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9   Continued Participation in Adolescent Male Rugby Union: Stakeholders' Perspectives

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Abstract

This study explored stakeholders' perceptions of Welsh adolescent rugby union participation. A Straussian grounded theory approach (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) was adopted and data collection was conducted via semi-structured interviews with 15 individuals involved in Welsh adolescent rugby union. Data were analyzed through open and axial coding procedures, and theoretical integration. Stakeholders perceived that continued rugby participation resulted from a positive evaluation of one's participation in the sport, and one's ability to cope with the demands experienced throughout transitions during adolescence. Overall, the findings provide a substantive grounded theory of stakeholders' perceptions of continued participation in adolescent Welsh rugby union, and applied implications, in an aim to promote continued sport participation.

29   Within the United Kingdom, substantial dropout from sport, particularly team sport, is

30   a continuing problem, warranting a call for strategies to enhance sport retention (Department

31   for Culture, Media, and Sport, 2010). An age group that continues to be of particular concern

32   for sport participation is that of adolescence (Stambulova, 2012). Reflecting these concerns,

33   rugby union in Wales has experienced reduced levels of participation among adolescent age

34   groups (cf. Welsh Rugby Union, 2014). The importance of rugby to Wales as a nation is ever

35   present, and therefore continued participation and future success in the sport is paramount

36   (Welsh Rugby Union, 2016). To enhance the opportunities for success and potential peak

37   performances in the sport, continued participation is vital as individuals develop at varied

38   rates (Fraser-Thomas, Côté, & Deakin, 2005; Sotiriadou, Shilbury, & Quick, 2008).

39   In seeking to understand continued participation in adolescent sport, researchers have

40   investigated both reasons for dropout, and sport participation motives. Dropout from

41   adolescent sport has been linked to: having other things to do, not liking the coach, the team

42   lacking spirit, poor teamwork, lack of perceived competence, early peak performances,

43   limited one-on-one coaching, pressuring parents, lack of sport-specific peers, and sibling

44   rivalries (Fraser-Thomas, Côté, & Deakin, 2008; Molinero, Salguero, Tuero, Alvarez, &

45   Márquez, 2006). Additionally, external pressures such as school demands, employment, non-

46   sport activities, and wanting to spend time with friends, have also been highlighted as factors

47   contributing to adolescents' dropout from sport (Enocksen, 2011).

48   In contrast, the most frequently cited reason for continued participation in adolescent

49   sport is enjoyment and fun (e.g., Gould, Lauer, Rolo, James, & Pennisi, 2008; Seefelt, Ewing,

50   & Walk, 1992). Similar to enjoyment, the importance of athletic satisfaction, defined as how

51   happy or content athletes are with their athletic experience, has been linked to participation

52   (Hodge, Lonsdale, & Jackson, 2009). Research has also highlighted other motives for sport

53   participation such as, perception of competence, parental influences, learning new skills, and

54   friends and peers (Bailey, Cope, & Pearce, 2013).

55   Extending the descriptive studies of dropout and participation motives, theoretical

56   approaches have been offered to explain adolescent sport participation. One of the most

57   prevalent theories is the Sport Commitment Model (SCM; Scanlan, Carpenter, Schmidt,

58   Simons, & Keeler 1993). Scanlan and colleagues proposed five antecedents to sport

59   commitment: enjoyment, involvement opportunities, involvement alternatives, personal

60   investments, and social constraints. Applying the SCM to recreational and collegiate tennis,

61   Casper and Andrew (2008) found that advanced tennis players reported higher levels of sport

62   commitment than intermediate and beginner players. Greater commitment was influenced by

63   the personal investment the players had made to reach an advanced skill level. An assessment

64   of the SCM in relation to female athlete commitment in elite netball reported enjoyment as

65   the most influential factor upon commitment, together with social support (e.g., feeling

66   encouraged and supported; Scanlan, Russell, Magyar, & Scanlan, 2009).

67   To better understand participation in sport, researchers have also sought advances

68   from outside of the domain. One such framework, originating from migration research, is that

69   of the push, pull, anti-push, and anti-pull (see Mullet, Dej, Lemaire, Raiff, & Barthorpe, 2000)

70   which has been used to explain decisions to continue in, or move on from, a current situation

71   or circumstance. Push factors relate to undesirable circumstances; pull factors to benefits;

72   anti-push factors to reasons for attachment; and, anti-pull factors relate to the costs and risks

73   of change. In a sport context, the framework has been used to explain the decisions made by

74   competitive athletes during career termination (Fernandez, Stephan, & Fouquereau, 2006).

75   Athletes associated push factors to negative aspects of their present life; pull factors to

76   positive characteristics of post-career life; anti-push factors to the attachment towards their

77   sport career; and, anti-pull factors to the overall risk and cost of a post sport-career life. In

78   sum, Fernandez et al. suggested that career termination decisions involved interactions

79   between push, pull, anti-push, and anti-pull factors.

80   　　　Recently, researchers have emphasized the importance of investigating sport

81   participation from a holistic lifespan perspective, central to which are transitions (cf.

