Running Head: THE CAR RIDE HOME

The car ride home: An interpretive examination of parent-athlete sport conversations

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Abstract

Purpose: Conversations occurring within the car ride home may shed light on parental socialization among adolescent athletes, as conversations are viewed as sites to socialize participants as members of the group or family. Parent-athlete communication also occurs within a broader social context of youth sport, where narratives regarding performance and parenting may shape the ways in which parents and athletes communicate and make sense of their experiences. The purpose of this study was to explore conversations between adolescent athletes and parents during the car ride home following sport practices and competitions.

Methods: Twenty-seven athletes and one of their parents participated in individual semi-structured interviews. Thematic, structural, and performative narrative analyses (Reissman, 2008) were used to examine parent and athlete accounts of conversations during the car ride home.

Results: Results pertained to participants' experiences of enjoying versus enduring the car ride home, privacy, and narratives of performance in youth sport. Participants' stories about the car ride home normalized parental feedback as useful and necessary for performance improvement, and conversations were often reported to differ depending on who was present in the car. We identified strategies that athletes used to navigate difficult conversations, and participants provided suggestions about strategies to improve the conversation during the car ride home. The findings are discussed in relation to narratives of performance and good parenting in youth sport, and in terms of parent behaviours in public versus private settings.

Keywords: adolescent athlete, youth sport parent; parent-child communication; narrative

The car ride home: An interpretive examination of parent-athlete sport conversations

Parents are providers and socializers of sport experiences for their children (Fredricks & Eccles, 2004) and sport is a unique context for communication within the family (Dorsch, Smith, Wilson, & McDonough, 2015). The car ride home from sport practices and competitions may offer a window of opportunity for parents and athletes to communicate about their sport experiences, and it is a setting that may offer insight into parental involvement in their child's sport participation. Studying parent and athlete experiences of the car ride home may also shed light on the culture of parenting and performance in youth sport, which can shape parents' and athletes' experiences and interactions with one another (McMahon & Penney, 2015).

Parent-child communication has been associated with a number of psychosocial outcomes among adolescents, and developmental psychologists have examined parent-child communication across various settings such as during family mealtimes (Blum-Kulka, 1997), visits to doctors' offices (Tates & Meeuwesen, 2001), via text and email (Rudi, Walkner, & Dworkin, 2015), and in lab-based studies (Crain-Thoreson, Dahlin, & Powell, 2001). Across these settings, communication patterns which are generally positive and which reflect warmth, consistent discipline, and agreement on solutions to problems are associated with positive child outcomes including decreased conflict behaviours, improved mental and physical health, and resiliency (Caughlin, Koerner, Schrod, & Fitzpatrick, 2011). For example, parental communication reflecting warmth, disciplinary skill, and low hostility has been found to predict lower adjustment problems among adolescents, after controlling for depressive symptoms and delinquent behaviours (Ge, Best, Conger, & Simons, 1996). Jackson, Bijstra, Oostra, and Bosma (1998) also reported that adolescents' perceptions of open communication with parents was associated with higher family satisfaction and a lack of problems within the family. In sport,

task-oriented parental feedback has been associated with improved perceptions of the parental motivational climate among youth athletes (Gershgoren, Tenenbaum, Gershgoren, & Eklund, 2011), and behaviours which reflect parental warmth, positive affect, and mastery climates are positively associated with perceptions of parental support (Dorsch, Smith, & Dotterer, 2016). Thus, understanding the dynamics of communication between parents and athletes is important for promoting positive psychosocial outcomes among youth athletes.

Parents' behaviours and communication include a wide range of actions such as providing encouragement and support, performance contingent feedback, providing instruction to athletes, negative comments, and derogatory comments (Holt, Tamminen, Black, Sehn, & Wall, 2008). Descriptive and observational studies suggest that parents and spectators at youth sport competitions are generally silent, but parents also provide instruction and make positive and negative comments during games (Bowker, Boekhoven, Nolan, Bauhas, Powell, & Taylor, 2009; Kidman, McKenzie, & McKenzie, 1999; Randall & McKenzie, 1987). These parental behaviours may change depending on situational factors such as the emotional intensity of the competition, their child's ability and performance, and the game circumstances (e.g., close games, games between rival teams; Bowker et al., 2009; Holt, Tamminen, et al., 2008). Furthermore, parent behaviours are also thought to reflect parents' instrumental, identity, and relational goals within youth sport settings (Dorsch et al., 2015). For example, parents' comments may reflect instrumental goals for their child to develop and grow as an athlete, while parental goals related to their identity (e.g., managing others' perceptions of them and their child) and relational goals (e.g., enhancing family relationships, building relationships with others) may also influence comments during competitions (Dorsch et al., 2015). Holt, Tamminen, and colleagues (2008) suggested that parent behaviours during competitions are also

influenced by their sport knowledge and their empathy with their child, while Goldstein and Iso-Ahola (2008) reported that parental ego defensiveness, perceived pressure, and anger were positively associated with parents' sideline aggression during youth soccer matches. Overall, there is considerable research examining parental behaviours in competitive youth sport settings and the factors that may influence these behaviours.

Moving beyond the immediate competitive context, researchers have also explored parental influence as it extends into settings such as practice or training environments and in post-game discussions in the home (e.g., Elliott & Drummond, 2015; Knight, Little, Harwood, & Goodger, 2016). In their work examining parental socialization in youth sport, Dorsch, Smith, and McDonough (2009) found that parents reported opportunities to communicate with their child across a variety of settings, including in the car when travelling to and from sport competitions and practices. One particular setting that we chose to explore in-depth was car ride home, since the car has been posited as "an extension of the home" regarding parents' enforcement of rules (Baslington, 2008, p.107), and interactions occurring within the car ride home may shed light on the nature of parental influence in youth sport. Additionally, researchers have noted that parental communication may be context-specific, such that some parents may communicate differently with their child in public or in private contexts (e.g., Dorsch et al., 2015; Knight, Little, et al., 2016). Ecological psychologists also assert that the physical setting and people present within a particular setting have important implications for individuals' behaviour within a particular context (Henderson, 2009; Wicker, 1979). For example, Dorsch and colleagues (2015) reported that some parents said they refrained from providing negative comments to their child in public settings, and the types of parent behaviours observed in youth sport settings may reflect parents' desire to maintain an image of being a good sport parent. In

the past, researchers have noted that many of the comments and behaviours observed in studies of spectators and parents in public settings are generally positive (e.g., Bowker et al., 2009; Kidman et al., 1999); however, these behaviours may be modified due to the presence of other parents and spectators in public settings (Dorsch et al., 2015). Thus, we sought to explore parent and athletes' experiences within more private settings, away from other parents and spectators.

