß, wie und wann ich den/die Trainer*in erreichen kann. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. Ich weiß, wie ich den oder die Trainer*in unterstützen kann. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Wenn Sie Fragen nicht beantworten konnten, gibt es mehrere

Möglichkeiten, um Klarheit zu schaffen:

- » Informieren Sie sich in dieser Broschüre oder auf der Webseite des Vereins
- » Besuchen Sie Elternabende und Feedbackgespräche
- » Bitten Sie um ein Gespräch mit dem oder der Trainer*in
- » Wenden Sie sich an weitere Ansprechpersonen wie die Pädagogische Leitung oder Elternsprecher*innen

¹Eckardt, V. C., Dorsch, T. E., & Leubinger, B. H. (2021). Parents' Competitive Stressors in Professional German Youth Soccer Academies: A Mixed-Method Study. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychsport.2021.102089>

²Knight, C. & Harwood, C. (2009). Exploring parent-related coaching stressors in British tennis: a developmental investigation. *International Journal of Sports Science & Coaching*, 4(4), 565.

³Smoll, F. L., Cumming, S. P., & Smith, R. E. (2011). Enhancing coach-parent relationships in youth sport: Increasing harmony and minimizing hassles. *International Journal of Sports Science & Coaching*, 6 (1), 13-26.

⁴O'Donnell, K., Elliott, G. K., & Drummond, M. J. (2022). Exploring parent and coach relationships in youth sport: a qualitative study. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*. Advance online publication: <https://doi.org/10.1080/2159676X.2022.2048060>

FAKTEN-CHECK

Sind Eltern und Trainer*innen wirklich so verschieden?

Ein Forscher*innen-Team aus den USA hat sich die Frage gestellt, ob die Ansichten von Eltern und Trainer*innen tatsächlich so weit auseinander gehen wie häufig berichtet wird. Dazu haben Sie eine Umfrage unter Eltern und Trainer*innen in verschiedenen Sportarten durchgeführt. Die Ergebnisse zeigen: An dem Mythos ist etwas Wahres dran. Beispielsweise waren regelmäßige Gespräche für Eltern weitaus wichtiger als für Trainer*innen. Die Ursache: Bei etwa 20 Kindern fällt es Trainer*innen in der Praxis schwer, jedem gerecht zu werden und dabei keine Familie zu bevorzugen. In einer Sache waren sich beide jedoch einig: Sie möchten gemeinsam Verantwortung für die Entwicklung und den Erfolg des Kindes übernehmen.

Horne, E., Lower-Hoppe, L., & Green, C. (2022). Co-creation in youth sport development: examining (mis)alignment between coaches and parents. *Sport Management Review*, 6(2), 271-292.