82   Alfermann & Stambulova, 2007; Debois, Ledon, & Wylleman, 2015; Stambulova, 2012).

83   Transitions are continuous processes, whereby individuals use effective coping to overcome a

84   set of specific demands. Individuals experience transitions in their careers, education, sport,

85   and everyday life that challenge sport continuation. Based upon the predictability of their

86   occurrence, transitions can be described as normative (predictable) or non-normative (less

87   predictable). Examples of normative transitions include, the beginning of sport specialization

88   or the transition from junior to senior competitive sport. Non-normative transitions include

89   events such as, sporting injuries or a change in coach.

90   　　　Combined, sport participation research has emphasized the importance of

91   understanding the notion of continued sport participation and the factors that influence it.

92   Central to this process are the sport providers (i.e., coaches, managerial staff, development

93   officers) who make available sport opportunities and experiences to performers. For example,

94   sport dropout rates are influenced by coaches neglecting social aspects of the sport (Molinero

95   et al., 2006), poor social support (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2008.), coach player conflicts, and

96   participants receiving a lack of playing time (Weiss & Williams, 2004). In contrast, sport

97   providers can positively influence sport continuation through, raising participants' levels of

98   enjoyment (Seefelt et al., 1992), enhancing athletic identity (Lamont-Mills & Christensen,

99   2006) and increasing overall levels of satisfaction with the sport (Hodge et al., 2009).

100   　　　Sport providers have a particularly important role in adolescents' continued sport

101   participation as, during this period, adolescents place more emphasis on relationships with

102   coaches, while parents transition away from primary providers and supporters of sport (Côté

103   & Hay, 2002). Therefore, sport providers must understand their role and influence upon

104   adolescent sport participation. By understanding developmental milestones, sport providers

105   can offer individualized and effective services to adolescents (Knight & Holt, 2012). As such,

106   it is important that sport providers understand the reasons for, and their personal influence

107   upon, continued sport participation in order to sustain participation.

108   In addition to the importance of understanding sport providers' perceptions of

109   adolescent sport participation, questions have been raised regarding the utility of examining

110   reasons for dropout and continued participation in isolation (cf. Vella, Cliff, & Okley, 2014).

111   Vella and colleagues suggested that reasons for continued participation should be investigated

112   in conjunction with reasons for dropout, in order to maximize organized sport participation.

113   Furthermore, the sport participation process is complex and multifaceted, and as such to fully

114   understand decisions made by individuals the unique context in which an individual is

115   involved in must be understood (Samuel & Tenenbaum, 2011).

116   Based on the existing conceptual and empirical research there is a need for a greater

117   collective understanding of sport providers and participants' perceptions of the combined

118   influence of dropout and continuation motives upon adolescent sport participation. Rugby

119   union in Wales is a sport which has recently experienced reduced levels of adolescent

120   participation, and therefore requires a greater collective understanding to support future

121   involvement in the sport. As such, the current study investigated stakeholders' (sport

122   providers and participants) perceptions of adolescent rugby union participation in Wales,

123   focusing upon reasons for continued sport participation and dropout. Specifically, we sought

124   to explore three research questions: (1) Why do stakeholders believe individuals post 15 years

125   of age continue to participate in rugby union? (2) What do stakeholders perceive are the

126   reasons for dropout in adolescent rugby union? (3) How do stakeholders consider adolescent

127   rugby union players could be encouraged to remain involved in the sport?

Method

Methodology and epistemological assumptions

A Straussian grounded theory approach (cf. Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Strauss & Corbin, 1998) was adopted for the current study. Grounded theory is a qualitative research methodology that builds theory from data, and is characterized by the continual interplay between data collection and analysis to produce a theory. The grounded theory approach is particularly useful to develop insights into social processes and can provide guidance of future actions. Additionally, a grounded theory approach is beneficial when there is a lack of a pre-existing theory in an area of study. A grounded theory approach was therefore viewed as a suitable approach for the current study of stakeholders' perceptions of continued participation in adolescent rugby union, because there is a lack of previous research investigating sport provider perspectives, the approach enables specific contextual and social aspects to be investigated, and future actions to be created in an aim to enhance continued participation in rugby union.

Straussian grounded theory is founded upon pragmatism, which emphasizes that individuals gain knowledge from actions and interactions, knowledge is collective, and individuals' environments influence their knowledge (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Therefore, a pragmatic view of knowledge indicates that there are multiple realities and truths. In the current study a pragmatic paradigm satisfied this philosophical perspective as we explored multiple realities and perspectives of adolescent rugby union continuation and the influence an individual's environment had upon participation. The philosophical paradigm also matched that of the research team, ensuring methodological coherence.

Sampling and participants

Participants comprised 15 males ranging in age from 17 to 66 years ($M = 34.47$ years, $SD = 14.50$) whom were involved in adolescent rugby union within Wales, UK: local club

153   and college coaches ($n = 2$), regional managerial staff ($n = 4$), development officers ($n = 6$),

154   and players ($n = 3$). Individuals involved in the provision of adolescent rugby union held roles

155   ranging from the organization of regional structures through to the provision of one-to-one

156   skills sessions to players. The three players in the study all had at least eight years of playing

157   the sport, providing experiences from different levels of participation. All played college and

158   club level, two were involved in representative squads, one of whom was part of a regional

159   representative team, and the other part of a regional development squad.