Exploring conversations during the car ride home may shed light on the socialization of norms and values in youth sport (Mondada, 2009), and we sought to focus our attention on these conversations as examples of 'small stories' (Phoenix & Sparkes, 2009) which may reflect the social context of youth sport and which hold important consequences for parents and athletes. In particular, we sought to examine how narratives of performance and parenting appear to shape and inform parent-child conversations during the car ride home. Within a sport context, a performance narrative concerns a "single-minded dedication to sport performance that requires all other areas of life and self to be relegated" (Carless & Douglas, 2016, p.220). From this perspective, winning and achievement are of foremost importance and are linked with the athlete's mental well-being, identity, and self-worth: sport is considered central to the athlete's life and the dominance of a performance narrative contributes to a narrow focus on optimal performance. A performance narrative has been explored in high performance and elite sport settings (e.g., Carless & Douglas, 2013; 2016), although there is little research examining how this narrative may be circulated and endorsed by parents within competitive youth sport settings. However, Carless and Douglas (2016) suggested that the words and actions of parents and coaches may reflect a performance narrative and may encourage adolescent athletes to train and compete in accordance with this dominant narrative. Thus, examining the conversations that

occur during the car ride home could provide insight into the ways that parents and athletes socialize, interpret, and develop understandings about youth sport experiences.

One study examining how parents' identities are constructed within a sporting culture dominated by performance narratives was conducted by McMahon and Penney (2015), who presented narrative accounts to demonstrate how parents of Australian swimmers may adopt and perpetuate ideologies of performance and perfection through their interactions with their child, how parents may adapt and attempt to fit into these discourses, and how parents may resist and challenge these ideologies in their interactions with their child athlete. Trussell and Shaw (2012) also examined parenting ideologies among 13 youth sport parents and discussed how appropriate parenting practices were constructed and understood within the family context as well as within the context of what is allowable and acceptable in youth sport settings. Parenting ideologies in youth sport may suggest that parents' moral worth is evaluated through their child's sport participation and success (Elliott & Drummond, 2015; Trussell & Shaw, 2012), and the provision of sport opportunities was viewed as a central feature of being a good parent. Trussell and Shaw also noted that parents' comments about their involvement in their child's sport activities reflected judgements and critiques of other parents, suggesting that parents situated their experiences in relation to observations of other parents and in relation to being a good parent. Elliott and Drummond (2015) noted that parents viewed the provision of feedback as an important job as a sport parent and parents felt that this helped athletes understand areas of improvement in their sport performance.

While previous research has explored parent behaviours and communication in public settings (e.g., Bowker et al., 2009; Holt, Tamminen, et al., 2008; Kidman et al., 1999; Randall & McKenzie, 1987), parental influence in sport extends beyond the competitive environment to

more private settings such as in the home or in the car ride after games and practices (Dorsch et al., 2009; Elliott & Drummond, 2015; Knight, Little, et al., 2016). The car ride home is a relatively private setting that may serve as an opportunity for parents to socialize their child's sport experiences, to help athletes learn to cope with stressors in sport, or to debrief following a poor performance (Elliott & Drummond, 2015; Tamminen & Holt, 2012). Conversations in these private settings have heretofore not been extensively examined as sites where parents may socialize children regarding norms and values regarding sport participation, and narratives regarding performance and parenting may shape the ways in which parents and athletes communicate and make sense of their experiences. Thus, building on previous research examining parent-athlete communication (e.g., Dorsch et al., 2015; Holt, Tamminen, et al., 2008; Knight, Little, et al., 2016) and narratives of performance and parenting in youth sport (e.g., Elliott & Drummond, 2015; McMahon & Penney, 2015; Trussell & Shaw, 2012), the purpose of the current study was to explore conversations between adolescent athletes and parents during the car ride home following sport practices and competitions.

Methods

We approached this study from an interpretivist/constructionist perspective, which adopts a relativist ontology and a transactional epistemology (Smith, Sparkes, Phoenix, & Kirkby, 2012). This perspective acknowledges multiple situated realities, that knowledge is constructed through interactions with others, and that interpretation is central to developing meaning in experiences (Schwandt, 1994). Consistent with a transactional epistemology, knowledge is co-created within interviews with participants, and findings are viewed as interpretations of the participants' own understandings of their experiences (Schwandt, 1994). Furthermore, researchers adopting an interpretivist/constructionist approach adhere to the idea that the

meanings attributed to events, objects, and experiences reflects the mental constructions and the discursive resource of the participants and the researchers (Smith et al., 2012).

Participants

We used typical case purposeful sampling (Palinkas, et al., 2015) to recruit participants who regularly experienced parent-child communication during the car ride home. Adolescent athletes were recruited if: (a) they typically travelled to and from games and practices with their parent(s); and (b) if they were currently participating in a competitive organized sport (e.g., in-season). We sought to include adolescent athletes from a variety of sports and we did not restrict participation based on the length of their commute to and from games/practices. We asked athletes to identify the parent with whom they travelled most frequently to and from sport competitions to participate in an interview. Based on these criteria, 27 adolescent athletes and 26 parents participated in this study (one parent had two children who participated in interviews; total $N = 53$ participants). Athletes included 18 female and 9 male athletes between 11 to 16 years of age ($M = 13.2$ years) from a range of sports including soccer, basketball, hockey, baseball, figure skating, and fencing, and had been participating in their primary sport for 1 to 12 years ($M = 7.3$ years). Parent participants included 15 mothers and 11 fathers between 35 to 65 years of age ($M = 47.8$ years). Participants' self-identified ethnicity was: White/ Caucasian (20 athletes; 19 parents), Hispanic (2 athletes; 2 parents), Black (2 athletes; 1 parent), Chinese (1 athlete; 1 parent), Other/mixed (2 athletes; 3 parents); one athlete and one parent preferred not to disclose. Two parents had completed high school, four parents had completed some college/university, fifteen parents had completed college/university, three parents had completed a post-graduate degree, and two parents chose not to disclose their education status.

Data Collection

Upon receiving university research ethics board approval, coaches and sport club administrators in the Greater Toronto Area were contacted and asked to send information about the study to their parents and athletes. Parents and athletes contacted the researchers directly to arrange interviews; interviews were conducted at a place and time that was convenient for the participants, including at the participant's home or at sports clubs/fields. Parents and athletes provided informed consent before participating in separate semi-structured interviews. All interviews were audio-recorded and conducted in a private setting (e.g., parents were not present for the athlete interviews and vice versa). Participant numbers are used to denote athletes (e.g., A2D = Athlete 2, daughter; A5S = Athlete 5, son) and parents (e.g., P1F = Parent 1, father; P2M = Parent 2, mother). To maintain anonymity of the participants' responses, the parent numbers and athlete numbers were assigned separately and are not matched in the results section (e.g., Parent 1 is not the parent of Athlete 1).

Athlete interview topics included: (a) sport background and ice-breaker questions (e.g., length of time participating in sport, positive and negative sport experiences), (b) logistical questions regarding the car ride home (e.g., length of car ride home, parents or siblings present), (c) conversation topics (e.g., 'what is the car ride home like after competitions/games?' and 'what kinds of things do you talk about with your parent during the car ride home?'), (d) conversation structure and strategies (e.g., 'who typically starts the conversation during the car ride home?'), and (e) general experience of the car ride home (e.g., 'how do you feel after the car ride home?' and 'what do you like/not like about the car ride home?'). Probe questions were used to ask athletes to elaborate on their experiences during the car ride home. Parent questions were modified slightly and parents were also asked about their efforts to structure the content of the conversation (e.g., 'are there specific things you discuss/avoid discussing with your child

after competitions/games?’ and ‘are there any strategies or words you use/avoid using when discussing competitions/games with your child?’). At the conclusion of each interview, participants were asked to provide suggestions of strategies to promote positive conversations during the car ride home. The interviewers were trained in conducting qualitative interviews and three pairs of pilot interviews were conducted to test the order of the interview questions and to gain familiarity with the interview questions. Based on these pilot interviews, questions were added to the interview to ask about factors that may affect the nature of the car ride conversation (e.g., teammates or other parent present in the car). Athlete interviews ranged from 16 to 51 minutes ($M = 32$ min., $SD = 11.6$), and parent interviews ranged from 26 to 67 minutes ($M = 42$ min., $SD = 11.3$). All participants were offered a \$10 gift card as a token of our appreciation for their participation in the study.

Data Analysis

We used a narrative approach (Reissman, 2008) and adopted the role of ‘story analysts’ (Smith, 2015) to examine participants’ accounts of the car ride home. The analysis was led by the first author, who has experience in interpretive qualitative methods and youth sport psychology research. Analysis of the interview transcripts began with a thematic narrative analysis (Reissman, 2008) to inductively explore athletes’ and parents’ experiences of the car ride home, as well as structural and performative analyses (Reissman, 2008) to interrogate how and why participants’ stories of the car ride home may have been told in particular ways and for particular audiences. Thematic narrative analysis began with the identification of stories within the interviews (Reissman, 2008; Smith, 2015). These stories consisted of participants’ accounts of particular car rides home after games and practices, which were examined to inductively generate concepts to examine across cases (Reissman, 2008). For example, themes identified in

this phase included conversation topics and the types of comments parents and athletes reported during the car ride home (e.g., positive or negative comments, performance advice, discussions about the team, coach), features of the car ride home (e.g., who was present, who initiated the conversation, how the participant responded within the situation), and the emotional tone of the stories (e.g., using words such as positive, negative, anxious, and guilty to capture the participant's expressed emotions while telling their stories). The thematic analysis began with an examination of the athletes' interview transcripts, followed by analysis of the parents' interviews. After the thematic analysis of the athlete and parent transcripts, pairs of athlete-parent dyads were analyzed together to examine similarities and differences in the ways athletes and parents described their car rides home. Notes were made in a 'dyad case summary' for each parent-athlete dyad to keep track of the key themes, similarities, differences, and researcher impressions of the transcripts.

Following our thematic analysis, we used structural and performative analyses (Reissman, 2008) to examine when and how participants shared particular stories of the car ride home. For example, we noted how participants framed the provision of negative feedback or criticism by referring to other parents they had observed, or by rationalizing criticism in terms of performance improvement. We also noted ways in which participants structured their stories and responses in the interview to achieve particular effects and emphasize particular points (e.g., posing rhetorical questions) and we also noted the recurrence of stories or themes within interviews (e.g., repeating or rephrasing points).