160   Sampling took place via a combination of purposive and theoretical strategies. Initially

161   purposive sampling identified individuals with an encompassing knowledge and experience of

162   adolescent rugby union in Wales. The criterion for purposeful selection was that an individual

163   had to be involved in the provision of adolescent rugby union in Wales, and be in direct

164   contact with coaching staff and players. Purposive techniques resulted in a sample of four

165   regional managerial staff members. Theoretical sampling subsequently took place to identify

166   individuals who could provide further pertinent information and insight (Corbin & Strauss,

167   2008). Initially, theoretical sampling resulted in local club and college coaches and national

168   governing body regional staff (development officers) being identified and interviewed. These

169   individuals were identified as having high levels of experience in adolescent rugby union.

170   Finally, current players were identified for interview so that their views and experiences could

171   be compared to those of the sport providers, with specific experiences of their participation in

172   adolescent rugby union being highlighted.

173   **Data collection**

174   Following University Research Ethics Board approval, the research team identified

175   potential participants based upon the initial criteria or emerging concepts. Potential

176   participants were then contacted regarding their interest and availability in participating in the

177   current study. An information letter outlining the study was provided requesting completion

178   of informed consent. Participants under the age of 18 were required to provide written assent

179   along with written informed consent from their parent/guardian. Data collection occurred

180   through semi-structured interviews. Interviews were conducted at a time and location of the

181   participants' choice. Prior to data collection three pilot interviews were carried out to assess

182   the effectiveness of the interview guide and provide an opportunity to establish familiarity

183   with the questions (Sparkes & Smith, 2014).

184   **Semi-structured interviews**. All interviews were conducted in a quiet, private room

185   on a university campus or sporting facility and lasted between 35 and 70 minutes ($M = 46.93$;

186    $SD = 9.16$). Interviews were recorded in their entirety and transcribed verbatim for subsequent

187   analysis (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). Initial interviews were conducted using an interview guide

188   based on an extensive review of relevant research (e.g., Côté & Fraser-Thomas, 2007; Fraser-

189   Thomas et al., 2008; Weiss & Williams, 2004). Over the course of data collection, the

190   interview guide was continually revised in line with the data (see Appendix A for the final

191   interview guide). In total, five iterations of the interview guide were developed. All the

192   interview guides used a structure consistent with the recommendations of Rubin and Rubin

193   (2012). For example, introductory questions related to demographic information and an

194   individual's background; main questions focused upon retention and dropout; and, summary

195   questions clarified the reasons for retention and dropout.

196   **Data analysis**

197   Data collection and analysis followed an iterative process (Corbin & Strauss, 2008;

198   Strauss & Corbin, 1998). After each interview the lead researcher recorded memos regarding

199   concepts and relationships. Post transcription, analysis occurred through a process of open

200   coding, axial coding, and theoretical integration. Open coding involved the breaking apart of

201   data and the allocation of concepts to raw data blocks. This process led to the initial

202   development of concepts relating to participation within rugby union (e.g., enjoyment and

203 satisfaction with participation in the sport). Next, axial coding comprised highlighting

204 relationships between concepts and grouping concepts that related to the same phenomenon to

205 create categories. For example, links between the concepts relating to identifying as a rugby

206 union player, enjoyment and satisfaction with rugby, and opportunities to participate and

207 progress in the sport led to these concepts being grouped together in a category entitled

208 'perceived value towards, and ease of, participating in rugby union'. Finally, the process of

209 theoretical integration linked categories around a core category and refined the findings.

210   **Methodological rigor.** Rigor was evaluated through the extent to which the study

211 fulfilled the specific characterizing traits of Straussian grounded theory rather than using an

212 absolute set of criteria for assessing the quality of the research. To enhance rigor an iterative

213 process and theoretical sampling were used (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Specifically, rigor was

214 enhanced via multiple contact time with participants and within the environment prior to data

215 collection, constant comparisons of data for similarities and differences; and continual

216 questioning of the data and concepts (cf. Smith & McGannon, 2017). Questioning took place

217 via individual reflections and external experts proposing challenging questions requiring

218 justifications and explanations. The recording of memos and the development of diagrams

219 were also used to enable conceptual and abstract thinking pertaining to the data and to

220 highlight possible relationships between concepts.

221   **Results**

222   Following data collection and analysis, findings were categorized and presented (see

223 Figure 1). The key finding presented is an overarching core category termed, positively

224 evaluate one's participation in rugby union, and one's ability to cope with demands

225 experienced throughout transitions during adolescence. The core category is underpinned by

226 two key categories: perceived value towards, and ease of, participating in rugby union; and,

227 attractiveness of, and importance placed upon, competing demands to participation in rugby

228 union. The key categories are further underpinned by concepts and influencing factors. The

229 following results section provides explanations of the categories, concepts, influencing

230 factors, and concludes with a substantive grounded theory.

231 **Core category: Positively evaluate one's participation in rugby union, and one's ability**

232 **to cope with demands experienced throughout transitions during adolescence.**

233 Participation in adolescent rugby union is a complex process in which an individual

234 evaluates their continued participation at transitions throughout their life. This involves a

235 cognitive process of weighing up different factors relevant to that individual's involvement in

236 the sport. A positive evaluation is achieved if the factors relevant to participation are viewed

237 as more favorable than those that oppose continuation, combined with a positive perception of

238 an ability to cope with the demands experienced throughout transitions.

239 A key aspect of the results is the evaluation of participation at transitions during

240 adolescence, and includes: the move from junior to youth rugby, following selection for

241 matches or attainment of representative honors, being injured, time away from rugby, a forced

242 change in club, change in school/college or beginning university, and times of high education

243 demands. For example, the move from junior to youth rugby is an important transition due to

244 the structure of youth age group rugby, which includes players aged 16 to 19 years rather than

245 a single year age group. Player 1 highlighted the concern:

246 … Like last year for instance, because it's under 16s you're playing the same people

247 your own age aren't you. And then when you go up to youth you start playing 19 year

248 olds and stuff then and people they're a bit scared aren't they so they stop playing.

249 That's when I usually see them stop [playing].

250 This presents potential concerns with an individual's perceived ability to cope when

251 transitioning into youth rugby, due to playing against, and training with, older, more

252 physically developed individuals.

253   Similarly, the selection for matches or attainment of representative honors is also a

254 transition within adolescent rugby union. An individual who experiences successful selection

255 will be likely to make a positive evaluation of their future participation. A non-selected

256 individual who values rugby highly and perceives their future rugby opportunities positively

257 will accept the selection decision and continue to participate at their current level. However,

258 dropout will occur if an individual perceives their aspirations can no longer be achieved and

259 continuing to participate at their current level is not valued. The influence of selection

260 decisions was highlighted by one of the managerial staff:

261   It's a test of character if you don't get selected, sometimes that character shows

262   through and they [players] persist and come back… But for every kid that does that,

263   how many kids have not done that?

264   Transitions are also experienced outside of a sporting environment due to external

265 demands such as, change in educational circumstance (new school/college or beginning

266 university) and commitments (e.g., exam periods). For example, one participant explained:

267   Academic years… in terms of GCSE qualifications at 16 and A levels at 18 I think

268   they are a possible drop off with kids, certainly at A level with kids having to focus on

269   their careers. And then when they go off to universities it's keeping in touch with them

270   then, I don't think we do a great job of keeping in touch. (Managerial Staff 4)

271 If an individual decides that their educational aspirations can be achieved while participating

272 in rugby union, then the individual will choose to continue. However, if coping with

273 education requirements and rugby aspirations is deemed unachievable then dropout can occur.

274 **Key categories**

275   The core category is underpinned by two key categories: perceived value towards, and

276 ease of, participating in rugby union; and, attractiveness of, and importance placed upon,

277 competing demands to participation in rugby union. The key categories interact and positively

278   or negatively influence an individual's overall evaluation of continued participation in the

279   sport depending upon the weighting of each category. These categories are further

280   underpinned by different concepts.

281   **Category 1: Perceived value towards, and ease of, participating in rugby union.**

282   The value placed upon rugby by adolescent players comprises: enjoyment and satisfaction

283   with participation in rugby union; number of opportunities to participate in rugby union and

284   progress in the sport; and, identifying as a rugby union player and being part of a rugby union

285   community. Development Officer 1 described some of these aspects, "I think, you know, it's

286   one of those things if you really enjoy it, then it's in your blood and you know, it's a family

287   thing and also sometimes it's a tradition in villages".

288   When an adolescent individual perceives that rugby is easy to participate in, and readily

289   available, then throughout transitions it is more likely that the individual will perceive

290   positive evaluations of coping with demands and participation in the sport.

291   **Identifying as a rugby union player and being part of a rugby union community.**

292   This concept represents the extent to which an individual identifies as a rugby player and feels

293   connected to the rugby community, which influences both the value placed on the sport and

294   the perceptions of coping with demands. Managerial staff 2 explained:

295   I suppose most people would go like 'I would love to be associated'; people are like

296   that, especially youngsters, your own identity and your inclusion in a group because

297   we all like to be included. Then you're representing that badge that team whatever it

298   is, I think that's important.

299   This concept comprises three factors, the first of which is the perceived strength of the rugby

300   union community. Specifically, an individual who is part of a community that expresses high

301   levels of rugby involvement will be more inclined to place value upon their own participation.

302   Second, the stronger the social ties within the sport the more an individual can feel part of

303   their club or team, and the more value an individual will place upon participation as part of

304   their life. Lastly, a family history of involvement leads to perceptions of high value towards

305   rugby participation. For example, Player 2 described how a teammate travelled large distances

306   to play rugby due to his father's history at the club, and how his own father's involvement in

307   the sport had influenced his participation:

308   He [teammate] just really enjoyed rugby and his father used to play for [the club] as

309   well. So, that's an influence there… Because my father played rugby as well … and

310   just watching him as a young boy, it's just like you want to be on the pitch one day. So

311   as soon as you can get involved at a young age that's what you do, you get there.

312   In sum, the greater the perception of each of these factors, the more likely an individual is to

313   identify as a rugby player and feel part of their rugby community, and want to remain in the

314   sport.

315   **Enjoyment and satisfaction with participation in rugby union**. Value is placed

316   upon continued participation when an individual enjoys and is satisfied with their rugby

317   experiences, as described by Development Officer 3:

318   … just enjoyment of the game, if they play it once and they have a good experience,

319   and that's kind of our job, then they'll want to come back and do it again the same as

320   anything if you enjoy something you are going to want to do it again.