A data analysis log (Reissman, 2008) was used to keep track of developing themes, thoughts and impressions of the data, to develop a coherent structure for presenting the results, and to synthesize the results. Writing and re-writing the themes and results was an integral part

of the analytic process, rather than a ‘mopping up activity’ (Smith, 2015). That is, within interpretivist/constructionist narrative research, writing is viewed as part of the analysis process, in the sense that the researcher develops interpretations of the data through the writing process. Richardson and St. Pierre (2005) suggest that writing is in fact a method of inquiry, and that through writing about the data, the researcher comes to develop understandings and interpretations about the data. From this perspective, writing is not simply an act of summarizing categories of data after the analytic process has come to a close; rather, writing is a method that bridges the data collection and analysis process as the researcher attempts to represent the results of qualitative inquiry. Throughout the analysis, we also considered how the researchers might have shaped the nature of the stories shared by the participants, keeping with an interpretivist/constructionist approach to our study. Thus, it is important to describe our position as researchers - the interviewers were White, female graduate students in a sport psychology program at a large, research-intensive Canadian university, and they had all participated in sports throughout their childhood and adolescence. The first author sought to conduct this study after years of working as a sport psychology/mental training consultant with high-performance youth sport athletes; in this work, athletes frequently described negative experiences during the car ride home, which served as the impetus to examine the car ride home as a site of socialization between parents and athletes. Thus, the first author entered this study with an assumption that athletes’ stories would be predominantly negative, which was not always the case. In the results, we have tried to present a balanced perspective reflecting the range of experiences reported by athletes and parents.

Results

Enjoying versus Enduring the Car Ride Home

The content of this theme reflected the positive and negative experiences reported by athletes and parents; in general, it appeared that some athletes experienced the car ride home as something to endure, whereas other athletes appeared to truly enjoy the car ride home as an opportunity to debrief with their parent. One athlete described her anticipation of the car ride home when she performed poorly:

A21D: If we're up like 1-0 and then I let, like, it's my fault and I like, give it up in front of the net and it leads to being tied up, then I'm in big trouble, like, I get in lots of trouble because it could have been a win for us. So then I like, lost the game for us.

I: What do you mean when you say like, you're going to get in lots of trouble?

A21D: Like as soon as I do it I'm like "shit," like, I'm going to get in the car and I'm just going to get it [laughs].

I: What, well what does that mean? That you're just going to get it?

A21D: Like they're going to like... like, they make fun of me almost, like... Just like, 'Really? You couldn't hold onto that ball for an extra three seconds?' or like, "Is it that hard to clear it out of the middle?" or like, 'How long have you been playing soccer? Come on, it's basic stuff.'

I: Okay, so is it all said in like, a joking manner, or what do you think?

A21D: Um.. sometimes.. they never like, mean it, they never yell at me, but they're like.. you can tell they're just like, not impressed ... like, in the moment they're like, not impressed, they're disappointed.

I: Yeah, yeah... hm. How does it make you feel when they're like that?

A21D: Uh... not so good. It makes me feel like.... I don't know, like, I love playing soccer, but then there's those games afterwards when you're like, [sigh/pause] and then

328 you have to like, remember why you play. Like, you play for the game, you don't play
329 for the talk afterwards, you play to play, not for the talk.

330 Another athlete said that she would simply 'wait it out' during the car ride home when her parent
331 was discussing her poor performance:

332 I don't like it on the way home when he's like... talking about me individually like,
333 poorly. And so I don't really like that part of the car ride home. And then I'm like just
334 excited to get home, like 'okay get home, get in the shower and you can have like your
335 thirty minutes of peace.'

336 Parents also described negative experiences, particularly concerning challenges managing their
337 own emotions and behaviours during the car ride home:

338 There have been times where I ... I will be on her and I'll be like 'okay, what happened?
339 Why are you [performing] like this, why are you chit chatting? Why are you wasting my
340 time? Why are you doing this?' And... and it's heartbreaking, like I know that I shouldn't
341 be saying that, but at that moment (pause). So I know that as I'm learning, I just need to
342 step back and say 'okay, don't say anything, wait until [later] and then figure out what
343 happened.'(P14M)

344 Furthermore, athletes were also aware of the challenges that parents faced during the car ride
345 home: "I think it's awkward for like, parents 'cause they don't know where to start, like how to
346 like, what to talk about or what's going to get you mad" (A24D).

347 Despite the tension and difficulty reported by some participants, many athletes said that
348 they enjoyed the car ride home and that talking with their parent helped them to feel better after
349 poor performances: "it just makes me feel more released and relaxed about the whole situation
350 and I forget about it and just enjoy the rest of my day" (A19D). Similarly, some parents also said

that the car ride home provided an opportunity to strengthen their relationship with their child. One father said the car ride to and from games and practices offered opportunities to bond with his daughter: “For my daughter and I ... it’s our bond. It’s really good quality time, just me and her ... we have that time together and I really ... I see it as being important for the bond” (P21F). Thus, it appeared that while some athletes and parents approached the car ride home with some trepidation and anxiety, for others it was a comforting ritual and a way to discuss the athlete’s sport experiences and foster positive parent-athlete relationships.

“It’s about trying to make her better” – Narratives of Performance in the Car Ride Home

In undertaking our analysis of the interview data, we considered the ways that participants situated their comments within narratives of performance in youth sport, particularly when providing feedback to athletes during the car ride home. Participants acknowledged that parents sometimes provided feedback in a manner that could be critical or negative, as one athlete said, “Sometimes we get in the car and one time he like screamed at me. He was like ‘what was that?!’ and I was like, ‘he’s a crazy person’” and a parent admitted, “I’ve gotten upset at him and yes, I’ve yelled at him” (P5F). However, parents and athletes alike often said that providing negative feedback was important for learning how to improve: “Even if we win, [my parent] will still find a way to um... like, think of what I did wrong so that, again next game, it will be better.” (A13D). Athletes also described negative parental feedback in terms of performance improvement: “my mom, ’cause she just, criticizes me out of like, watching me play and wanting me to play better” (A10D). We interpreted these types of comment as reflecting and supporting a performance narrative (Douglas & Carless, 2015) that may be used to justify negative feedback in the interest of performance improvement:

373 It's tough for her in the car on the way home when you say, 'you know, you did this well,
374 but you didn't do this well and this is where you need to improve.' And I think
375 sometimes she doesn't, it's hard for her to hear that and, and I know that about her. But I
376 still think that you need to talk to her about the good and the bad because, um, she needs
377 to know what she needs to improve on. (P1F)

378 In another example, Parent 7M described her husband's role as the coach of their daughter's
379 team and his feedback to her during the car ride home:

380 We've talked about it, and it's not like, bad, like, I don't think. Um, you know, she gets a
381 lot of good feedback that other kids don't get either, right? Like, when she's done
382 something good, he'll be the first to tell her that too. Where you know, other kids don't
383 get to ride home with the coach and have him say the good things they did either, so I
384 guess there's perks to it too. Um, but I think, I don't know, sometimes she takes it hard.
385 She's a little dramatic too so, I don't know. I think she genuinely appreciates um, the
386 feedback. She's a bit of a perfectionist so she loves to, like, if there's somewhere she can
387 improve, like she will do all that. Like, she will work on it and work hard.

388 We noted that when considering the possibility that negative feedback may have adverse
389 consequences, both parents and athletes drew attention to the potential benefits of providing
390 feedback and minimize the emphasis on athletes' negative emotions. Thus, when discussing the
391 delivery of feedback or criticism, participants reasoned that it helped athletes to improve, and
392 they suggested that athletes wanted this feedback in order to work hard to achieve performance
393 goals. These narrative techniques draw on and also act in service of narratives of performance in
394 sport.

395 In addition to examining ways in which parents provided feedback during the car ride
396 home, athletes often said that they explicitly sought out performance feedback from their parents:
397 I definitely ask for advice ... let's say if I'm getting confused, during the game. I don't
398 really handle it very well. Like, it's not like I'm getting my anger out but it's just like I'm
399 really confused and I keep getting frustrated. So after the game I like to ask a lot of
400 questions so that next time I will know for sure and know what to do. (A13D)

401 Another athlete said that he sought out feedback during the car ride home for the explicit purpose
402 of improving his performance:

403 I just, I want to get better so if I just know what I did wrong then if I keep making the
404 same mistake then I really know that I need to work on that. Then I really focus on if I
405 made that mistake last game, did I make it again today? 'Cause I don't want to make the
406 same mistake twice in a row. (A15S)

407 In some cases athletes said they did not appreciate their parent's comments immediately after a
408 game, even when the feedback was supportive. However, athletes said that these conversations
409 resonated with them in the long term:

410 [After a loss] I'm like 'yeah but like, I wanted to win this game' and she's like 'well you
411 can't win all of them, so you just have to go past it and think of it as like, a learning tool.'
412 And I'll just be like okay, like I don't really listen; well I listen but like, I'm so mad that
413 we lost that I'm just kinda like 'okay mom whatever okay.' But I still like, take it into
414 consideration... I don't usually like, show it as valuable in the car, but yeah they are
415 pretty valuable because then you have like, a new mindset of like how... like, that you
416 can improve. (A24D)

Thus, while several athletes reported that they sought out and appreciated feedback from their parents, these comments were interpreted as reflecting the internalization of a dominant performance narrative and an emphasis on continual performance enhancement in youth sport.

“Praise in public, review in private” – Privacy, Parenting, and the Car Ride Home

The notion of privacy was identified through our analysis as an issue that appeared to shape the nature and timing of conversations between parents and athletes. It seemed that feedback which might be perceived as critical was reserved for private conversations: “I’m a big fan of uh, a lot of that stuff, you know, it happens in private right? Praise in public and um, review in private” (P25M). Another parent also said that when teammates were in the car, he would refrain from providing feedback to his daughter until later in the evening:

No honestly, it’s a different environment when she [teammate] is in the car. Because I... on the way home in the car when she’s with us I don’t tend to focus on talking to [daughter] about what she didn’t do so well or what she did do well. It will be a conversation later when we get home...If there was something specific that I thought [daughter] didn’t do well, I’d leave it until we got home and I’d pull her aside and talk to her and I’d say, you know... um... ‘this happened during the game, why did you do this? You know, you could have done this better.’ But yeah, it’s different when [teammate] is in the car.” (P1F)

Parent 7M said that the reason she thought that criticism should happen in private was because of the different relationships parents have with their child, and due to the potential that conversations or comments might be viewed critically by other parents:

I think you definitely don’t, you definitely don’t um, have these discussions in front of other players and parents, for sure. I think it’s a private thing, you know, everybody’s

440 relationships with their kids are different, you know? Like I may be able to say something
 441 to my kids like, um, you know, whatever, I mean we have a really fun joking kind of
 442 relationship too, so I may be able to say something to my kid where another parent might
 443 go, ‘uh, I would never say that to my kid’ and vice versa, right?

444 Athletes also suggested that negative feedback or criticism should be delivered privately: “Umm
 445 some people don’t like other people to hear their constructive criticism, they think it’s just for
 446 them and nobody else needs to hear about it” (A18S).

447 The presence of different family members also appeared to change the social context and
 448 the nature of privacy within the car ride home. For example, several athletes also said that
 449 conversations changed when their mothers were in the car:

450 A20D: I feel like if my mom is in the car, [my dad] won’t point out my mistakes as
 451 much... yeah. If it’s just me and him in the car then he will say um, ‘yeah you should fix
 452 this mistake,’ but if it’s both me and my parents then he would say all encouraging stuff.

453 I: Why do you think that is?

454 A20D: (pause) I dunno. I, I guess he just doesn’t want my mom to see that he’s pointing
 455 out my mistakes, I guess? I don’t know.