321   Enjoyment and satisfaction with participation in the sport includes five factors: strength of

322   social ties to the club or team (friendships and social experiences); coaching quality, varied

323   practice, and relationships with players; perceived level of success achieved in relation to

324   aspirations and previous accomplishments in rugby union; perceptions of opportunities to

325   progress in rugby union; and, amount of playing time an individual has during matches, and

326   number of opportunities to participate in matches.

327   An individual who does not experience enjoyment from rugby and is not satisfied will

328   question the value of the sport and the ease of participation, and therefore evaluate their

329   participation and ability to cope with the demands throughout transitions. For example, "…

330   why should I bother, why should I train if I'm not going to be successful, if I'm not going to

331   make any money out of it, if I'm not going to win things…" (Coach 2). Additionally, all

332   players highlighted the potential for a lack of satisfaction due to repetition in the way training

333   sessions were structured or delivered at a club or team from season to season.

334   I think some boys get bored, they've been doing it for ages and they can't be bothered.

335   And it's mainly the same thing over and over again in local clubs. So if, my local club

336   now will do training every week and nothing really changes, it's the same place, the

337   same time, I think they just get bored of it. (Player 3)

338   **Number of opportunities to participate in rugby union and progress in the sport.**

339   The more opportunities available to play, the easier an individual perceives their ability to

340   participate, leading to a positive evaluation of involvement in the sport and ability to cope

341   with demands throughout transitions. Additionally, the number of opportunities to participate

342   and progress in rugby union can affect enjoyment and satisfaction with the sport due to

343   players being unable to achieve desired goals and aspirations, or not perceiving benefits from

344   the time invested. For example:

345   … If they [players] are training week in week out but they're not playing on a regular

346   basis then that's going to start airing frustrations and, ultimately, with the other

347   interests that are going on for them then you will start to get, 'Actually it's not for me

348   I'm going to go do this or something else'. (Managerial Staff 4)

349   Opportunities for participation are underpinned by: perceptions of opportunities to

350   progress in rugby union; playing time and consistency of match fixtures; and, access to

351   facilities, teams, and coaching. Future opportunities for development and selection to a higher

352   level of standard can lead an individual to place greater value upon their participation and

353   ability to cope with demands at transitions, due to the possibility of advancing in the sport and

354   achieving aspirations. Similarly, a lack of opportunities to participate and progress due to

355   unavailability of facilities, teams, coaching, consistent matches, and game time, may lead to

356   negative evaluations of participation and coping with demands throughout transitions.

357   **Category 2: Attractiveness of, and importance placed upon, competing demands**

358   **to participation in rugby union.** This category refers to the competing demands to rugby

359   union that an individual can choose, or is required, to participate in (e.g., competing in other

360   sports). This decision is influenced by the perceived importance and attractiveness of these

361   demands relative to rugby. Player 3 commented upon the variety of demands that might

362   compete with participation in rugby union:

363   Sometimes… like for example with football, if you play football and rugby at like 15

364   or 16, they try to say, 'come and play football, it's pointless playing rugby', stuff like

365   that. So, you definitely get drawn by other sports and other people.

366   In addition, the competing demands from societal views and perceived norms highlighted an

367   increased importance placed upon having money than compared with previous generations.

368   For example, Development Officer 2 highlighted societal changes in relation to employment:

369   … kids can now get Saturday morning and Saturday afternoon jobs where they are at

370   MacDonald's, where they are at Tesco stacking shelves and part time jobs and they

371   need the money and that can adversely affect the game. Similarly, at senior level there

372   seems to be far more shift work that goes on with weekend commitments than there

373   was 20 years ago. So I think society has changed in many ways and it's really really

374   difficult in some of the clubs to get players to play the game.

375   **Educational commitments**. An adolescent rugby union player may experience

376 situations in which evaluations are made concerning whether coping with educational

377 commitments and sport participation is possible. For example:

378   One of the biggest ones [competing demands] I hear is that, 'I've got to concentrate on

379   my education'. They don't, a lot, a lot of boys don't seem to believe that they can

380   marry the two together, it's either they seem to have preconceived ideas that they're

381   either sporty or academic. They don't seem to see that they can fit the two together.

382   (Development Officer 1)

383 Player 1, described a consequence of players missing training due to educational demands:

384   … If they've got a load of work then they're missing training and all that, they don't

385   see them [teammates] enough, and we only see them once a Saturday. They don't

386   really know the team that well, so they're like shy in the corner and just on their own.

387 The greater demands from education, such as assignments and exam periods, influence

388 overall educational commitments and the amount of time players have to participate in rugby.

389   **Participation in other sports and activities**. Other sports are often a competing

390 demand to rugby union participation because sports frequently take place at the same time,

391 leading players to choose which to attend. Choice of sport and other activities is further

392 emphasized with age, as peers become influential, as Development Officer 6 highlighted, "At

393 16 maybe they have got to make a choice, do you play your football or do you play rugby?

394 And maybe just people going out enjoying being that age." Activities outside of sport (e.g.,

395 spending time with friends who do not participate in rugby) can also be viewed as attractive.

396   Therefore, if other activities are perceived as more attractive than rugby, and coping with the

397 demands of both is perceived detrimentally, this may also lead to dropout.

398   **Need to engage in employment.** If an individual perceives the need to be employed

399 to be of greater importance than playing rugby, and perceives coping with the demands of

400 both employment and rugby participation is unachievable, then dropout can occur. Regional

401 Managerial Staff 1 highlighted the choice:

402   Every player aged 15, 16, 17, or 18 they are looking for employment they are looking

403   to earn money for themselves… if they are still in education, they have to go for a

404   Saturday job and that is when rugby is played so I think the knock-on effect of kids

405   growing up and wanting to live the lifestyle that that they see as the social norm then

406   they have to earn the money and that then takes away from their ability to play rugby.

407 Security of employment is also threatened by the physical nature of the sport, for example, "I

408 think the bumps and bruises that guys get is a big threat to them losing work and certainly at

409 16 to 19 [years old] … when numerous people are working it does cause problems"

410 (Development Officer 2). As such, throughout transitions an individual may feel forced to

411 choose between rugby participation and employment for fear of injury preventing them from

412 working.

413 **A substantive grounded theory of stakeholders' perceptions of continued participation**

414 **in adolescent rugby**

415   In sum, continued participation in adolescent rugby union occurs if an individual holds

416 a positive evaluation of participation in rugby, and their ability to cope with the demands

417 experienced throughout transitions during their adolescence (see Figure 1). This evaluation is

418 influenced by an athlete's perception of the value towards, and ease of, rugby participation;

419 and, the attractiveness of and importance placed upon competing demands to participation in

420 rugby union. Continued participation is apparent when, throughout transitions in their

421 adolescence, an individual places value on participation in rugby union, and perceives access

422 to rugby opportunities easily. An individual who perceives value and ease of participating in

423 rugby union is suggested to identify as a rugby player and feel part of a rugby community,

424 enjoy and be satisfied with participation, and perceive opportunities to participate and

425   progress in the sport. The greater the level of enjoyment and satisfaction experienced, the

426   more an individual identifies with the sport. Similarly, the more an individual identifies as a

427   rugby player, and as being part of the community, the greater levels of enjoyment and

428   satisfaction experienced. Additionally, an individual is more satisfied with their rugby

429   participation when greater numbers of opportunities to participate and progress in the sport

430   are apparent.

431   **Discussion**

432   Stakeholders' perceptions of adolescent Welsh rugby union participation, focusing

433   upon reasons for continued sport participation and dropout was investigated, and explored

434   through three research questions: (1) Why do stakeholders believe individuals post 15 years

435   of age continue to participate in rugby union? (2) What do stakeholders perceive are the

436   reasons for dropout in adolescent rugby union? (3) How do stakeholders consider adolescent

437   rugby union players could be encouraged to remain involved in the sport? Continued

438   participation in adolescent rugby union was reported to occur if an individual held a positive

439   evaluation of their participation in rugby union, and their ability to cope with the demands

440   experienced throughout the transitions experienced during their adolescence.

441   Our study adds to current literature by providing a new perspective of adolescent

442   rugby participation, and, to the authors' knowledge, is the first to combine adolescent rugby

443   providers' and participants' perspectives of continued participation. Furthermore, in line with

444   Vella et al.'s (2014) suggestions, our study includes both participation motives and reasons

445   for dropout. Through the use of a grounded theory methodology, a context-specific overview

446   of stakeholders' perspectives and evaluations of adolescent rugby participation within Wales

447   is provided. Specifically, the findings illustrate links and potential differences between rugby

448   providers and participants' perspectives; demonstrate the ongoing evaluative process of

449   continued participation; and suggest challenging transitions relevant to adolescent rugby

450   union.

451   Collectively, our study highlights the complexity of continued sport involvement and

452   the range of potential factors affecting participation. Of particular importance is the

453   contribution of an individual's evaluation of their involvement in the sport and coping with

454   demands at distinct transitions during adolescence. Our findings support the suggestion that

455   transitions disrupt the athletic engagement status quo and challenge athletes to respond by

456   using coping strategies and making decisions (Samuel & Tenebaum 2011; Stambulova,

457   2012).

458   Additionally, during transitions it was reported that an individual evaluated their rugby

459   participation against any competing demands. By understanding this evaluative process and

460   its influencing factors, sport providers have the opportunity to promote positive factors of

461   rugby participation (e.g., enjoyment, satisfaction, identification with the sport), and provide

462   coping strategies to support participants with the competing demands they may face. This

463   evaluation is comparable with the push pull anti-push anti-pull framework (e.g., Fernandez et

464   al., 2006) and the SCM (Scanlan et al., 1993). For example, when viewing dropout as the

465   outcome, the push factors, would be negative considerations of current rugby participation

466   (i.e., evaluation of value and ease of rugby participation). The pull factors would be the

467   perceived benefits of dropping out from rugby union (i.e., attractiveness and importance

468   placed upon competing demands to the sport). The anti-push factors would relate to the

469   current attachment to rugby participation; and, the anti-pull factors would be the overall risk

470   and cost aspects related to no longer participating in rugby union.