456 Furthermore, a mother said that she tried to ‘soften’ the conversation during the car ride home:

457 I think, I probably might water things down that [husband] says. Or I’ll put it in different
 458 terms, in softer terms because sometimes he can be fairly hard with what he says ... he is
 459 spirited at times and he can actually say things so I just try to say ‘okay well let’s talk
 460 about that later’ or you know, um, try to soften it. (P6M)

461 Many athletes said that if teammates or other family members were in the car, parents may be
 462 less critical and the conversation focused mainly on things that the athletes did well:

463 I guess he wouldn't get as angry, to not like, freak them out or something, you know? ...
464 if someone else is in the car, like one of my teammates, um, I guess they would probably
465 be thinking 'he's going to get mad at me, just like how he got mad at her.' So I think he
466 likes to kinda dial it down when someone else is in the car... [laughs]. (A13D)

467 Another athlete indicated that privacy surrounding parent-child conversations was important for
468 maintaining relationships with other athletes and parents, so as to avoid having other players and
469 parents hear about what was discussed concerning the team's performance. One athlete said that
470 if her mom discussed the team's performance with teammates in the car, "then they could like,
471 tell their parents and then they could like, tell their friends as well and stuff and it can just go on
472 from there" (A22D). Thus, the privacy of the car ride home afforded parents and athletes the
473 opportunity to engage in more sensitive discussions about the athlete's and the team's
474 performance. However, there were also some athletes who said that their parents would engage
475 in the same types of conversations, regardless of who was in the car: "Well my dad will, he will
476 address the things that [teammate] might have done wrong, but same with me too" (A23S).

477 Privacy during the car ride home also offered athletes opportunities to share sport-related
478 concerns and anxieties with their parents. One parent recounted a car ride home when her son
479 "confessed to me that he was afraid not to make it to the major leagues ... It was a private
480 moment. They like to talk to me when nobody's there" (P15M). Thus, the sense of privacy
481 within the car ride home could help to foster intimacy and allow athletes to open up about his or
482 her feelings; privacy could also help shield the athlete from embarrassment when discussing poor
483 performances; and the privacy of the car ride home allowed parents and athletes to hold
484 discussions that might be critical of coaches or teammates.

The concept of privacy also appeared to intersect with narratives of performance and ‘good parenting’ in youth sport to inform parents’ communication with their child. We noted that some parents drew comparisons between other parents’ public behaviours and their own interactions with their child during the car ride home. One father said:

I’ve seen parents you know, be super negative about their daughter and I’ve seen you know, incidences where people are you know, literally shouting and screaming at the daughter on the way to the car ... I don’t, I try not to raise my voice when we’re talking, although my wife tells me that I do get a little bit emotional about it, but um, so I don’t think I’ve ever been shouting and screaming at [daughter] about anything. Um, do I raise my voice? You know, certainly we have a conversation about it but um, I don’t know, it’s just, in my opinion it’s about trying to make her better.

In this example, the parent began by describing the behaviours of other parents as a way to contextualize his own conversations with his child. By drawing attention to the behaviours of other parents who were ‘shouting and screaming’ at their children, it appeared that the way in which he explained his own behaviours emphasized ideals concerning good parenting (i.e., not being emotional, not shouting and screaming in public), while still supporting a performance narrative and his provision of feedback to improve his daughter’s performance.

Co-piloting: Navigating Difficult Conversations

We also identified strategies that athletes reported using to navigate difficult or potentially challenging conversations during the car ride home. In some cases, athletes said they specifically asked their parent to change the way they discussed his or her sport performance. One athlete said “...that’s when I get angry like, ‘dad, please just stop,’ like it gets so annoying” (A24D). Some athletes said that they would appeal to their other parent if the conversations

508 during the car ride home were uncomfortable: “I would tell my mom. I’d say um, ‘I don’t like
 509 how dad makes me feel after this soccer game’ and then I think my mom and dad talked about
 510 that. And, I think he’s gotten better at it” (A20D).

511 In other cases, athletes said they used strategies such as sarcasm to antagonize their
 512 parent when the conversation was upsetting, or to avoid talking about their sport performance:

513 ... when he’s like, mean to me, I just like, make fun of him. ’Cause I don’t know why,
 514 but I like, taunt him. I think that’s bad but I’m like, “okay coach” [sarcastically]. Like, I
 515 don’t even take it that personally anymore, I’m like, I get that I played bad but I’m not
 516 going to let you bug me about it. (A21D)

517 We also noted several avoidant behaviours where athletes attempted to prevent or stop
 518 conversations during the car ride home by listening to music, refusing to respond to parents’
 519 questions (silent treatment), or pretending to be asleep:

520 If I don’t play as well as I want to or if the team doesn’t, I’ll be really quiet and she will
 521 try to like, stir up conversation, but I will usually just try to avoid it or... I’ll just explain
 522 what we did wrong and I will get mad and stuff. (A12D)

523 This athlete also said that she would choose her position in the car depending on whether she
 524 wanted to engage in a conversation during the car ride home, “I will usually sit in the back and I
 525 will just put on a movie and try to ignore her ... if I’m tired or if I’m mad I will sit in the back”
 526 (A12D). One mother said that her daughter would try to avoid conversations when carpooling
 527 home from the game with the coach: “my daughter will pretend to be asleep. Yeah, she will try
 528 all her best to avoid talking” (P18M).

529 Based on their experiences, athletes and parents provided several positive strategies and
 530 suggestions for navigating the conversation during the car ride home, including providing

positive feedback, de-emphasizing performance outcomes, taking time to think, asking questions in a supportive manner, and developing ‘rules of the road’. We refer the reader to Table 1 for a summary of parent and athlete suggestions for strategies to improve the car ride conversation.

Discussion

The purpose of this research was to explore adolescent athletes’ and parents’ experiences during the car ride home following sport practices and competitions. Our findings illustrate how the car ride home reflected narratives of performance and parenting in youth sport (Douglas & Carless, 2015; Trussell & Shaw, 2012), and our findings also connect to literature regarding the socialization of parents in youth sport regarding the appropriateness of public versus private behaviours. We also provided findings concerning athletes’ attempts to exert control within conversations that were uncomfortable or negative, and our results also provide suggestions for future research on parent-athlete communication in youth sport.