471   Although continued rugby participation may be viewed as optional, certain competing

472   demands can be obligatory. For example, education or employment can be viewed as

473   demands that are inevitable and unchangeable, and therefore detrimental to involvement in

474   the sport, as these competing demands take up time and resources, which prevent

475   participation. The current study findings also highlight a concern for continued rugby

476   participation as a preconception existed that sport participation and education demands were

477   incompatible and would lead to dropout. This apparent conflict is evident in dual career

478   literature (e.g., European Commission, 2012), and highlights the need for further provision of

479   support to help adolescents combine their education commitments and sport participation. The

480   current findings also emphasize the importance of understanding the competing demands to

481   sport participation, which vary depending upon individual circumstances. Sport providers

482   should therefore recognize the specific competing demands to participation and provide

483   appropriate support to aid continuation.

484   Despite the threat from competing demands, participation may continue if adolescents

485   place value on their involvement in the sport, and have opportunities to participate. The

486   current research combines the adolescents' perceived value of rugby to the individual, with

487   their perceptions of the relative ease of participation. Consistent with previous literature, our

488   findings emphasize the importance of enjoyment (e.g., Seefelt et al., 1992) and satisfaction

489   (Hodge et al., 2009) upon sporting participation and retention respectively. However, limited

490   research has explored how satisfaction influences sport participation (Burns, Jasinski, Dunn,

491   & Fletcher, 2012). Our findings highlight that an adolescent player's enjoyment and

492   satisfaction with rugby union is influenced by the participation opportunities available.

493   Specifically, in order to be satisfied with the sport, an individual must be afforded with

494   opportunities to participate in competitive matches, and be able to justify the amount of time

495   and resources invested. The enjoyment and satisfaction a player experiences are also

496   influenced by the level of coaching expertise and the appropriateness of practice provided.

497   Indeed, Baker, Yardley, and Côté (2003) noted the importance of satisfaction with the coach

498   in both team and individual sports, and the demonstration of positive coach behaviors (e.g.,

499   goal setting, personal rapport) to avoid negative personal rapports with athletes.

500   Similar to Anderson, Mâsse, Zhang, Coleman and Chang (2009), the current findings

501   highlight the importance of social experiences during involvement in rugby union, through

502   enhanced enjoyment and identification with the sport. Social experiences with teammates

503   during practice sessions and away from competitive rugby (e.g., socializing in the club house)

504   are examples of sources of enjoyment. Positive social experiences promote a sense of

505   belonging within a rugby community and influence the level to which an adolescent may

506   identify as a rugby player. A greater identification with rugby is linked to retention due to

507   greater value being placed upon the sport. This positive influence upon sport participation in

508   our study is consistent with the findings of Lamont-Mills and Christensen (2006), who

509   observed that individuals with stronger athletic identities were more likely to participate in

510   sport. However, in our study a challenge to these positive rugby experiences were

511   participants' societal views and perceived norms. Specifically, adolescent rugby players

512   placed value upon having disposable income from employment and experiencing instant

513   gratification through activities. As such, sport providers should endeavor to understand

514   participants' desires and, where possible, allow these desires to be satisfied, be that during or

515   alongside rugby participation.

Applied Implications

517   From the findings, strategies can subsequently be developed and implemented to

518   enhance players' ability to cope with the demands experienced throughout transitions in their

519   adolescence, and to enhance the opportunities for positive evaluations of rugby participation

520   and subsequent sport continuation. One way to enhance coping during such transitions is

521   through the development of players' life skills. Life skills training adds to athletes' coping

522   resources in transitions, and is suggested to support other future demands (Stambulova, 2012).

523   Specifically, Gould and Carson (2008) suggested a life skills set for young athletes, which

524   included: time and stress management skills, character development and decision making

525   skills, communication skills, leadership skills, links to positive adult and peer role models,

526   and general confidence and self-efficacy. To further develop coping ability, the incorporation

527   of reflective practice is suggested via prompting athletes to think about their experiences and

528   which sport skills could be used in other life domains (Jones, 2012).

529   In addition to life skills training, support should also focus upon fostering participants'

530   positive appraisals of the demands faced in transition. If a positive appraisal of demands at

531   transitions is made, then there will be a greater opportunity for coping with demands at

532   transitions and thus a greater opportunity for continued participation. One concept which can

533   influence an individual's appraisals of situations is their level of resilience, characterized by

534   the influence on appraisals and protective impact against the negative effect of stressors

535   (Fletcher & Sarkar, 2014). Sport providers should therefore aim to promote psychological

536   factors associated with resilience including motivation, confidence, and focus.

537   A particularly prevalent competing demand identified in the current study was that of

538   the educational commitments faced by the adolescents. In line with the recent dual career

539   literature (e.g., Gledhill & Harwood, 2015), it is suggested that there is a need for further

540   collaborations between national governing bodies and education providers, with an aim to

541   support adolescents combine both their sport participation and education commitments. As

542   such, enhanced communication between clubs and schools is suggested in order to predict and

543   prepare for transitions related to educational commitments (e.g., exam periods).

544   A final implication relates to enhancing players perceptions of the opportunities

545   available through rugby, and increasing the level of satisfaction and enjoyment when

546   participating in the sport. This may include: increasing opportunities for social experiences

547   for players, in both competitive and non-competitive environments; offering flexible times for

548   training, and creating training plans to allow individuals to complete in their spare time;

549   coaching review sessions in which coaches discuss training techniques and embark in

550   reflective practice; and, assessments of players' expectations, desires, and levels of

551   satisfaction, via reviews, at specific points during the season.