Parents and athletes often reported that conversations during the car ride home were valuable opportunities to debrief about the athlete’s sport experiences and performance, and many athletes said they explicitly sought feedback from their parent following games and practices, which is similar to findings from previous studies of parental communication in sport (e.g., Dorsh, et al., 2015; Knight, Little, et al., 2016). Participants stated that seeking, receiving, and providing parental feedback was intended to improve the athlete’s performance, which we interpreted as reflecting a performance narrative emphasizing performance enhancement, winning or being the best, and dedication to sport performance (Douglas & Carless, 2015). Thus, it appeared that parent and athlete stories about the car ride home served to normalize parental feedback as useful and necessary for their child to improve and develop into a better athlete, suggesting that many participants in the current study were ‘living’ or ‘playing’ the part of youth

sport athletes and parents (McMahon & Penney, 2015). In offering our interpretations of the data, we are not suggesting that providing negative feedback to athletes is necessarily detrimental, as athletes need feedback to learn how to improve their performance. However, it appeared that in some cases parent feedback contributed to athletes' enjoyment of the car ride home, and in other cases athletes expressed that they were enduring the car ride home or 'waiting it out' when parents provided negative feedback to athletes. In light of previous research demonstrating that the ways in which parents communicate with their child may shape athletes' perceptions of the motivational climate, enjoyment, and perceptions of support (Dorsch et al., 2016; Gershgoren et al., 2011), it is worthwhile to consider whether providing feedback in an environment where athletes are simply 'enduring' the car ride home is useful or valuable for the athlete's performance, enjoyment, or motivation in sport, or for the parent-athlete relationship. Moving forward, researchers may seek to explore whether specific types of feedback or patterns of communication during the car ride home (e.g., questioning, turn-taking) reflect narratives of performance in youth sport, and whether these are associated with short-term and long-term outcomes for youth athletes and their parents.

The issue of privacy within the car ride home also adds to our understanding of parent-athlete communication. Although sport is a public achievement domain (Harwood, Spray, & Keegan, 2006), many of the discussions that parents have with their children about sport likely occur in private or semi-private situations (e.g., in the car or at home, at the dinner table, before bedtime). For example, Knight, Little, et al. (2016) described a variety of parental behaviours occurring during competition, in training environments, and in the home, supporting the notion that parental involvement in sport extends across domains (Elliott & Drummond, 2015). Building on this work, parents and athletes in the present study reported that performance feedback or

criticism was preferably left to private conversations, which supports the idea that the timing and nature of parent communication is important for promoting positive sport experiences among young athletes (Knight, Little, et al., 2016). Participants in the current study said that privacy within the car ride home afforded them opportunities to have conversations that might not occur elsewhere. Thus, reserving criticism or performance feedback for private settings may be viewed as a valuable way for parents to provide feedback that the athlete could perceive as negative or embarrassing, and it could allow the athlete time to process and reflect on the feedback.

The issue of parent communication in public versus private settings also connects to research examining the socialization of parents within youth sport. Dorsch et al. (2009) reported that parents learned acceptable ‘bleacher behaviours’ as spectators in youth sport settings through feedback from their children, by modeling other parents’ behaviours, and by taking cues from other parents about setting and amending goals for their children in sport. Furthermore, Dorsch et al. (2009) found that parents engaged in impression management and presented a ‘public face’ to other parents at sporting events, while subsequent research reported that parents attempted to change their behaviours in public settings if they felt their involvement might be viewed negatively by other parents (Dorsch et al., 2014). It is plausible that parents may be more critical in their feedback to their child during private conversations in order to maintain an outward appearance of being a good sport parent who does not publicly criticize their child (Trussell & Shaw, 2012). For example, participants spoke about reserving criticism or performance feedback for the car ride home when other people were not around, implying that other parents may view their comments as being too critical and that some conversations (e.g., about the coach or other teammates) were best kept private. Taken together, this research

suggests that parents' interactions with their children in private settings may be influenced by parents' perceptions about whether their behaviours would be deemed acceptable in public. While it is understandable that parents may choose to deliver critical feedback in private, it is important to consider the potential consequences of such behaviours, given that some athletes reported negative experiences of the car ride home. Building on the current study, it appears there is considerable scope for examination of the notion of privacy and both the positive and negative consequences of privacy within the parent-athlete relationship.

Another question extending from this body of research is whether parents' efforts to regulate their behaviours in public settings (Dorsch et al., 2014; Trussell & Shaw, 2012) are congruent with their behaviours in private settings. This point has implications for researchers and practitioners seeking to improve parent behaviours in youth sport: while some interventions and codes of conduct enforced by sport organizations are intended to improve parents' behaviours as spectators in public youth sport settings (i.e., during competitions), it is not known whether these approaches also effect changes in parents' private interactions and communication with their child. Given a general lack of research examining interventions designed to improve parental behaviours in youth sport (Harwood & Knight, 2016), an important avenue for future research would be to examine the effects of educational interventions on parent behaviours in both public and private settings. Furthermore, parent behaviours are also thought to be influenced by their own experiences, beliefs, and expectations (e.g., Knight, Dorsch, et al., 2016), and also by social factors including the youth sport organization, coaches, other parents, and athletes (e.g., Dorsch et al., 2009). Thus, interventions targeting behavioural beliefs and subjective norms (Ajzen, 1991) about parental behaviours in youth sport may help improve public and private parent-athlete communication.