552   **Study limitations and future research directions**

553   Firstly, it is important to consider that the current model represents an initial

554   grounded theory model of continued participation in Welsh adolescent rugby union. As such,

555   further data collection is required to substantiate the current theory across different contexts

556   and populations. Regarding the current investigation, a group of potential participants that we

557   did not sample were the parents of the players themselves. Given their influence upon

558   adolescent sporting participation (cf. Holt, Tamminen, Black, Mandigo, & Fox, 2009),

559   parents' perspectives would have further enhanced understanding of the influence of parental

560   roles on adolescent sport continuation. Similar to parents, those individuals involved with a

561   player's education (e.g., teachers, welfare officers) may have also influenced evaluations of

562   participation. As such, investigating the nature and degree of communication between

563   educational and sports providers in rugby union therefore warrants further investigation.

564   Future research should also explore perceptions of continued participation across

565   different developmental stages within rugby union, as research in other sports has shown that

566   participations demands differ as a function of age (cf. Côté & Fraser-Thomas, 2007). The

567   potential transferability of the findings to additional sporting populations, such as other

568   adolescent team sports (e.g., soccer, hockey) would also be of interest. Further, in the current

569   study only male continued participation was explored. Female rugby participants were not

570   included in the current study as prior to data collection it was viewed that the two sports were

571   distinctly different, with female rugby perceived as a newer sport, operating in a different

572   context. Research is therefore warranted into continued participation regarding the female

573   version of the game, particularly from a cultural-specific stance.

574

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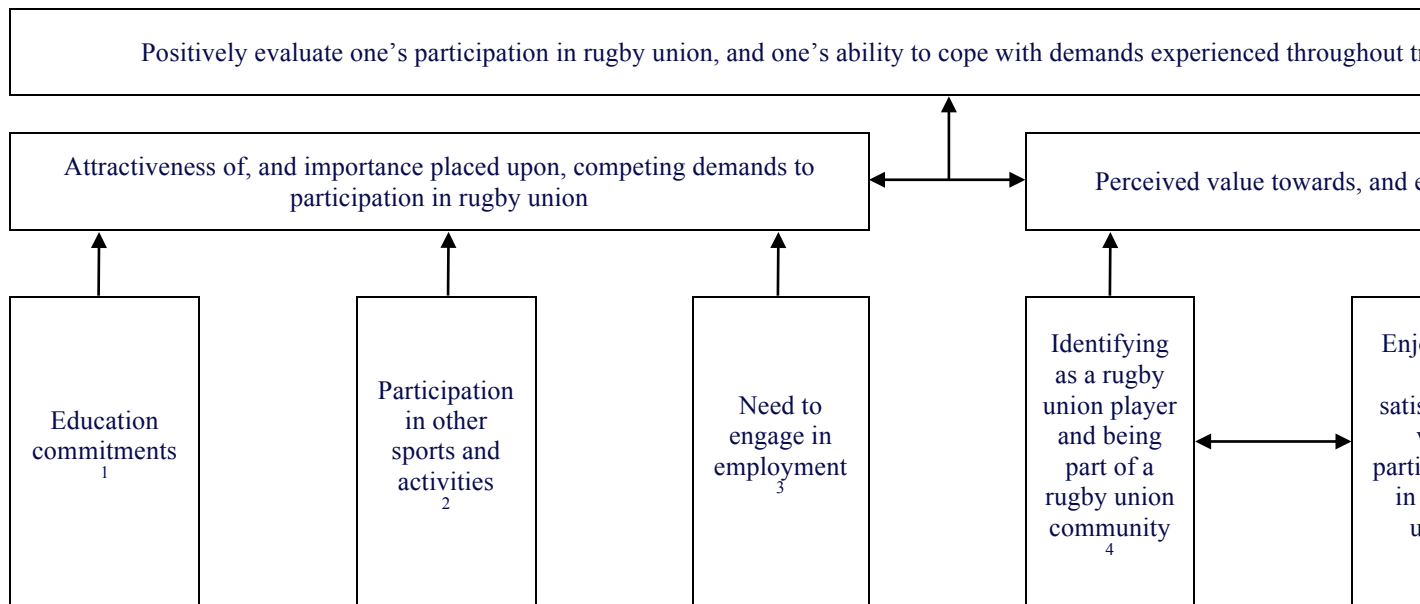623   662. doi: 10.1016/j.psychsport.2007.08.003

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Figure 1:

Continued participation in adolescent male rugby union: Stakeholders' perspectives

Positively evaluate one's participation in rugby union, and one's ability to cope with demands experienced throughout t

Attractiveness of, and importance placed upon, competing demands to participation in rugby union

Perceived value towards, and e

Education commitments[1]

Participation in other sports and activities[2]

Need to engage in employment[3]

Identifying as a rugby union player and being part of a rugby union community[4]

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[1] Exam periods; Number of assignments

[2] Other sports; Activities outside of competitive sport

[3] Importance placed on expendable income; Job security

[4] Perceived strength of rugby union
the club or team; Family history of

[5] Strength of social ties to the club o
practice, and relationship with play
in relation to aspirations and previo
Perceptions of opportunities to prog
time an individual has during match
participate in matches

[6] Perceptions of opportunities to pro
consistency of match fixtures; Acce