Our analysis also produced findings regarding the ways in which athletes also contributed to and shaped conversations with their parents during the car ride home. Previous research examining the factors that influence parental involvement and communication in youth sport has found that parents' cognitions and behaviours are influenced by athletes' temperament, emotions, and gender (Dorsch et al., 2009), as well as by the youth sport context, parents' knowledge and experience in sport, and by parents' goals, expectations, and beliefs about their child's participation in sport (Knight, Dorsch, Osai, Haderlie, & Sellars, 2016). Moreover, researchers suggest that parents should read their athletes' emotional reactions and seek to understand the appropriate timing and phrasing of comments when providing feedback to athletes about their sport performance (Knight, Little, et al., 2016; Tamminen & Holt, 2012). Adding to this body of literature, our identification of athletes' communication strategies may reflect ways that athletes attempted to exert control within conversations where parents typically have more power than the child (Recchia, Ross, & Vicker, 2010), and they may be viewed as ways in which athletes 'resisted the part' of the athlete during the car ride home (McMahon & Penney, 2015). These findings also suggest future research directions drawing on theories of power, conflict resolution, and communication patterns within the parent-child relationship. For example, athletes may feel more comfortable expressing their frustration or confronting their parent directly about changing the conversation during the car ride home if his or her parent values athlete agency and attempts to balance the inherent power imbalance in the parent-child relationship. Conversely, an athlete may engage in avoidant behaviours during the car ride home if his or her parent seeks to maintain greater power within the parent-child relationship. Our findings emphasize the bi-directional communication process between parents and athletes, highlighting the idea that children contribute to and shape the nature of their interactions with

parents and are producers of their own experiences (Dworkin, Larson, & Hansen, 2003; Holt, Black, Tamminen, Fox, & Mandigo, 2008).

We also found that conversations were often reported to differ depending on who was present in the car (e.g., both parents vs. one parent only; teammates; coaches), supporting the assertion of ecological psychologists that the setting and those present in the setting shape the behaviours of individuals (Henderson, 2009; Wicker, 1979). Some athletes reported that their fathers were not as critical during the car ride home when mothers or teammates were also in the car, and one mother said she tried to ‘soften’ the conversation during the car ride home. Dorsch et al. (2016) noted that self-reported conflict and pressure was higher among youth athletes’ fathers than among mothers, suggesting that athletes could experience more conflict with fathers than with mothers. While the design of our study does not permit an examination of gender differences in communication patterns, such research would be valuable, particularly if athletes do experience more conflict or greater perceived pressure from fathers versus mothers.

Consistent with an interpretivist/constructionist approach, our interpretations of the participants’ stories are presented as situated truths that are partial, committed, and incomplete (Reissman, 2008). From this perspective, there is no one ‘set’ of criteria by which a study may be judged, but rather we adhered to a relativist approach (Burke, 2016) whereby the value or quality of a study may be assessed by considering the significant contribution of the work, whether the evidence is comprehensive (in terms of the quality of interviews/data and the interpretations that are offered), the coherence of interpretations and fit with previous theories and research, the transparency of the research, and the impact of the work in generating new research questions, analysis, or action as a result of the findings (Burke, 2016). A strength of this study is our dyadic approach to data collection that allowed us to examine parent and athlete accounts of

668 conversations during the car ride home. We maintained a data analysis log and dyad case
669 summaries to keep track of our analysis, and we also attempted to maintain reflexivity regarding
670 our roles as researchers and the ways we shaped the interviews and analysis.

671 One limitation of our study is that we did not explicitly ask participants about a specific
672 car ride experience or event, and so it is possible that athletes and parents were recalling different
673 experiences. Our study was also limited by cross-sectional, retrospective interviews; additional
674 methods of data collection such as audio diaries could also be used to collect data during or after
675 the car ride home. We are also mindful of the fact that the car ride home is but one context in
676 which participants' relationships are constituted, and these are not necessarily common or
677 universal experiences for all athletes. We also acknowledge that our roles as youth sport
678 researchers may have positioned us as 'experts' or 'judges' of parents' involvement in sport, and
679 participants may have framed their answers to portray their behaviours in socially acceptable
680 ways during the interviews.

681 In conclusion, the car ride home is a setting in which parents and athletes socialize and
682 develop understandings about their experiences in youth sport. Some participants seemed to
683 endure the experience, while others enjoyed the car ride home. The private nature of the car ride
684 home may afford parents and athletes opportunities to hold conversations that are not observed
685 by others, and the nature of these conversations appeared to be influenced by narratives of
686 performance and parenting in youth sport, as well as by the presence (or absence) of other family
687 members or teammates. Athletes and parents provided some suggestions to improve their
688 conversations with athletes during the car ride home, and our findings also point to the
689 importance of considering broader, socially constructed discourses within research on parenting
690 in youth sport.

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802 Table 2. Strategies for improving the car ride home
803

Strategy	Example Quote
Give time to think	“Give me space. If I’m feeling down or not happy, I would really appreciate it if my mom gave me some space and some time to let me think about it.” (A14D)
Take time to think	“I let things sort of wait... sometimes I’m high on adrenaline as well right? Sometimes I, I say something and I don’t mean to say it in the way that I say it, because it just comes out wrong but I’m just so.. I’m not thinking about my words right?” (P6M)
De-emphasize performance outcomes	“I try to make a conscious effort to always point out the effort level at the game. Even when one of them has a bad game, um, that’s one thing that usually, I usually comment for both of them, like they both work really hard when they’re out there, like in a game scenario. So that’s one thing that’s usually an easy first like, ‘you really worked hard, you really stood out today.’ (P7M)
Ask questions in a supportive manner	“I try to say ‘so what did you learn?’, ‘did you feel that’s getting better?’” (P5F) “[my husband] will go ‘but I don’t understand when you did this, this other girl did this other move and I don’t understand that.’ So it’s more trying to understand the sport a bit more.” (P14M)
Develop ‘rules of the road’	“I’ve asked her if she has, if she minds it, the conversation. And she said no. Sometimes she likes it to be pointed out, like ‘yeah maybe I could do this better.’” (P3F) “I asked her like, can you start with something positive? Like if um... if you start with something positive then it’s a little bit better for me to take in all the negative things that happened.” (A22D)
Be positive and supportive	“I kinda wish that my parents like, on the car ride home, if it was like, not so good of a game, I kinda wish they would be a little supportive because at the end of the day they are my parents and so they should be supportive no matter what.” (A13D)